ISSN 2278 - 7208
VOL. V & VI, 2016-17

indraprasth

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An International Journal of Culture and Communication Studies
[A Refereed, UGC Approved Journal (No. 46457)]

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Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University
New Delhi

ISSN 2278 - 7208
VOL. V & VI, 2016-17

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Contents

Note from the Editors

Literature in its varied forms has produced diverging, often antagonistic, attitudes towards life, language and thought. This double-issue of *Indraprasth*, accordingly, attempts to capture the variegated spectrum of responses that literature makes available for critical scrunity. Cutting across academic profiles and institutions, the papers contained in this issue deal with critically less researched areas, texts, or perspectives, and seek to understand and decode texts from new dimensions and angles.

In Navneet Sethi's "Citing Sites of Memory in *Beloved*: A Postcolonial Perspective", the representation of the experiences (of Pakistan) lodged in memory are put forward through writing, and memory is thus concretised through the medium of language. Sethi also puts forward the idea of resistance in the postcolonial practice of naming the places and substantiates it with the characters in the novel who engage in appropriating the synergy of memory in order to preserve it for posterity.

Sameer Chopra in his critique of Black Nationalism looks at nationalism and 'being black' from the eyes of the marginalised. He sees nationalism as a homogenous entity, which fails to encompass the aspirations and requirements of the marginalised sections of the society, especially those which do not appear 'normal' to the mainstream. Only the black man, who comes at the top of the hierarchy of the sexual and gender differences, enjoys the benefits of Black Nationalism, and thus, the paper critiques it as a ruptured idea with a narrow vision which is non-inclusive.

Shaival Thakkar in his article "Political Representation of Mumbai in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*" studies Mumbai in the light of *A Fine Balance*. Perspectives of the characters are taken into account, and the times in which such characters, themes and ideas come into existence are delved into. Thakkar also writes about the impact of violence on the lower castes in the city and highlights the representation of Mumbai as a cityscape through its crowded trains, the restaurants and the court houses.

Navdeep Kaur's "Saadat Hasan Manto's "Kali Shalwar" and "Hatak": A Reading in the Light of Slavoj ŽiŽek's Theory of Ideology" examines the two short stories of Manto in the light of Zizek's idea of false consciousness. The theoretical part of the ideology is elaborated first followed by its application to the characters in the stories. The postcolonial terms of interpellation and ideology are used to further explain the stance. The distorted image of reality in terms of imagination and symbolic subjectivity forms the background of the study of Manto's characters.

Ved Prakash's "Photographing the Sound and the Fury: War Photography and New Media" delves into the concept of war photography and examines the role of new media in proliferating the images of war across people and cultures in order to satiate their curiosity. The portrayal of violence on the TV screens and the internet has contributed towards a demand for such documents of war and thereby the photographers risk their lives to feed the technological economy.

"Embedding the Male in Female Body: A *Qissa*" by Rekha and Ankita Rathee analyses the film *Qissa* from the socio-cultural aspect of body politics that asserts maleness onto the female body. The confusion between the biological female (which is subdued through clothes and mannerisms) and the imposed male hood on Kanwar are negotiated only at the cost of incurring social exclusion. The partition of India is likened to this confusion between the accepted and the imposed acceptance that marred the lives and dreams of millions.

Hardeep Kaur's "The *Prawah* and the *Prabhav*: A Critical Study of the Inner and the Outer Travel Quests in Select Travelogues on the Ganga" examines the quest of the travelers exploring the river Ganga. It reads the traveler as an active agent, in the pursuit of unraveling the mysteries of the spiritual and sacred Ganga. The impact of the river on the travelers is analysed at two levels, i.e. at the level of prawah and prabhav. They become two ways of interacting with the river which have their own problematics.

Somrita Ganguly in "Stopping at Old, Familiar *Stations*: A Review of Seamus Heaney's 1975 Anthology" studies the anthology of Heaney by bringing

into focus the personal and the political in terms of Irish history. The metrical structure of the poems and the technique of writing including the poetic form are studied too.

Neeti Singh's "The Metaphor and Matrix of Mysticism in the Verse of Guru Nanak and Fernando Pessoa: A Comparative Overview" endeavours to compare the writings of Nanak with that of Pessoa. The paper examines the aspects of spiritualism within the parameters of paganism and Sufism. The binding similarity between the works of two mystics is that they chose Nature as their subject and were opposed to any conventional rules or rituals in this path.

"Virtual Reality, Cyberspace and Adolescent Dissipation: A Close Reading of Kirsten Krauth's *Just a Girl*" by Ketaki Datta studies the impact of virtual media on the human relationships and the emotional conditioning of a girl. The paper portrays the detrimental ramifications of seeking relationships outside the immediate surroundings of the family and points out the problematics of the situations where the families do not bond together and become vulnerable by seeking love and validation from external sources.

Ranjita Pati's "Fantasy and Historiography: Dymystifying Cromwell" reads two novels by Hillary Mantel, and locates the figure of Thomas Cromwell, the ancestor of the famed Oliver Cromwell, within his historical and political contexts. The role and progress of the character from the humble origins to influencing the king forms the major part of the novel's plot, and the subject is intriguing as this portion of history has not been studied much, something which this paper aims to redress.

"The Personal Forever at War with the Public – A Study of the Patient(s) in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*" by Navdeep Kaur and Nikhilesh Yadav negotiates the idea of disease and explores it with reference to *The English Patient*. English Nationalism excludes whatever does not comes under its umbrella of normality; analysing the characters of the novel, the paper puts forward its argument with a nuanced understanding of the roles played by the different characters.

In the paper "From Margin to Centre: A Study of August Wilson's *Gem of the Oceans*", Nakul and Renu interrogate the relationship between the centre and the margins. The complexity of black man's survival is constantly being rebuffed; this paper tries to highlight the collective consciousness of the black people whose struggle goes beyond the individual self and are still given the status of being marginals.

Shruti Sharma's "Inclusions, Exclusions and Interpolations in the Critical Edition of *Mahabharata*: Debates and Dilemmas" studies the nuances arising out of the excision of an episode (read as an interpolation by the Critical Edition) and its influence upon the modern critical scholarship of the epic (which largely relies upon the manuscript tradition). It tries to unearth the specifics of how an episode came to be inserted (and/or redacted) in *Mahabharata* and the ramifications, problematics and politics of such an action thereof.

Lakhvinder Singh Bedi's "Pash, Peasantry and Green Revolution" portrays the negotiation of a poet during the times of turmoil and suffering. The impact of political and ideological unrest during 1970s made Pash use poetry as an artistic medium to approach social issues in an empathetic way. Green Revolution, which was introduced as an empowering tool for the farmers, failed to provide benefits to the small scale farmers. They were, in fact, exploited by money lenders and big farmers. Pash emerged during these times and fought for the rights of common man.

Priyadarshini Yadav in "Delhi, a Postmodern Vessel of Consumerism: A Critical Study of Maneesh Sharma's *Band Baja Barat"* engages in a comprehensive study of the spatio-temporal dynamics of the film. Focussing on the wedding industry – around which the plot revolves – the paper foregrounds the consumerist desires for material gain, and exploitation. The paper reads the shift in the value system of the society has changed the spatial and temporal structures of Delhi, specifically.

Gurleen Kaur's "Beyond the Anthropocentric and Mythopoeic: Representation of Animals in Post-90s Indian Poetry in English" acknowledges that animals have primarily been precieved, over the ages, from the reductive vantage point of anthropocentric discourses and limited as symbolic deities,

which contemporary Indian English poetry seems to be problematise. In Indian mythology, animals usually find themselves marginalized; however, Kaur reads select poems to identify instances of the reservsal of this mythopoeic deification and humanist anthropomorphism, one which liberates the animals back into organic wilderness.

Mahim Sharma in his paper "Chaos and Literary Aesthetics: Stitching the Indian Myth" discusses how the dynamics of Chaos Theory leads towards a poetics of aesthetic dissipation.

Lastly, Saptarshi Mallick reviews Sanjukta Dasgupta's fifth poetry collection, *Lakshmi Unbound*. The poems deal with the theme of social conditioning of women and their resultant subjugation; the theme of feminist emancipation is echoed by not relating the women as goddesses but rather seen as humans. The assigning of the sacred status to the woman as a deity itself dissociates the essential humanness in them and thereby imposes certain moral conduct. The review portrays the socio-cultural themes of the poems.

Like its earlier avatars, this version of *Indraprasth* is also a result of concerted team effort. Many people have contributed in its making. However, special thanks are due to Hardeep Kaur and Avani Bhatnagar who have meticulously seen the formatting and proofreading aspect of these present volumes.

It is with such a diverse ensemble of ideas, views and opinions that this volume of critical papers sets forth. We hope that the papers included in these volumes would help re-engage the readers with life, language and literature afresh, and this endeavour called *Indraprasth* would lead to a rigorous, deep and thorough critical engagement with the texts, authors, and ideas in question.

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Sites of Memory in *Beloved*: A Postcolonial Perspective

Navneet Sethi

There was a house in the village Vijah, near the city of Lahore in Pakistan. I have seen the nooks and crannies of this house, touched the warmth of the sun, heard the call of the morning bird in this very house. I know this house very well even though I have never lived in it. This is actually the house which witnessed the birth of my father, raised him here till the year 1947. The events of 1947 cleaved a nation in two and fragmented the lives of millions of people like my father, who were torn apart from the 'places', the sites of their experiences which would gradually be congealed as the "sites of memory" in the postcolonial years. Fed over many years on the experienced warmth of the house, that life lived by my father until the age of 16, I have seen my own hunger grow to nourish the demands of my own imagination … so much so that the house that has grown in my mind has been touched, ornamented by the citing creativity of my imagination.

The process of handing me the 'bits and pieces' of his childhood energized me enough to 'construct' in my mind 'a site of my father's lived in memory' which is unique enough to be mine as well as collective enough to echo the feelings of millions, who though they gained freedom from the yoke of British imperialism actually lost their homes … homes which live on as sites of memory, having a life of their own inspiring creative overtures through the process of citing them. The citing of the site of memory through the medium of language significantly tantamounts to actually recreating the 'site' anew, possibly in a more enduring form layered within the scaffolding of words.

A major feature of postcolonial literature is:

> the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special postcolonial crisis comes into being, the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. The dialectics of place and displacement are always a feature of postcolonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention or a mixture of two. (Ashcroft, 1)

Elleke Bohemer, in her book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures*, defines postcolonial literature as:

> that which critically scrutinises the colonial relationship. It is a writing

> that which sets out in one way or other to resist colonial perspective. As well as a change in power, decolonisation demanded symbolic overhaul, a reshaping of dominant meanings …. To give expression to colonized experience, postcolonial writer sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization-the myths of power, the race classification, the imagery of subordination … that condition in which colonized people seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise as historical subjects. (2)

In any initiative that I take to cite the 'house in Pakistan', the site of memory lodged in my father, I would be engaged in a revisionist act of resistance and would naturally be creating a "palimpsest, a kind of parchment on which successive generations will and would have inscribed and reinscribed the process of history", which is postcolonial in content and form (Ashcroft, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader,* 346). In as much as my act of citing the site would unravel the relationship between my father and the house, the site determined by the events of the Partition of India and the bloody aftermath in 1947, my creative overture would be postcolonial to the core. The memory inlaid into the site would be aligned with the active agency of the citation itself and would create a postcolonial textual site unique as well as a creative heirloom in its own right.

Singh and Schmidt in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity and Literature* suggest that, "because of its current position of power and the neo-colonizing role it has played, the postcolonial nature of the U.S has generally not been recognized"… its "relationship with the metropolitan center as is evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for postcolonial literatures everywhere" (3). Further, Singh and Schmidt observe,

> while the U.S. defined itself as the world's first independent and anti colonial nation state it simultaneously incorporated many of the defining features of the European colonial networks… the U.S. may be understood to be world's first postcolonial and neo-colonial country. Anti-slavery resistance at its founding worked to secure an economy that thrived by appropriating the labor of racially defined 'aliens' not allowed the 'inalienable rights of full citizenship'. The founding fathers were caught in a constant refusal to acknowledge the conflicts between slavery and nation's democratic ideals. (4)

Margaret Atwood's phrase, "home grown literature" embraces literatures in the U.S. that seriously "look within themselves and without and are engaged in exploring issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class from the perspective of U.S.

studies as well as the transnational focus of postcolonial studies as well" (Singh and Schmidt, *Postcolonial Theory*,18).

Colonization was finally a struggle for supremacy, for control of markets, nations, people and creativity. Consequently, "the process of 'othering', fundamental to colonization created alienation of vision and crisis in self image produced by displacement" (Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back*, 9). Therefore Denver's exasperation, "how come everybody run off from Sweet Home can't stop talking about it? Look like it was so sweet you would have stayed", (*Beloved*, 13) voices the post postcolonial descendant's absence of bonding emerging out of a realization of one's absence from the site of experience and without being experimentally displaced, feeling piquantly the gap within the self where the connection should have been.

The gap, which opens between the experience of place and the language available for describing it, forms a classic and all pervasive feature of postcolonial texts. And this is where the "site of memory" for Sethe, which is Sweet Home, is articulated as a shared collective legacy and viewed as a 'thought picture' for Denver, whose 'part in the story', the one that 'she loved best', began after she fled Sweet Home running to her children and to hold them as wide as she could in the 'circle' of her arms. Sethe tells Denver,

> … Some things go. Some things pass on. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Others things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down its gone but the place—the picture of it stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world… even if I die, the picture of what I did or know or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. Someday, you will be walking down the road and you hear something or hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think its you thinking it up… no… it's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real it's never going away. Even if the whole farm, every tree and every blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more if you go there, you who was never there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was it will happen again, it will be there waiting for you. (*Beloved*, 36)

Even as I know that, that house of my father in the neighbouring country, Pakistan, may not actually be there but if I was to go to that place, and someone would point out the place to me, the transferred inherited energies would 'suffuse' the pictures in my mind of the house. Those pictures would be about the same

place but the process of those pictures being cited for me by my father, I citing them all over again the "site of memory" that existed and the "site" created through creative synergy would acquire a uniqueness and a doubleness created through an act of language. The theory of place in postcolonial discourse,

> does not simply propose binary separation between the 'place' named and described in language and some 'real' place inaccessible to it, but rather indicates that in some sense, place is language, something in constant flux, a discourse in process. The sense of lack of fit between language and place is that which creates the rationale to construct a new language, that which is equipped to 'cite' the "site of memory. By 'place' we do not simply mean 'landscape.' Place in postcolonial discourse is a complex interaction of history, languages and environment. (Ashcroft's *The Postcolonial Studies*, 391)

The dynamic of naming becomes a primary colonizing mode because it appropriates, defines and captures the place in language. And yet the very process of naming opens the wider epistemological gap which it is designed to fill, for the dynamic mystery of language becomes a groping step into the reality of place, not simply reflecting or representing, but in some mysterious sense involved in the creation of the place, of its coming into being. Citing or 'naming' is crucial to highlight the significance of the site embedded in the memory as a site that has been lived and as a site that has been passed on to be cited as posterity. Naming is crucial in the postcolonial context as a rejoinder to the naming of the colonized slave by the colonizing Sweet Home owners and the schoolteacher's ferocious attempt to list the human and animal characteristics of the human piece of property.

Sethe flinched at the idea of her children being subjected to naming by the schoolteacher, "so she collected every bit of life that she had made" (*Beloved*, 163) and ran. The fatal hand that fell on the crawling already daughter of Sethe was in many ways also an agonized resistance to the 'heads' of "Sixty Million and more" who perished in the Middle Passage.

In dedicating her novel *Beloved* to Sixty Million, Morrison situates the novel as a resounding indestructible site of collective memory that courses through the veins of the community and the action. If a novel is the monument, a memorial constructed by Toni Morrison, then Sethe's efforts to give all that she had to procure the words, "Dearly Beloved", on the pink headstone of her slain "crawling already" daughter is a heart wrenching memorial. Beloved's site, her 'unnamed grave' needed to be cited. It had to be cited to make her come into existence. 'Dearly Beloved'—the words uttered and Beloved emerged out of the dark,

formless caverns of the past, rose from within the recesses of the grave, emerged from the waters as if she had been waiting to cross the 'bridge' where she had been left behind during the historic, tumultuous passage of human cargo, of life's passage into death itself.

When the word was uttered and filled the environment, some 'form' was created, some 'inscription' made. Citing of the memory ensured that Beloved, "the dismembered, unaccounted for, who had no claim" (*Beloved*, 274) was actually Dearly Beloved if for no one else but for her mother Sethe. In refusing to be content with the 'nameless' grave for her slain daughter, Sethe engages in a markedly postcolonial act of resistance by 'naming' her, by 'citing' her 'nameless' 'site' into existence.

This is a significant postcolonialist concern in which the *place* comes into being, place here being the concretization of the memory and a grudging acknowledgement of the history to that place, the interaction therefore being between language, history and environment that creates the place, the site within the postcolonial critical discourse. The words, 'Dearly Beloved' created ripples in the collective unconscious of the past, of the nation out of which rose a 'fully dressed woman', the one whom 'everybody forgot because it was not wise to remember her' (*Beloved*, 274). She rose from the waters creasing the placid tranquillity of the river and shaking the nation out of a sense of self-complacency. The unmarked grave of Beloved was actually the unmarked site of the unaccounted history/ past of the nation. And Dearly Beloved is Sethe's efforts to give voice to the conveniently forgotten betrayal enacted towards the ideals of liberty enshrined in the encouraging choric voices of the founding fathers, and the brutal treachery carried out on the "crawling already" daughter waiting for the wide embrace and ready milk of her mother, Sethe.

The widened embrace that Sethe spoke of to Paul D to signify her oozing need to bring milk to her waiting daughter reveals the experienced truth of Sweet Home. The truth that slavery sucked the life out of men and women had another dimension as Sethe reminds Paul D, "But maybe you don't know what it was like for me to get away from there". Paul D realizes, "her price was greater than his, property reproduced itself without cost" (*Beloved*, 267). Postcolonial discourse has consistently seen connections between the condition of the colonized, and the marginalization of women, especially women of colour. Sethe widens her arms and when she says, "this wide" to Paul D, she is possibly trying to embrace the different trajectories of the same experience and merge them together. Sethe entrusting Paul D decides that "her story was wearable because it was his as well to tell, refine and to tell again" (*Beloved*, 72) and

which is why for Sethe the act of citing the site of her memory had more to do with gathering the strands together in the 'wide' embrace and enclose them within the circle of her life.

> Round and round the room. Past the jelly cupboard, past the front door. Paul D sat at the dining table watching her drift from the view, then disappear behind his back, turning like a slow but steady wheel. Sometimes she crossed her hands behind her back, the wheel never stopped. (*Beloved*, 159)

Though her children, the 'circle of her life' were unsafe at Sweet Home, still the place was a site of memory for Sethe and it would remain that for her. The 'spinning around' was not a gesture to weave in life again but the "movement of circling. Circling, gnawing at something else instead of getting to the point… the circle that she was making around the room , around him, the subject would remain one" (*Beloved*, 163). In fact, the site of sweet Home's memory was so painful that, "she was circling around, never coming to the point" (*Beloved*, 162). The "gnawing" at was actually postponing the actual moment of the gruesome revelation of the consecration of her back as the enduring parchment bearing the hideous script of slavery, the 'keeping at bay' of the final moment of recognition that had been kept in abeyance by Paul D when he had said that, "that ain't her mouth"(*Beloved*, 154) . The citing of Sweet Home by Sethe in a circular motion highlighted the underlying reality of the doubly marginalized situation of the female slave and Sweet Home. Denver's exasperation at Sweet Home as the site of memory that excluded herself, moves to a point where she realizes that between Sethe and Beloved, "somebody had to be saved". This reckoning is a far cry from the petulant Denver who 'loved' to tell' only the part of the story where she could step into and 'retell again the journey of Sethe from Sweet Home to her children. Through the act of 'citing' the 'memory' of the moment of her birth, Denver recovers and reclaims her freed self again and again.

The sheer force and skill of language creates in the reader a willing sense to be ushered into believing Denver, "as she stepped into the told story that lay before her eyes on the path she followed away from the window" (*Beloved*, 29). Here is the undeniable instance of how actually in the process of telling, in the very moment of citing is the site of memory created.

It may not exist a moment prior to the act of citing but it acquires a presence, a forming of the very formation of worlds till the non-existing 'place' in the forest where Sethe meets Amy. It was not as if the site never existed. It was a moment lived by Sethe and then stowed away in the archives of memory.

The postcolonial discourse is echoed here in as much place itself is a flux and is created through language. This dimension of postcolonial condition is evident in Denver's interjection and creation by the act of citing a site that was simultaneously Sethe's as well as Denver's.

> …there was only one door to the house and to get to it from the back you had to walk all the way around to the front of 124, past the storeroom, past the cold hose, the privy, she, and to get to the story she liked best, she had to start way back, hear the birds in the thick woods, the crunch of leaves underfoot, see her mother making her way up into the hills. (*Beloved*, 29)

It is significant how language changes its form here, from a description that physically propels the reader to the 'lace', the shift is towards a moment when all the senses are engaged to feel, see, hear, taste and smell the moment of Sethe running into the white girl, Amy, on her swollen feet. The citing creates a site of memory in a classic example which highlights Denver not only as a passive recipient but as an active agent involved through the enterprise of 'citing' to create the site that she would want to remember, somewhat akin to Toni Morrison's goal to write the books that she wanted to read.

> I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive "othering "of people and language which are by no means marginalised already and completely known and knowable in my work. (Morrison, *Playing in the Dark, 9)*

In her relationship with Beloved, it is Denver who finally becomes the agent for claiming, appropriating the past, which is Beloved's, the unclaimed one. She chooses to 'tell' Beloved what was experienced by Sethe and in the act of telling, in the act of citing, Denver creates a compelling bond because of the creativity innate to it that could recapitulate the site by citing it. Denver in citing the site not only creates a memorial to the memory of that site, but also makes Denver a creative agent to generate newer memorials of free selves. The strategic narrative actually gives scope to the reader to enter into the narrative, to empathise with it, be bonded with it, and in the process of telling and retelling it, create a site of memory that is paradigmatic of most postcolonial literatures. The effort is to create a narrative that rejects the colonizer's control over experience and the languages to control it.

> Denver was seeing it now and feeling it through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. And the more fine points she made, the more details that she

> provided the more Beloved liked it. Denver spoke and Beloved listened and the two did the best they could to create what really happened, how it really was, something only Sethe know because she alone had the mind for it and the time afterwards to shape it. (*Beloved*, 78)

Denver through the process of citing created not only new site of memory for Sethe, but importantly brought together Beloved and Sethe, all that the past and the present meant to each other. They had experienced the site of Sweet Home but it was the creative negotiation with the site by Denver that an enduring textual memorial could be created. Denver in her postcolonial condition ensures that the site of memory lives on beyond Sethe, beyond Beloved …..through the act of citing it and passing it on….my father's house lives in me…and maybe one day I will visit the site of his memory with him in Vijah, Sargodha district in Pakistan.

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Black Nationalism and the Problematic of Sexual Otherness in James Baldwin's *Another Country* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

Sameer Chopra

> I'm not here to argue or discuss anything that we differ about, because it is time for us to submerge our differences and realize that it is best for us to first see that we have the same problem, a common problem . . . We are all in the same boat and we all are going to catch hell from the same man. He just happens to be the white man . . . If we have differences, let us differ in the closet; when we come out in the front, let us not argue about anything until we finish arguing with the man. (X 405)

The clarion call for abandoning differences, forcefully articulated by Malcolm X in a well-known speech quoted in the epigraph above, constitutes an abiding theme in the rhetoric of Black Nationalism, a term that refers to a set of interlinked ideologies advocating a broad and overarching solidarity among black people and an aggressive, revolutionary assertion of their social, political and economic rights. Such a conception of racial unity necessitates the adoption of a homogenous identity centered solely on the metanarrative of race; consequently, anything even seemingly falling outside that paradigm is considered a threat to the notional oneness requisite for the construction of a linear, straightforward *telos* of radical transformation and must be overridden. This paper purports to analyse two seminal African American literary texts, James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), to argue that the discourse of a reified, essentialised blackness, often under girding celebratory accounts of black resistance to the hegemony of whiteness in America, is nevertheless not without its share of problems, especially in its misogynistic and homophobic emphasis on normative gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality, leading to the marginalization of its supposed sexual and gendered others. These include not only women who are insufficiently submissive or feminine but also non-heterosexual, gender-transgressive subjectivities. In an important study entitled *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (1994), Madhu Dubey illustrates how the racial ideology of the 1960s, with its myopic focus on the black male self as the archetypal figure of heroic social change, understood black feminine identity

within an exclusively reproductive frame. Amiri Baraka, a leading figure of the Black Arts Movement, for instance, preached an uncritical reversion to traditional gender roles and attempted to justify patriarchy as a natural system, "[n]ature has made woman submissive, she must submit to man's creation in order to exist" (qtd. in Dubey 18). The black woman is constantly rendered on the peripheries of the Black Nationalist discourse, reductively configured either as the (re-)producer of male heroes or, more dubiously, as the principal cause of black men's economic and social emasculation. The nationalist agenda proliferates only by assigning a fixed, immutable place to everyone- man and woman, normal and abnormal, black and white, native and foreigner. Any confusion among these categories precipitates a semiotic and moral collapse.

This makes the position of the black homosexual especially precarious, "even further away from the center [when compared to black heterosexual women], an unimaginable, unfathomable, unutterable entity" (Dunning 63). The highly contested relationship between Black Nationalism and queerness, or what is provisionally termed "sexual otherness" in the title of this paper, forms the conceptual core of my argument. In the essay "It's Raining Men: Notes on the Million Man March," Robert Reid-Pharr discusses precisely this fraught dynamic, premised on the assumption that blackness and homosexuality are mutually antithetical, irreconcilable forces and that queer people are existential threats to the very idea of a cohesive black community. Referring to a historic protest-gathering of African American men in Washington, D.C. in 1995, Reid-Pharr notes that "if the real message of the march was that it is going to take a heroic black masculinity to restore order in our various communities . . . then it follows that black gay men are irrelevant, or even dangerous to that project" (38). Nationalism conceptualizes its perpetuation narrowly in terms of heterosexual, monogamous reproductivity, delegitimizing possible flows of desire that fracture culturally sanctioned myths of an aggressive, virile manliness and a pliant, tractable femininity. In their inability to lead to procreation, same-sex relations are not only considered unnatural and reprehensible, an "anathema to the building of a strong black nation," but also negatively conflated with a perverted sexual desire for whiteness" (Williams 136). In a vociferous indictment of James Baldwin, Eldridge Cleaver, a prominent political activist and leader of the Black Panther Party, dismisses homosexuality as portending the annihilation of a valiant, robust blackness, a veritable "racial death-wish":

> [The] white man has deprived him [the black male homosexual] of his masculinity, castrated him in the center of his burning skull, and

> when he submits to the change and takes the white man for his lover as well as Big Daddy, he focuses on "whiteness" all the love in his pent-up soul and turns the razor edge of hatred against "blackness" - upon himself, what he is, and those who look like him. (qtd. in Dunning 48)

In Cleaver's analysis, black men having sexual relations with other men is akin to a passive capitulation to white masculinity, leading to a complete disintegration of the resistant black self. This equation between homosexuality and miscegenation is a politically charged one: it ratifies the significance of heterosexual, mono-racial sex as the fundamental building block of the nationalist schema, as a neat binary between blackness and queerness emerges, the disturbing implication of which is that, one could only legitimately adopt either of those socially volatile identities. Understandably then, Baldwin's homosexuality strikes Cleaver as a form of racial betrayal, the celebrated author presenting to him a very public image of the black man as castrated and womanly.

These authenticating discourses, used to otherize black queers, also lie at the heart of the trajectory of twentieth-century African American literature, which, before the appearance of black female writers in the mid-1970s, was an overwhelmingly masculinist enterprise dominated by the likes of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison (Hudson and Shin 247). Noteworthy from several perspectives, this phallocentric tradition nonetheless treats black maleness as an essential given, impervious to any form of critical scrutiny, even celebrating it as a form of defiance to the supremacy of the white man in a racist America. Baldwin's writing, with an emphasis on what critic Irving Howe pejoratively calls "a program of aesthetic autonomy and faithfulness to private experience," addresses precisely this gap (qtd. in Hudson and Shin 249). In offering a strident critique of heteronormative masculinity, it resists an easy assimilation into the discursive imperative of Black Nationalism, thus complicating the always-already fraught relationship between art and politics, the burden of representativeness that a black author must shoulder as the spokesperson of his fraternity and his aesthetic, imaginative autonomy as an artist. Baldwin discusses some of these concerns in two important essays, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" and "Here Be Dragons." In "To be an American Negro Male", seen by him as "a kind of walking phallic symbol," suggests that the straitjacket of black masculinity was a prison that he struggled to liberate himself from, throughout his life (290). He understood masculinity and femininity to be performative, non-biologically determined roles that often entrap and immobilize individuals, rendering them

incapable of approximating an androgynous wholeness of being. "We are all androgynous," he asserts, "each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other-male in female, female in male, white in black, black in white. We are a part of each other" ("Here Be Dragons" 690). Essentialism of any kind, whether pertaining to gender, sexuality or race, does not resonate well with Baldwin's psychic and political worldview, profoundly shaped as it is by his traumatic personal experiences, "I think that I know something about the (*sic*) American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because they have not been menaced by it in the way that I have been" ("The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" 290).

In his critically acclaimed novel, *Another Country* (1962), Baldwin rigorously demonstrates the tragic consequences of disciplining and compartmentalizing the self in accordance with the mandates of such rigid and ossified ideologies. By disavowing hegemonic racial and sexual categorizations, he queries the nationalist contention that to be queer is somehow opposed to being black. Rufus Scott and Vivaldo, the novel's two major characters have suppressed homoerotic desires for each other, never fully acknowledging and burying them under the socially acceptable veneer of heterosexuality. In a fleeting moment, however, they do confront the irrepressible truth of their existence:

> Have you ever wished you were queer? Rufus asked, suddenly. Vivaldo smiled, looking into his glass. "I used to think maybe I was. Hell, I think I even wished I was." He laughed. "But I'm not. So I'm stuck" (51).

When prodded further by Rufus about his sexual experiences – "[s]o you been all up and down that street, too" (51) – Vivaldo's response gestures towards the shared victimization that men face at the hands of patriarchal notions of manliness and that his individual experiences are in some ways symptomatic of a larger malaise: "We have *all* been up the same streets. . . Only, we've been taught to *lie* so much, about so many things, that we hardly ever know where we are" (51-52 emphasis mine).

Conforming to what it means to be a man in America constitutes a fundamental falsehood which Baldwin seems to imply; congealed in their roles as gendered and racial subjects, men, both black and white, willfully negate possibilities of sexual and spiritual companionship. It is their masculinity and a gridlock of racial and gendered barriers that keep Rufus and Vivaldo apart,

incapable as they are of transcending their keenly-felt sense of blackness and whiteness. These categories, vehemently glorified in the nationalist discourse, here become obstructions in the way of a liberating communion between two individuals. This becomes starkly manifest when, later in the novel, Vivaldo relates to Eric how, in moments immediately preceding his suicide, Rufus had needed him, "Well, when he looked at me . . . I had the weirdest feeling that he wanted me to take him in my arms . . . I had the feeling that he wanted someone to hold him . . . [and] that night, it had to be a man" (342).

Wondering whether Rufus would still have been alive had he been embraced in that moment, Vivaldo admits to himself as much as to Eric, that he chose to perpetuate his best friend's death owing to his deep-seated fear of coming across as a 'faggot'. He confronts the adverse repercussions of upholding an unyielding code of masculinity, one that makes him repress his fondness, both emotional and erotic, for another man and reject the possibility of Rufus', and his own salvation. Ironically, Rufus is himself guilty of denying other men the affirmative potentialities of same-sex desire, reminiscing at various points in the novel how he had psychologically brutalized Eric, and treats him "nothing more than a hideous sexual deformity" (46). Nevertheless, Eric's memories continue to haunt and conflict Rufus throughout his life, making him regret his own insistent attempts to check the "flood of affection" he had once experienced for his friend (46). Rufus' internalised homophobia devastates Eric, who is consequently forced to flee America altogether and settle in Paris. This is an act of violence, the text avows, that Rufus perpetrates not simply on the "other" but also the "self"; driven by an overwhelming, inescapable need to belong to a destructive regime of heteronormative manliness, Rufus strangulates his capacity to love, eager as he is to plot his identity along conventional, socially viable trajectories of "seeing" and "being." Unable to relate to people across racial and sexual lines, he is thus forced to annul within himself the plenitude, the vital life force, which in Baldwin's syncretic consciousness makes us uniquely human, beyond the narrow and stifling confines of identity.

Vivaldo, on the other hand is rescued from his inner demons as he makes love to Eric, and is able to partially undo the damning effects of years of social posturing and indoctrination: "He [Vivaldo] had brought about something that he had long desired," Baldwin writes, and "he could not pull away, he did not want to" (383). Ultimately delighted to discover that sexual intimacy between men, an act he had long thought of as humiliating and self-debasing, could bring such tremendous solace to him, Vivaldo feels "all of his hope which had grown

so pale flush[ing] into life again" (387). His new-found love for Eric, described in the text as a great revelation, is at once deeply personal and political- besides being individually gratifying, it holds forth for Vivaldo the utopian promise of transcending reductive, dehumanising polarities of right and wrong, moral and immoral, man and woman, active and passive: "Now, Vivaldo, who was accustomed himself to labor, to be the giver of the gift, and enter into his satisfaction by means of the satisfaction of a woman, surrendered to the luxury, the flaming torpor of passivity" (385).

To Eric, the novel's most explicitly queer character, Baldwin ascribes the role of a messiah, in that, unlike Rufus and Vivaldo, he manages to fully come to terms with his otherness and emancipate himself from the gnawing need to perform one's masculinity in compliance with coercive heteronormative scripts. Rejected and condemned as filthy and diseased in the eyes of the world, in some ways epitomising what most men often dare not acknowledge within themselves, Eric has "no standards for him except those he could make for himself" (212). Remarkably liberated to that extent, Eric catalyses Vivaldo's redemption, pulling him back from the brink of existential loneliness and despair. Significantly, however, he too encounters his bisexual side, finding sexual fulfillment in his female friend, Cass, who "had awakened something in him, an animal long caged, which came pounding out of its captivity now with a fury which astounded and transfigured them both"(292).

This has crucial ramifications for understanding both Baldwin's vision and, more importantly its political limitations. With Eric finding his encounter with Cass pleasurable, even restorative, and Yves, his French partner engaging in flirtatious banter with an airhostess on the flight he takes to join Eric in America, we are plunged into a universe where all of the novel's main characters are, to varying degrees, bisexual. What is unceasingly foregrounded here is the centrality of desire as a liminal, free-floating force that undermines binary notions of self-other, black-white and straight-queer constituting gendered common sense on how our affective and corporeal selves pan out in the everyday. Ostensibly a progressive manoeuvre, it is, in fact, a defensive one, insofar as it stops short of asserting the power of exclusive same-sex relationships as posing a radical challenge to the *status quo*. One ought to, then, be mindful of the text's diffident sexual politics- curiously as late as 1984, Baldwin spoke of his discomfort with the term *gay*. In an interview with Richard Goldstein, he mused: "[t]he word 'gay' has always rubbed me the wrong way. I never understood exactly what is meant by it . . . I simply feel it's a world that has very little to do with me, with

where I did my growing up. I was never at home in it" (qtd. 59). More problematically, Baldwin sought to steer his readers away from specifically gay interpretations of his work. Admitting that the negative reception of *Giovanni*'s *Room* (1956) – a novel centered on an American man's anguished homosexual affair with an Italian bartender in Paris – had taken a toll on him, he stressed that the book was "not *really* about homosexuality. It's about what happens to you if you're afraid to love anybody. Which is much more interesting than the question of homosexuality" (61 emphasis mine). Although Baldwin's attempt to broaden and universalise the appeal of his work is at some level understandable, it, in my opinion, dulls the edge of his social critique. In playing down the queer implications of his work, Baldwin seems content in condemning the rigid exclusivity of all sexual orientations, never proceeding to locate same-sex desire as a distinctive and thorough going threat to the moral architecture of heteropatriarchy.

It is in comparison with Baldwin's tentative, relatively hesitant stance on the issue that one might situate Alice Walker's treatment of sexual otherness as far more categorical in its decentering of the heterosexist matrix. For one, Walker, writing in the 1970s and 1980s was part of an established black feminist tradition, which was scathingly critical of the nationalist "figuration of black feminine identity as [a form of] absence" (Dubey 156). Black women writers and critics rigorously interrogated the regressive, sexist stances of the Black Nationalist discourse, highlighting gender differences at a time when the continuous affirmation of an integrated racial community was considered beyond the pale of questioning. Then it is ironic, that such skepticism towards a unitary conception of blackness did not extend itself to a ready and empathetic embrace of lesbian issues as central to the feminist agenda. Renowned queer-feminist writer, Audre Lorde, explains this contradiction: "Those of us who stand outside . . . power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing" (517). Lorde expostulates how heterosexism and homophobia internally fractured black women's groups that, for all their radical views, partook in some of the negative stereotypes conventionally ascribed to the Black lesbian. Widely perceived to be deranged and abnormal, her very existence was an affront to the sanctity of the black family and, along with gay men, ideologically equated with non-blackness. Together, these queer subjectivities were deemed to be marginal even irrelevant to the more authentic struggles of the Black Nation. In fact,

lesbianism is one vector of identity that remains absolutely invisible from all fictional representation of blackness during the 1970s, the terms "black" and "lesbian" remaining virtually incompatible until the publication of three path-breaking novels, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, in 1982.

Walker can thus be seen to be working within the Black feminist tradition and yet, along with Lorde and Naylor, opening it up for newer sites of exploration and contestation. In her essay, "In the Closet of the Soul," she avows freedom for all women, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation: "Women loving women, and expressing it 'publicly,'" she contends, "is part and parcel of what freedom for women means, just as this is what it means for anyone else" (qtd. in Johnson 211). The text of *The Color Purple* begins with a patriarchal structure on silence directed towards its black female protagonist: "You'd better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (3). Celie's story is structured around many threats, physical and psychological, constantly enforced upon her. Simultaneously victimized by racism, misogyny and homophobia, she is a veritable non-entity, brutally effaced at every level of her existence. The idea of deriving pleasure from the sexual act with her husband, simply referred to as Mr. ___ for the most part of the novel, seems untenable to her, experiencing it as she does in the form of naked debasement, objectification and phallic aggression: "He git (*sic*) up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain't (*sic*) there. He never know (*sic*) the difference. Never ast (*sic*) me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep" (74). Repeatedly abused and humiliated, denied education and independence, Celie nevertheless experiences a sexual and emotional awakening when she begins to get attracted to one of Mr.___'s mistresses, the glamorous Shug Avery: "Shug Avery was . . . [t]he most beautiful woman I ever saw . . . An (*sic*) now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dress (*sic*) to kill, whirling an (*sic*) laughing" (8).

Shug's physical attractiveness closely approximates her libertine, even hedonistic persona. Unencumbered by any of the moral and cultural limitations designed to contain female sexuality, she pursues her desires without guilt or inhibition. "Why any woman give (*sic*) a shit [to] what people think," she proclaims, "is a mystery to me" (181). What ruffles most men about her is her uncompromising determination to live life on her own terms. She is economically independent, widely travelled and unwilling to succumb to the constraints of a

monogamous marriage. "She embodies," Linda Abbandonato proposes, "the highly disruptive potential of sexuality . . . to survive and flourish in "aberrant" forms despite the cultural imposition of a norm" (1112). Even at an early juncture in the novel, Shug's picture instantly leads to Celie's metamorphosis from a silent object to an actively desiring subject, a shift enabled by lesbianism's potential to disrupt the cultural mechanisms of patriarchy. Compulsory heterosexuality is the basis on which women are prevented from attaining full personhood, and same-sex desire queries the terms of this social contract. In an obvious manifestation of this reversal, the gendered categories that are so routinely fetishized in the nationalist rhetoric are irrevocably muddled during an erotically charged encounter between the two women: "First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it (*sic*) black plum nipples . . . I thought I had turned into a man" (47). Having become conscious of her sexuality, the woman ceases to be at the receiving end of abject negation and feels like a man, hence demystifying in the process the supposedly natural bases for the hierarchization of gender. Another important moment in the novel describes Shug helping Celie gaze at her own genitals in a mirror and grapple for the first time with the sheer corporeality of her body. The notion of shame, often deployed to control and domesticate women, is gradually dispelled here as Celie admires the beauty of her vagina as a "wet rose" (75). Furthermore, Shug insists that since Celie had never hitherto found sex with her husband satisfying, she is "still a virgin" (74). Severing the reified connection between sexuality and reproduction, Shug encourages her more uninitiated lover to fundamentally reorient the way she understands carnal pleasure, making it central rather than peripheral to her experiences.

The relationship between the two women, however, is not merely sexual in nature. Celie's initiation into same-sex eroticism is contextualised within her growing emotional steadfastness and self-reliance that become apparent, among other things, in the reconceptualization of her institutionalized beliefs about God, who, she eventually realizes, is not "a he or she, but a (*sic*) It" (176). Phallogocentrism has been ruptured: God has been transfigured from a vengeful, authoritarian white male to a new form of androgynous wholeness, a life-affirming creator palpable in "[e]verything that is or ever was or ever will be" (176). An inextricable link is established between God and the pleasure principle, the *jouissance*, that pervades the universe:"God love everything you love . . . I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (177). This process of liberating self-fashioning reaches an

emphatic climax in Celie's decision to reject her husband altogether and move to Memphis with Shug. "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook," she fumes defiantly, "[b]ut I'm here" (187). Setting up an independent, gender-neutral business enterprise of sewing custom-made pants, Celie gives vent to her buried creativity and entrepreneurial energy, hence rejecting her troubled past. Symbolic of the novel's broader questioning of gender norms and categories – pants are suggestive of mobility and flexibility, a less formal, restrictive form of dress traditionally forbidden to women – Celie's venture transcends ideological barriers of both sex and colour. Her products, which "release the wearer into authentic self-expression" and cater to everyone, are manufactured in a non-prejudiced, diverse setting, employing both Sofia and a white male worker towards a common goal (Berlant 21). On that account, Celie's workplace becomes an apt metaphor for Walker's vision of social reconciliation and harmonious co-existence between men and women of diverse racial backgrounds, one that she actualizes by consciously inverting stereotypical gender hierarchies. While women increasingly breach masculine privilege in the novel, the men are feminized re-connecting with their softer, more humane selves. As Keith Byerman contends, the text partly resolves its tensions "by making all males female (or at least androgynous), all destroyers creators, and all difference sameness" (qtd. in Kaplan 198). Albert's gradual understanding of the value of mutuality and cooperation releases him from his destructive maleness and he revives his sewing talent, becomes an avid shell collector and participates in the communal feeding of yam to Henrietta. He also "clean[s] . . . [the] house just like a woman," cooks, and washes the dishes (201). Albert sums up his profound transformation in a conversation with Celie when he says, "I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel (*sic*) like a new experience" (236). Natural man, in Walker's egalitarian schema, has relinquished his gender-based superiority complex and is ready to amicably coexist with natural woman, who no longer sees herself as a victim. In much the same vein, Harpo who had previously harboured a desire to beat his fiercely independent wife, Sofia into behaving in a more docile, womanly fashion eventually tells her: "I loves(*sic*)every judgment you ever made" (255). By the end of the novel, he renounces his predatory anxieties and resolves all his differences with Sofia, forging a remarkably equitable relationship with her. While he attends to household chores, Sofia and her Amazonian sisters accompany their brothers as pall bearers of their mother's coffin.

The sexist social order in Africa also becomes the target of Walker's

scathing criticism. So firmly entrenched is the investment in male dominance among Olinka men and women that a mother can only claim about her girl-child: "A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something," which refers of course, to being "the mother of his children" (140). Education is the sole reserve of boys who, when they become men, are expected to look after their wives. Those who rebel against this oppressive ethos, such as Tashi's aunt are sold into slavery leading to a complete obliteration of their individuality. It is quite striking, then, that Tashi manages to carve a niche for herself: "She is changing, becoming quiet and too thoughtful, they say. She is becoming someone else; her face is beginning to show the spirit of one of her aunts who . . . refused to marry the man chosen for her. Refused to bow down to the chief" (145). Matters come to a head with her rejection of Adam's proposal, setting the terms of the marital agreement- she will not barter her unique self, her scarred face or skin colour to fit into the normative expectations of ideal femininity or win her suitor's favor. Adam, for his own part, goes far beyond promising eternal fidelity to Tashi; he scars his face after hers, signifying the critical breakthrough that male-female relations have achieved in the novel. In many ways, their relationship is indicative of an "emergent sexual consciousness that allows for difference without penalty or privilege" (Allan 136).

In her essay, "Breaking Chains and Encouraging Life," Walker urges her readers to espouse the rights of black lesbian women by declaring, "We are all lesbians" (qtd. in Johnson 211-212). This universalising rallying cry is audacious in its broad sweep, especially in a context where the Black Nationalist agenda dictates the unremitting glorification of a united community built exclusively around race. In calling attention to the contradictions that challenge the narrow, dogmatic definition of a positive black self, always already consolidated, stable and known, Walker gives prominence to the subversive implications of same-sex desire with a forthrightness one rarely comes across in Baldwin's novels. Celie's choice of lesbianism is politically charged because, as Lorde opines, "openly women-identified black women who are no longer dependent on men for their self-definition may well reorder our whole concept of social relationships" (521). The novel is also lesbian in the more expansive sense referenced in Adrienne Rich's concept of the "lesbian continuum," which spans a whole spectrum of "woman-identified experiences, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" but also "the sharing of rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny

[and] the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (239). In view of such an understanding, Celie's love for Shug forms part of a more pervasive structure of productive, mutually invigorating female bonds shared by Celie and Sofia, Celie and Nettie, Sofia and her sisters, Shug and Mary Agnes and Tashi and Olivia.

Although both *Another Country* and *The Color Purple* are implicitly critical of Black Nationalism and its denigration of sexual otherness, one may conclude that Walker emerges as far more confrontational in her political stance. In his unwillingness to depict exclusively queer characters or relationships, Baldwin, on the other hand, ends up limiting the scope of his vision. Unsurprisingly, we find that all prominent characters across his oeuvre are bisexuals: David and Giovanni in *Giovanni's Room* (1956); Rufus, Vivaldo and Eric in *Another Country* (1962); and Leo and Christopher in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968). In this, Baldwin's politics is far from radical as he refuses to move beyond questioning Black masculinity as a restrictive imperative that has tightened its noose around most American men. The significant lacuna in his position is perhaps an unequivocal assertion of the errant, deterritorializing power of same-sex desire to counteract the strangle hold of the institutions that so alienate him. Throughout his career, Baldwin insisted homosexuality was a private matter, best kept away from public view. About André Gide, he wrote disparagingly that the acclaimed French author's "homosexuality . . . was his own affair which he should have kept hidden from us" ("The Male Prison" 102); thirty years later, in the same interview with Goldstein cited above, he maintained: "It seems to me simply a man is a man, a woman is a woman, and who they go to bed with is nobody's business but theirs . . . that one's sexual preference is a private matter" (71). Walker, then can be said to explode the possibilities of a tradition of representation that Baldwin, writing in the racially explosive climate of the 1960s, could only warily, defensively inaugurate.

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Political Representation of Mumbai in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

Shaival Thakkar

> "For those who are lost, there will always be cities that feel like home."
>
> - Simon Van Booy, *Everything Beautiful Began After* (2011)

This research paper will examine the representation of the Emergency and casteism in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995). It will also look at the representation of Mumbai that is constructed through cityscapes, characters' perspectives about the city and its comparison with other locales concluding with its research findings.

A Fine Balance (*AFB*) is the story of four characters, Dina, Maneck, Ishvar and Omprakash who live through the Emergency (1975-1977) and its effects on their lives. The setting of the novel is the city of Mumbai referred to as 'the city by the sea' throughout the novel and the timeline of the narrative is from 1947 to 1984. *AFB* has been examined from diverse perspectives such as post colonialism (Sørensen), historiography (Schneller), caste (D'cruz), untouchability (Kumari), nationhood and migration (Herbert), and the technique of neorealism (Takhar). In this research paper I will look at the political representation of Mumbai in *AFB* by using the semiotic approach to representation; by studying the major political events, characters, spaces and the city as signs that are encoded by the author in the texts to construct Mumbai.

Critical Framework – Stuart Hall's concept of Representation

Stuart Hall in his essay "The Work of Representation" from the book *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* talks about representation and different approaches to representation. According to Hall, representation is the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning. He explains the reflective or mimetic approach, the intentional approach and the constructionist approach to representation. Hall considers the conceptual world, signs, and codes to be essential for the practice of representation from the constructionist perspective. He also explains the two variants or models of the constructionist approach: the semiotic and the discursive approach. Saussure and Barthes were practitioners of the semiotic approach

that concentrated on how language and signification works in producing meanings. Foucault was a practitioner of the discursive approach which concentrated on how discourse and discursive practices produce knowledge (61-63).

Mumbai in Mistry's Fiction and its Political History

The Mumbai of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is not the flashy and glamorous Mumbai of Bollywood, nor is it the fast moving Mumbai of cut-throat trade and commerce; for the most part, Mistry's Mumbai is a Parsi household or a Parsi colony where largely the drama is domestic. The city streets and slums also feature in *AFB* but they usually act as a chaotic foil to the better organization and the greater peacefulness of the Parsi household. Mistry also uses the village, the town, and life in the hill town as foils and in contrast to the city of Mumbai which is shown to be a place of greater goodness, urbanity, opportunity, progress, and hope where overwhelming rural issues like casteism, violence, poverty and unemployment can be contained.

Mumbai consists of seven islands which were at first inhabited by fishing communities. From the second century BCE to ninth century CE, the islands were ruled by many indigenous dynasties. In the mid 16thcentury, Mumbai was a part of the Mughal Empire but later came under the control of the Portuguese. During the 17th century, the islands came under the possession of the British Empire which in turn leased them to the British East India Company. In the 18th century, the Marathas conquered parts of Mumbai from the Portuguese but were later on defeated by the British who by then had complete control over the entire city.

Mumbai became the capital of the Bombay Presidency area and witnessed the Quit India Movement in 1942 and The Royal Indian Navy Mutiny in 1946 as important events of the Indian Independence Movement. In 1947, when India achieved independence, Bombay Presidency was restructured into Bombay State. In 1960, Bombay State was separated into Gujarat and Maharashtra on linguistic basis whereby Mumbai became the capital of Maharashtra. Politically, Mumbai had been a stronghold of the Congress party which ruled the city from independence to early 1980s. Later on parties like Shiv Sena and the Bharatiya Janta Party contested and won elections and became very influential in the city's political life.

As mentioned above, this paper will examine the representation of the Emergency, casteism and the construction of Mumbai in the novel.

1. The Emergency

Rohinton Mistry depicts the Emergency through humor, seriousness, conversations, posters, slogan-shouting, an Emergency era motto on a stamp, the compulsory singing of the national anthem in cinemas, demolition of slums, forced sterilizations and the enforcement of MISA.

1.1 Demolition hutments and 'City Beautification'

Mistry represents the episode of demolition and 'city beautification' in metropolitan cities by showing tailors' hutment colony being demolished, their struggle for shelter, and the tailors being hauled to the outskirts of the city along with beggars and by being forced to do labour work at an irrigation project in subhuman conditions. An instance of this from the novel is stated:

> One day after coming back from work, Ishvar and Omprakash find that their shack along with other hutments was destroyed by bulldozers as a part of the slum prevention and city beautification program. In between the demolitions, the hutment dwellers were given thirty minutes to collect their belongings (*AFB* 294-316).

1.2 Forced Sterilizations

Mistry represents the episode of forced sterilisations in metropolitan cities by describing how it had been incentivised by connecting it to the promotions, the payment and non-payment of salaries of government employees. Furthermore, he depicts the way in which sterilizations were also incentivised with the offer of money, transistor radios for the public and family planning volunteers. His humour shows the corruption involved in the practice of forced sterilizations, the State using its power to sterilize people against their will, and the disastrous consequences of deficiently done sterilization operations:

Ashraf Chacha, Ishvar and Om were eating *paans* when Om spots Thakur Dharamsi. He was the upper caste man responsible for his family's death and was now in charge of Family Planning. Om walks towards him and spits in his direction in spite of Ishvar's attempts to restrain him. Thakur Dharamsi recognized who Om was and drove off in his car. Ishvar reprimanded Om severely for his action (519-523).

A little later in the novel both Om and Ishvar face the consequences of Om's rebelliousness:

> The tailors were taken to a sterilization camp on the outskirts of town. In spite of Ishvar's attempted explanations and pleadings both

Ishvar and Om were sterilized against their will. Ishvar despairs that his plans for his nephew's wedding will never come true. While they were resting after their operations, Thakur Dharamsi passed by Om's bed. He gave orders to a doctor for castrating Om which was carried out. Ishvar and Om felt devastated. Complain to the police and Family Planning Centre officials proved unfruitful. A week later Ishvar's legs were swollen. The medicines that were given to him did not work. So his legs had to be amputated (534-543).

1.3 MISA - Maintenance of Internal Security Act

Mistry represents the power of MISA by describing that two professors at Maneck's college who chose to denounce the campus goon squads, were taken away by plainclothesmen for anti-government activities, under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act. No one dared to help the professors as everyone knew that MISA allowed imprisonment without trial and they were afraid of it (247). Another instance of an arbitrary arrest under MISA is the tailors' initial Mumbai contact Nawaz who is imprisoned under MISA but the actual cause was a payment dispute with an influential man. Mistry also represents well the arbitrary nature of arrests under MISA with a humorous instance where two *goondas* are arrested for the murders of two long-haired beggars that they did not commit (558-571).

2. Casteism

Mistry represents the practice of caste discrimination by showing many kinds of brutal punishments meted out by the upper castes to the lowers castes. Dukhi Mochi's wife Roopa tries to steal some oranges from the orchard of an upper class man and she is caught and raped by the guard there. Dukhi Mochi is made to work extremely hard in return for a glass of milk but when the mortar breaks, Dukhi gets his leg injured. Moreover, he is blamed for breaking the mortar, is beaten and is not given any remuneration. According to the scholar Dr. Giuseppe Scuto in his study entitled *Caste Violence in Contemporary India* says, "In India every day two dalits are murdered and three dalit women are raped. Yearly, around 27,000 crimes against former untouchables are recorded and discrimination against them is still *very much alive* [sic] (5)".This violence towards the dalits is well represented by Mistry in *AFB.*

Mistry represents violence as intrinsic to the caste system. However, an attempt to break out of the caste system also leads to caste violence in Mistry's novel. Dukhi's move to make his sons tailors is not liked by the upper castes in

his village. Later on, when Narayan is getting married, the upper castes don't allow the village musicians to play at the wedding and the musicians from town had to be hired. Moreover, when Narayan insists on practicing his franchise to vote, he is tortured by the men of Thakur Dharamsi and killed. Thereafter, his house is set on fire and almost his entire family is killed. This kind of caste violence is probably triggered off due to jealously resulting from the development of the Chamaar community. Mistry reveals the complexities of the caste system by showing that discrimination is not limited to upper castes and Chamaars but there is discrimination amongst sub-castes as well. Mistry represents this by showing that Roopa does not allow a Bhangi to enter the tailoring workshop of her son Narayan. She is against sewing for Bhangis. After Narayan's arguments she finally allows him to sew for Bhangis but none of them are allowed inside; all their dealings have to take place outside Narayan's workshop (*AFB* 95-148).

3. Representation of the city of Mumbai – constructed through cityscapes, character perspectives and comparisons to other locales

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall says, "Representation itself is a biased activity. However, it is important to study representations as they contain new knowledges, new identities and new meanings" ("Representation and Media"). Hall in his essay "The Work of Representation" uses Roland Barthes' analysis of a pasta advertisement. It is a picture of some packets of pasta, a tin, a sachet, some tomatoes, onions, peppers, a mushroom, all emerging from a half-open string bag. Barthes suggests that we can read the pasta ad as a 'myth' by linking its completed message with the cultural theme or concept of 'Italianicity' or 'Italianness'. Then, Hall adds, at the level of the myth or meta-language, the Panzani ad becomes a message about the essential meaning of Italian-ness as a national culture (*The Work of Representation,* 41).

Taking a hint from Hall's analysis of the Barthes' example of the pasta advertisement, my argument is that Mistry constructs a Mumbai in the novel which can be looked at the level of myth or meta-language. As a result we find that the cityscapes, character perspectives and comparisons to other spaces construct the city of Mumbai.

3.1 Cityscapes

3.1.1 The overcrowded Mumbai local train

The novel begins with an overcrowded train which is symbolic of Mumbai. The Bombay Suburban Railway carries more than 7.24 million commuters daily. The Mumbai Suburban Railway suffers from some of the most severe

overcrowding in the world. Over 4,500 passengers are packed into a 9-car rake during peak hours, as against the rated carrying capacity of 1,700. This has resulted in what is known as Super-Dense Crush Load of 14 to 16 standing passengers per square metre of floor space.People are struggling for space in a train compartment and that's how Maneck gets introduced to the tailors Ishvar and Omprakash (*AFB* 3-11).

3.1.2 The Vishram Vegetarian Hotel

The Vishram Vegetarian Hotel is an important place in the novel. This is where Ishvar and Omprakash go for their tea breaks and sometimes for meals. This place is important as a meeting point. The outside of this restaurant is also the place where the beggar Shankar works. Maneck accompanies the tailors often for their tea breaks at the VishramVegetarain Hotel. They pass by Shankar, the beggar on castor whom Maneck gives some small change and who later on in the narrative becomes their friend (275-276).

3.1.3 The Indian courthouse

Mistry provides an interesting representation of the crowded, noisy and chaotic Indian courthouse which Dina visits in order to hire a lawyer. She is swarmed by lawyers looking for a client and they take advantage of the crowd and also misbehave with her. She finds one eccentric lawyer Vasant Rao Valmik who is sitting on a broken bench. Instead of helping her straightaway, he tells her about his life story, the state of law in India, the Prime Minister's electoral malpractice and then listens to her case (558-571).

3.1.4 Dina Dalal's flat and the Bombay Rent Act, 1947

Real estate has always been valuable in the island-city of Mumbai whose population is approximately 18.4 million now. A substantial part of the narrative takes place inside Dina Dalal's flat which is protected by the Bombay Rent Act, 1947. Dina becomes the tenant of the flat after her husband passes away and pays a paltry sum as rent as she is protected by the Rent Act. Dina Dalal also conducts sewing business and has sublet a room to a paying guest; these are illegal activities. This also gives the landlord excuses to throw her out of the apartment in which he succeeds towards the end of the novel. Shirish B. Patel in an article called "Life between Buildings: The use and abuse of FSI" in the *Economic and Political Weekly* explains the detrimental effects of The Rent Act to the city:

> The main culprit for proliferation of slums is the Rent Control Act in Mumbai which allows nearly two million people to stay in homes almost free of rent. They pay monthly rents as low as Rs 100-500,

while the market rates are 1000 times higher. The Act not only had a negative effect on investment in housing for rental purpose but also withdrew existing housing stock from the rental market. The Rent Control Act completely protected the already housed people in Mumbai and also denied access to rental housing to the migrants. What migrants paid to get a room in slums was many times greater than the old rental house in chawls and even greater than houses in many middle and upper class localities.

3.1. 5 Informal housing and slums in Mumbai

When Ishvar and Omprakash first reach Mumbai they are greeted by the sea of humanity at the railway station. They sleep for six months in the awning behind the kitchen of their miserly host Nawaz's house. The tailors try very hard but they are able to find only odd jobs. Then Nawaz tells them about Dina Dalal's job offer and makes sure that they take it. That same day Nawaz takes them to a slum where he makes sure they rent a room and thus gets rid of them from his own house (*AFB* 153-163).

Over 9 million people, over 60% of the population of Mumbai, live in informal housing or slums, yet they cover only 6–8% of the citys land area. Slum growth rate in Mumbai is greater than the general urban growth rate. Like scores of other people in the city, Ishvar and Omprakash start getting used to the life in the slums. They find out that tap water is available only early in the morning. Their neighbour Rajaram shows them their way around. They also learn to defecate in the open near the railway tracks (167-170). Mistry represents the migration phenomenon in Mumbai through Rajaram when he says, "Yes, thousands and thousands are coming to the city because of bad times in their native place. I came for the same reason" (171-172).

3.2 Characters' Perspectives

3.2.1 Mumbai as a progressive and cosmopolitan city

Mistry represents inter-dining and co-habitation in the flat as a levelling factor in the class and caste distinctions between the tailors vis-à-vis Dina and Maneck and also shows egalitarianism as something joyful. This modern family unit of four cooks, eats, works, sews, lives and travels together in the city. They also take interest in the quilt that Dina Dalal sews from leftover cloth material as it marks the time they started working and living together. Dina even gives the tailors the permission for Om's future wife too to sleep on the verandah of her flat.

3.2.2 Nostalgia for Mumbai of Dina's youth

Dina Dalal in her youth used to save money from the household budget for buying provisions. With those savings she would travel in buses, go to parks, museums, markets, look at posters outside cinemas, and public libraries. She found the libraries to be quiet and comforting places where she could spend hours. Some modern libraries also contained music rooms. There she would spend time looking for and listening to familiar music and was mesmerised by it. She also used to visit free concerts organised in the city which is where she also meets her future husband Rustom (29-30).

The readers get a glimpse of the Mumbai they have "never seen and possibly can't see" (Hall 17) through the eyes of Dina Dalal. Dina reminisces about her youth in this lost city to Maneck and the tailors. She tells them about:

> those enchanted evenings of musical recitals, and emerging with Rustom from the concert hall into the fragrant night when the streets were quiet – yes, she said, in those days the city was still beautiful, the footpaths were clean, not yet taken over by pavement-dwellers, and yes, the stars were visible in the sky in those days, when Rustom and she walked along the sea, listening to the endless exchange of the waves, or in the Hanging Gardens, among the whispering trees, planning their wedding and their lives, planning and plotting in full ignorance of destiny's plan for them (336).

3.2.3 Mumbai from the perspective of beggars

The character of Beggarmaster in the novel represents the commercialisation of begging. Many beggars work for him and he makes sketches and strategizes how and where to place the beggars in order to make maximum profits. Mistry shows many creative beggar characters in his novel and makes a sordid practice like begging tolerable for the reader by adding humour and by making use of grotesque images. Mistry also humanizes the Beggarmaster by telling his story.

Mistry represents the dark side of the begging business as well: The Beggarmaster has gouged out the eyes of two children and turned them into beggars. Their uncle Monkey-man is distraught about that fact and as a result murders Beggarmaster for revenge. RTI activist Anil Galgali, who runs an NGO, Athak Seva Sangh, in an article "More you cry, more you earn" said: "I have noticed an increase in the number of children begging in and around Mumbai. These kids are governed by a senior handler, who collects all the cash they make by begging. It is a thriving racket at the expense of children." Galgali

has also lodged a complaint with the railway police, highlighting the plight of handicapped beggar kids. “Those beggars with an eye gouged out or limbs amputated are victims of a more sinister, cruel mafia. They will do anything to force the public to pity the children and give money,” said Galgali.

3.3 Comparison with other locales

In *AFB*, unlike his other books, Mistry goes beyond Mumbai and describes the Chamaar tailors’ village, the small town near the tailors’ village, the hill town from where the character Maneck comes from, the outskirts of the city where the tailors are forced into a labour camp where they work at an irrigation project, the outskirts of the Chamaar village where forced sterilizations take place and Dubai where Maneck goes and works for many years before returning to India. Mistry explains this creative decision thus: ‘I made a conscious decision in this book to include more ... mainly because in India seventy five per cent of Indians live in villages and I wanted to embrace more of the social reality of India’ (qtd. in Morey, “Thread and Circuses: Performing in the Spaces of City and Nation in *A Fine Balance*” 95).

Conclusion

The political representation of Mumbai is done in *AFB* through three major tracks in the novel. The first track is that of the Emergency which is constructed through its impact on the four major characters. The two tailors suffer due to the demolition of their hutments and later they are rendered handicapped through the forced and malicious sterilizations and its detrimental effects. Mistry depicts MISA through the illegal and arbitrary arrests of five minor characters. He also makes use of humor, seriousness, conversations, posters, slogan-shouting, an Emergency era motto on a stamp and the compulsory singing of the national anthem in cinemas to construct the Emergency environment in the novel. Thus, Mistry constructs Mumbai which is the signifying field on which Emergency politics are played out in the novel. The political semiosis of Mumbai comes across as a city grappling with a draconic state and its life-denying laws.

The second major representational track is that of casteism. He constructs this by showing that the tailors’ family had suffered from caste violence in their village and the two tailors are the lone survivors from that family. He also shows many instances of brutal casteism such as rape, endurance of labour under inhuman conditions, the hindrance of the Chamaar caste’s upward mobility, the forced sterilizations and castration of Omprakash as well as the complex workings of the caste system within the Chamaar caste. However, here Mumbai is constructed as a site for redemption from the rampant casteism in the

Chamaars' village. The city's urbanity protects the two tailor characters from the tribulations of casteism. This further reinforces Mumbai as a sign of an all-embracing and redemptive city.

The third major representation track is that of the construction of Mumbai. The signs and symbols which construct the city of Mumbai in *AFB* are the overcrowded Mumbai local train, the Vishram Vegetarian Hotel, the Indian courthouse, Dina Dalal's flat,the Bombay Rent Act (1947) and informal housing and slums in Mumbai. Mumbai is also constructed through character perspectives such as Mumbai as a progressive and cosmopolitan city, Dina Dalal's nostalgia for the Mumbai of her youth and Mumbai from the beggars' perspective. The inclusion of the other locales gives the novel a pan-India feel. Here Mumbai can be read as a city of opportunities, egalitarianism and emancipationas opposed to the oppressive village. The character perspectives like those of Dina, Ishvar and Omprakash, Maneck and the beggars signify Mumbai as city of struggles, squalor, Emergency politics, tragedies and grotesque poverty yet also a city of opportunities, survival, culture, romance, friendships and nostalgia. Mumbai can also be read as a city of opportunities, egalitarianism and emancipationas opposed to the oppressive village. The political representation of Mumbai comes across as a city great in its magnanimity but also great in its inadequacies.

Mistry in representing Mumbai in his novels is creating a particularised figure of the city. A figure of the city constructed through the language used, cityscapes foregrounded, perspectives of the characters regarding political events and its aftermath, nostalgia opens up a signifying field where the performativity of the language as well as human life is acted out. The Mumbai constructed in *AFB* is suffering from the inside, due to the nation's self-created problems and thus it is a city grappling with draconic state and its life-denying laws.The village comes looking for the city as a site of redemption and thus it can also be an all-embracing and redemptive city in *AFB*. Similar to Charles Dickens' London, Mistry creates the figure of Mumbai in *AFB* as a city great in its magnanimity but also great in its inadequacies. In *AFB*, the myth of Mumbai is larger as the city is not the only centre yet is central to the narrative. It is the picture of a city that is suffering, evolving and struggling to survive.

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Saadat Hasan Manto's "Kali Shalwar" and "Hatak": A Reading in the Light of Slavoj ŽiŽek's Theory of Ideology

Navdeep Kaur

This paper examines the implicit functioning of ideology in Saadat Hasan Manto's two short stories, namely, "Kali Shalwar" ("Black Shalwar") and "Hatak" ("Insult"). It employs the idea of ideology as elaborated by Slavoj ŽiŽek and proceeds to undertake a comprehensive and critical analysis of these stories. The paper critically examines the two stories examining how these fictional narratives highlight the role played by ideology in the lives of female sex workers. After giving a brief overview of Slavoj ŽiŽek's theory of ideology, the paper attempts a critical appraisal of ideology as it has been portrayed in the two texts.

Slavoj ŽiŽek establishes a new way to read the traditional conception of ideology as 'false consciousness' of reality. According to ŽiŽek, the most basic definition of ideology is provided by Karl Marx- "they do not know it, but they are doing it", in other words, people's ignorance about their subjection to ideology (ŽiŽek 24). With this model of ideology, the process of ideological critique is fairly straightforward. All that is required is to lead the naive ideological consciousness to a point at which it can recognize that its understanding of reality is distorted. As soon as ideology is recognized as ideology, that is, as a distorted version of the truth, it disappears. However, ŽiŽek points out that this is not the case today. Subjects already know that they are receiving a distorted version of reality, yet they go on with it. ŽiŽek, following the German theorist Peter Sloterdijk, calls such subjects "cynical subjects". The cynical subject already accepts that it is being misled by a flawed and distorted version of reality but still it does not dispense with that skewed vision. Instead of Marx's formula of ideology, the formula proposed by Sloterdijk is- "they know very well what they are doing, but still they are doing it" (ŽiŽek 25). ŽiŽek argues that ideological illusion lies not in the "knowing" but in the "doing".

In his famous essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation", Louis Althusser divides the apparatuses of domination in a class society into two categories – the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatus. While the former works through repression or

coercion, the latter functions through ideology. The Repressive State Apparatus consists of the government, the courts, the army, the police, and the prison, and so on, whereas, the Ideological State Apparatuses are the religious ISA , the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the communication ISA, and the cultural ISA, and so on. According to Althusser, "ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (173). For ŽiŽek, Althusser fails to explain the link between Ideological State apparatuses and ideological interpellation: how does the Ideological State Apparatus internalize itself; how does an Ideological State Apparatus create belief in an ideology. According to ŽiŽek, the external machine of State Apparatuses exercises its force only in so far as it is experienced in the unconscious of the subject, as a traumatic senseless injunction. For Althusser, the Symbolic machine of ideology is "internalized" into the ideological experience of Meaning and Truth through the process of ideological interpellation. But for ŽiŽek, this internalization never fully succeeds, there is always a residue, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senseless sticking to it, which "far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command is, is the very condition of it" (43).

ŽiŽek mentions that the subject identifies with some signifying feature in the big Other, in the Symbolic order. This feature assumes concrete, recognizable shape in a name or in a mandate that the subject takes upon himself or that is bestowed on him. This symbolic identification is to be distinguished from imaginary identification. The Lacanian theory of the mirror stage states that the subject must identify with the imaginary other to achieve self-identity, he must alienate himself – put his identity outside himself into the image of his double. ŽiŽek states that the 'effect of retroversion' or the transferential illusion is based primarily upon this imaginary level – it is supported by the illusion of the self as the autonomous agent which is present from the beginning as the origin of its acts. This imaginary experience is for the subject the way to misrecognize his radical dependence on the big Other.

According to ŽiŽek, the relation between imaginary identification and symbolic identification is that between 'constituted' and 'constitutive' identification. Imaginary identification is identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing 'what we would like to be', whereas, symbolic identification is identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear likeable to ourselves. ŽiŽek asserts that imaginary identification is

always identification on behalf of a certain gaze in the other. The subject is enacting the role in order to offer herself to the Other as the object of its desire, and she identifies symbolically with the *gaze* of the other. The imaginary identification is always subordinated to the symbolic identification (the point from which we are observed) which dominates and determines the image, the imaginary form in which we appear likeable to ourselves. Žižek points out that this interplay of imaginary and symbolic identification under the domination of symbolic identification constitutes the mechanism by means of which the subject is integrated into a social and ideological function – the way he/she assumes certain 'mandates' (116-123). Žižek writes:

> The subject is always fastened, pinned to a signifier which represents him for the other, and through this pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, he is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations. The point is that this mandate is ultimately always arbitrary: since its nature is performative; it cannot be accounted for by reference to the 'real' properties and capacities of the subject. So, loaded with this mandate, the subject is automatically confronted with a certain '*Che vuoi?*, with a question of the Other. (125-26)

The Other addresses the subject as if the subject possesses the answer to the question of why he has this mandate, but the question is, of course, unanswerable. The subject does not know why he is occupying this place in the symbolic network. His own answer to this '*Che vuoi?*'of the Other can only be the hysterical question "Why am I what you [the big Other] are saying that I am?" (Žižek 126).

Žižek argues that the hysterical question is an articulation of the incapacity of the subject to fulfill the symbolic identification, to assume fully and without restraint the symbolic mandate. It is, in other words, the effect and testimony of a failed interpellation. The answer to this '*Che vuoi?*'appears as fantasy. Žižek elaborates:

[F]antasy functions as a construction, as an imaginary scenario filling out the void, the opening of the *desire of the Other*: by giving us a definite answer to the question 'What does the Other want?', it enables us to evade the unbearable deadlock in which the Other wants something from us, but we are at the same time incapable of translating this desire of the Other into a positive interpellation, into a mandate with which to identify. (Žižek 128)

Žižek states that fantasy appears as an answer to '*Che vuoi?*, to the

unbearable enigma of the desire of the Other, of the lack in the Other but, at the same time, fantasy provides the co-ordinates of our desire. It constructs the frame enabling us to desire something. ŽiŽek argues that we learn how to desire through fantasy. In the fantasy-scene the desire is not fulfilled or satisfied, but constituted, that is, it is given its objects. The desire structured through fantasy is a defence against the desire of the Other ('*Che vuoi?*'). It is through the mechanism of fantasy that an empirical, positively given object becomes an object of desire- it begins to contain some unknown quality, something which is 'in it more than it', and makes it worthy of our desire. It is noticeable that any given object cannot take its place in the fantasy-frame. ŽiŽek writes that "some objects (those which are too close to the traumatic Thing) are definitely excluded from it; if, by any chance, they intrude into the fantasy-space, the effect is extremely disturbing and disgusting- the fantasy loses its fascinating power and changes into a nauseating object (134).

ŽiŽek states that the theory of ideology descending from the Althusserian theory of interpellation limits itself to grasping the efficiency of an ideology exclusively through the mechanisms of imaginary and symbolic identification. It overlooks the dimension "beyond interpellation", the leftover which opens the space for desire and makes the Other (the symbolic order) inconsistent. For ŽiŽek, all we have to do is experience how there is nothing 'behind' fantasy and how fantasy masks precisely this 'nothing' (138-41). ŽiŽek remarks that every process of identification that confers on the subject a fixed socio-symbolic identity is ultimately doomed to fail. The function of ideological fantasy is to mask this inconsistency and thus to compensate us for the failed identification. In other words, "fantasy is a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance" (ŽiŽek 142). Thus, ŽiŽek supplements the basic procedure of the 'criticism of ideology' with another formula: to detect, in a given ideological edifice, the element which represents within it its own impossibility.

"Kali Shalwar" (Black Shalwar)

Manto's well-known story "Kali Shalwar" ("Black Shalwar") first appeared in the collection titled *Dhuan* (*The Smoke*) in 1942. The story grapples with certain social, psychological and religious issues centered on the life of Sultana, a sex worker who has moved from Ambala Cantonment to New Delhi on the insistence of her partner Khuda Baksh. She earned well in Ambala where the British soldiers were her regular customers but she faces great hardship in Delhi. As the story opens, Sultana is bored and depressed after

three months of practically having no business in Delhi. There arrives a moment of crisis in her life when her poverty begins to tell upon her religious beliefs and practices. The month of *Muharram* is approaching and Sultana needs black clothes for the occasion. She arranges a black *kameez* and a black *dupatta* but does not have a black *shalwar*. She requests Shankar, a man who gets her services free of cost, to get her a black *shalwar*. He takes her silver earrings and brings a black *shalwar* for her in return. He has exchanged her earrings for this *shalwar* with Mukhtar, another sex worker who lives and works in the same building. He acts as a middle man who takes advantage of both the women and gets free sexual favours from them. On the day of *Muharram*, Mukhtar, wearing Sultana's earrings, visits Sultana's place. She sees Sultana wearing her (Mukhtar's) black *shalwar*. However both women are reluctant to acknowledge the truth and they pretend as if they are ignorant of the transaction and their consequent exploitation by Shankar. At the end of the story, Sultana is well aware of her exploitation but she acts as if she is ignorant of the situation. In a way, by remaining silent, she colludes with her exploiter in the act of exploitation.

The story "Kali Shalwar" ("Black Shalwar") presents the ŽiŽekian cynical subject in the form of Sultana. Throughout the story, Sultana equates herself with objects. This amply shows that she is very well aware of her commodified-status in the society. It can be said that she does not misrecognize her social reality but at the same time, it cannot be denied that she overlooks the ideological illusion structuring this reality. At the end of the story, Sultana knows that Shankar has exchanged her silver earrings for Mukhtar's black *shalwar* but she does not confront the reality. She is reluctant to acknowledge the truth of her situation and pretends as if she is ignorant of the transaction and her consequent exploitation at the hands of the middleman Shankar. The reason behind her connivance with her exploiter can be located in, what ŽiŽek calls, the ideological (unconscious) fantasy structuring her social reality. Sultana, though aware of her status of a commodity in the flesh market, keeps a cynical distance from this reality. This cynical distance blinds her to the structuring power of fantasy; even if she keeps an ironical distance from her status, in her social activity she still adheres to that status.

Sultana's predicament can be understood clearly by looking at the relationship between her imaginary and symbolic identification. In her imaginary identification, she imitates or identifies with an image of 'female sex worker', a commodity, an object. ŽiŽek argues that imaginary identification is always done

on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other. The question here is for whom is Sultana enacting this role of a female sex worker? Which gaze is considered when she identifies herself with this image? This gap between the way she sees herself and the point from which she is being observed is crucial for grasping the structuring power of ideological fantasy. Sultana is presenting herself as a female sex worker to offer herself to the Other as the object of its desire. Behind this 'feminine' imaginary figure, we can discover the patriarchal identification; Sultana is enacting fragile femininity but on the symbolic level, she is in fact identifying with the paternal gaze, to which she wants to appear likeable.

It is noticeable that Sultana compares herself, time and again, with objects. The often repeated image is that of the railway tracks, trains, bogies and engines. She compares herself to shunted carriage left to run on its own along a track. The most telling image is that of the engines as *seths* (her male customers); these *seth*-like fat engines shunt Sultana-like bogies hither and thither. The description of the engines appears repeatedly in the text:

> Sometimes a thought came to her mind that the network of railway tracks that lay in front of her, the steam and smoke rising here and there, was a huge brothel. There were a lot of bogies being shunted hither and thither by a few fat engines. Sometimes Sultana felt that these engines were the *Seths* who used to visit her in Ambala from time to time. And sometimes when she saw a solitary engine passing slowly by a row of carriages, she felt as if a man was looking at the balconies while passing through a brothel[1]. (156-57)

The question, however, is how she must look at herself so that she appears as a carriage shunted by others. The answer, of course, is the gaze of the *seths* or the so-called 'respectable' society – only the patriarchal society can treat her as if she is an object, a commodity to be circulated in the market. Sultana's imaginary identification is subordinated to her symbolic identification. As Žižek points out in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, it is always the symbolic identification which dominates and determines the image or the imaginary form in which we appear likeable to ourselves (120). This interplay of imaginary and symbolic identification under the domination of symbolic identification constitutes the mechanism by means of which Sultana is integrated into the social and ideological function, the way she assumes her symbolic mandates.

Žižek mentions in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that the movement

between symbolic and imaginary identification never comes out without a certain leftover. The subject is bestowed with a symbolic mandate and thus, is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations. But this mandate is ultimately always arbitrary because it cannot be accounted for by reference to the real properties and capacities of the subject. So the subject is automatically confronted with a certain '*Che vuoi?*, the question: Why am I what the big Other is saying that I am? This question is an articulation of the incapacity of the subject to fulfill the symbolic identification, to assume fully and without restraint the symbolic mandate. It is the effect and testimony of a failed interpellation. In the story "Black Shalwar", one does not come across any such instance that hints at the failure of interpellation. The story amply shows that Sultana has fully assumed her symbolic mandate, the status of a female sex worker, the role of a commodity to be circulated in the flesh market. The story ends precisely at the point where the reality of her exploitation stares at her in the face but she acts as if she is ignorant of this reality. This act that continues in spite of the knowledge of its falsity constitutes the ideological illusion.

"Hatak" (Insult)

Manto's another story titled "Hatak" ("Insult") brings into focus the failure of interpellation. The story articulates the incapacity of the subject to fulfill the symbolic mandate. The protagonist of the story, another female sex worker named Sugandhi, cannot assume fully the symbolic mandate given by the big Other, that is, the Symbolic network. The story "Hattak" appeared in a collection of short stories entitled *Manto ke Afsane* in 1940. It was later adapted as a radio play by Manto, when he was working with All India Radio, Delhi in 1940-42. The story deals with the life of a female sex worker named Sugandhi. It focuses on one incident that illuminates Sugandhi's entire life. Manto, no doubt, captures mute acceptance of a victim's status by Sugandhi in the beginning of the text. But the story does not depict her as a meek and hunted victim throughout, she shows the courage to step out of the 'ghettos' of silence in order to articulate her resistance to the social machinery that works in collusion with her male exploiters. Towards the end of the story, Sugandhi stands up to confront the exploitative forces; she ventures out and refuses to cater to the needs of her callous and double faced male clients. Sugandhi realizes that speaking out against exploitation is the only way to be at peace with her inner self. The critique of the story does not limit itself to grasping the efficiency of ideology through the mechanism of imaginary and symbolic identification. The story gives us a glimpse into the dimension that lies beyond interpellation, the leftover which opens the

space for desire and makes the Other (the Symbolic order) inconsistent.

Manto takes us to the very centre of a sex worker's existence, to her dreary room in the beginning of the story. The squalor of her room reflects the squalid and sordid situation of her life. The room is littered with odds and ends, the back of the only cane chair in the room is dirty from overuse, the black cloth covering the gramophone is in tatters, the mangy dog is resting on dried and withered *chappals*, and the parrot's cage is strewn with stale peels of fruit. Her name 'Sugandhi' meaning 'sweet fragrance' bears a special significance with reference to the conditions of her room as well as her life. The parrot and the dog are her only constant companions. There is a portrait of Lord Ganesha, adorned with fresh and wilted flowers. The presence of oil lamp and incense sticks on a small shelf near the portrait is proof of her faith in the god. Her religious faith provides her an additional sense of security and also the strength to survive in the hostile world. Sugandhi is lying face down on her bed; a thoroughly drunk 'sanitary' inspector of the Municipal Committee has just left her after shaking the ribs and bones of her body. He did not stay for the night because he had "high regards for his wife who loved him a lot" (Manto 165). There is brutality in Sugandhi's encounter with her customers as these men cannot dissociate violence from their sexual acts and hence pinch her blue and black. The bestial treatment meted out by men to Sugandhi suggests that for the patriarchal subject she is a mere object of sexual gratification. Sugandhi tolerates this violent and cruel behaviour as she is forever hungry for love and so melts into submission at the slightest suggestion of warmth from a man.

The relationship between Sugandhi's imaginary identification and symbolical identification is clearly discernible at this point in the story. In her imaginary identification, she certainly identifies with an image of a fragile feminine figure that is capable of arousing the sexual passions of her clients. Since the imaginary identification is always done on behalf of a certain gaze in the other, the gaze here is that of her male clients. She is enacting this feminine image because she wants to appear likeable to her male clients. This interplay of imaginary and symbolic identification works to integrate her into the social and ideological function so that she assumes her symbolic mandates.

The text narrates how Sugandhi has created a make-believe world of love and lies to sustain her existence. She has, right above the table on the wall, four framed pictures of different men who are her regular clients. She thinks that she is in love with all of them. But in reality the men give her only coins and

not love. Madho, a *hawildar* from Pune, manipulates and exploits the situation to his advantage. He lures and deceives her through the use of various tactics. He takes away her earnings by playing a wicked game of husband-wife. He exercises control over Sugandhi not through the use of brute force but he achieves control over her through discourse. He says to her, "Do you realize what you are bargaining for? …for seven and a half rupees you're promising to give me such a thing that you cannot give and I have come to take such a thing that I cannot take." He adds, "I want a woman; but do you, at this moment, want a man?" (Manto 169). He comforts her with his soothing words and provides her the much needed emotional security through his regular visits, unfulfilled promises of financial help and meaningless utterances. Madho, thus, uses her as a tool in order to ease his own life's burden. Sugandhi is happy to live this lie as there is no possibility of living its truth. Manto describes her situation in these words, "those who cannot get real gold, settle for gold-plated imitations" (Manto 170). It is clear that at this point Sugandhi is fooling herself with her cynicism into thinking that these men are not her clients but her lovers, whereas in her actions she shows effectively that they are her customers. The ideological illusion lies in the reality of what she does, rather than what she thinks.

The moment of realization arrives in Sugandhi's life when she is rejected with a mere '*oun*' by a *Seth*, a 'gentleman' who has come to the 'Prostitute Quarters' in the middle of the night. For the Seth, she is an object of desire; her body becomes an object – inspected, surveyed, judged and finally rejected by the buyer. Her sensibility is totally numbed for a moment, but soon she regains her consciousness. These moments of humiliation make her realize the need to demolish the make-believe world, so consciously created and maintained by her. Her rejection by the *Seth* fills her with the feelings of anger and frustration. Her attempts to avenge her insult are thwarted as the *Seth* leaves her in this bewildered state, even before she could comprehend the situation. She feels as if the *Seth* has spat on her face and has said, "ten rupees for this woman, what's wrong with a mule" (Manto 174). A strong desire to re-enact the whole episode in order to avenge her insult catches hold of her. She wishes that the *Seth* would come to her once again and at the sound of "*oun*" she would pounce on him like a wild cat and scratch his face with her nails. She would tear her clothes, stand before him stark naked and say, "This is what you came for, didn't you? Take it without paying the price but what I am, whatever is hidden inside me, neither you nor your father can take that" (Manto 177). She

finds it hard to handle the intensity of her anger and helplessness. "What do I lack?", she asks this question of each and every object around her.

Sugandhi directs her anger towards Madho, a patriarchal subject who is an epitome of her physical, emotional and economic exploitation at the hands of inconsiderate society. She steps out of her zone of peace, security and silence to confront her exploiter. Sugandhi throws away Madho's picture out of the window of her room thus snapping all connections with him. The completely docile Sugandhi turns into a strong person and pulls out the pictures of her clients and throws them violently in the street. She rejects them all. She expresses her complete rejection of them with an "*oun*". She rejects Madho completely whom she used to refer to as her husband. She laughs and repeats Madho's dialogues to develop her revenge. She questions Madho's authority over her and drives him out of her house. She finally wakes up from her self-imposed slumber to voice her silence as she is now prepared to face the truth of her existence.

Thus, towards the end of the story, the movement between symbolic and imaginary identification definitely comes out with a certain leftover. The symbolic mandate bestowed upon Sugandhi gives her a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations. But this mandate is ultimately arbitrary because it cannot be accounted for by reference to her real properties and capacities. Her rejection by the *Seth* by a mere 'ooun' can be read as an intrusion of the Real in the symbolic order. Sugandhi is automatically confronted with a certain '*Che vuoi?*, the question – Why is she what the big Other is saying that she is? This question is an articulation of her incapacity to fulfill the symbolic identification, to assume fully and without restraint the symbolic mandate. It is thus, the effect and testimony of a failed interpellation. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek mentions that every process of identification conferring on us a fixed socio-symbolic identity is ultimately doomed to fail. The function of ideological fantasy is to mask this inconsistency and thus to compensate us for the failed identification (142). In "Hatak", Sugandhi finally traverses this fantasy; she experiences how there is nothing behind it and realizes that the fantasy masks precisely this nothing. When she traverses her fantasy, she throws Madho and all other male clients out of her life.

A close reading of "Kali Shalwar" and "Hatak" reveals Manto's attempts to capture and represent in his fictional narrative the functioning of ideology. He narrates the sufferings of female sex workers through an authentic portrayal

of the miserable plight of these generally excluded members of society. Sultana of "Kali Shalwar" is a cynical subject who is misled by a flawed version of reality but still she is not prepared to dispense with this vision. This story emphasizes the internalization of interpellation by a cynical subject. Sultana has completely accepted her Symbolic mandate without any restraint. On the other hand, Sugandhi of "Hatak" realizes that the Symbolic mandate imposed upon her by the big Other is arbitrary in nature. She acts consciously to disturb this established mode of existence and consequently rejects her Symbolic mandate. Thus, the text presents Sugandhi as an effect and testimony of failed interpellation.

End Note

[1] All translations of Saadat Hasan Manto's works are mine.

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Photographing the Sound and the Fury: War Photography and New Media

Ved Prakash

> "What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially." (Barthes 4)
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> "A war that is distinguished by the high level of technical precision, is bound to leave behind documents more numerous and varied than battles waged in earlier times, less present to consciousness." (Junger 24)

At present, our society is visibly surrounded by the state of warfare. It seems one cannot escape the institution of war even when one is sitting in one's living room away from the war zones. The images from the war fronts which are published in newspapers, journals, and magazines and the ones which are shown on TV screens regularly, convey the trauma of war to the masses. The reason war has been one of those human activities that seem to produce innumerable images is because of the overt curiosity of the common man with the domain of violence. In the age of New Media where nations have come closer and a lot more information is always in circulation, it becomes all the more essential to consider what should be captured in a war through the camera lens and what should be disregarded. This is not a hidden fact that photographers at present do not mind jeopardizing their lives in order to click iconic images which may provide an explicit visual representation of war. At present, war photographers are pushing the line so that they can get as close to war as possible. However, at times they have to pay a serious cost for this act of courage. The list of war photographers who have died during the course of capturing conflicts is endless. There is a high possibility of being the victim while documenting the victims of war. Freelance photojournalist Ahmed Deeb has been covering the conflict in Syria. In the documentary titled *Son of War – Photojournalist Risks his Life to Capture Conflicts*, he recounts: "If anything happens, I am the witness, may be one day I will be the news itself. One time, I gave up and I said it's OK, it's the last minutes of my life." Ahmed Deeb knows that the choice which he has made of course provides the world a window to peep into the pain and agony of people who continue to suffer as war has become a norm at present. However, the point which one needs to postulate is whether war photographers

ever decide to pause clicking? And on what parameters they decide what all needs to be captured? What is the whole politics of selecting and freezing a moment?

In this age of New Media, the emergence of war photography has dramatically altered the way the public perceives conflicts. New Media and technology has made the movement of war photography easier. In the present scenario, there is an intense consumption of war photographs amongst the mass. In fact, anything which has to do with war becomes extremely significant not only because war leads to destruction, bloodshed, and gory images but it also glorifies violence which leads to some kind of a voyeuristic pleasure. German-American political theorist Hannah Arendt in her book *On Violence* (1970) writes about how nations and civilisations have always thrived on violence. Some of the greatest empires were built on the institution of killing but what is really shocking is that there has been a normalisation of violence through TV, films, videos games, advertisements etc. One interacts with violence all the time and this perpetual interaction leads to the accommodation of violence. Arendt opines, "No one engaged in thought about history and politics can remain unaware of the enormous role violence has always played in human affairs, and it is at first glance rather surprising that violence has been singled out so seldom for special consideration" (8). This shows to what extent violence and its arbitrariness were taken for granted and therefore neglected; no one questions or examines what is obvious to all. Those who saw nothing but violence in human affairs convinced that they were "always haphazard, not serious, not precise" (8).

Hannah Arendt goes on to give an example of Carl Philipp Clausewitz, a German general and military theorist who believed that war cannot be looked at in isolation as it is not a segregated entity. At present, war as a social institution has become a transaction. Apart from all the destruction, the powerful nations attempt to accommodate war to contribute to their economy. The dominant power structures do not shy away from intimidating and victimising the subordinate under the guise of justice and equality. The pretence of justice is maintained till the desired objectives are not achieved by the dominant. Clausewitz in his most seminal work titled *On War* (1832), written after the Napoleonic wars, asserts that war cannot be quantified or reduced to maps, diagrams, geometry or graphs. In fact, war is a continuation of politics and it is an act of violence to compel ones opponent to accomplish ones will (27)[1]. Clausewitz uses the term 'political commerce' to hint upon how war is used as an investment to accomplish power over the powerless.

As far as photography in relation to war is concerned, one can infer that photography has always been perceived as a potential threat during the state of war because a photograph can act as a testimony. During the First World War, the practice of photography was forbidden in France and in fact, there was an official order from the state that anyone found with a camera in the public domain could be punished. Despite the orders, people still attempted to click covertly. With regard to the domain of photography there is no doubt that there has always been a disputation about how photography affects the social, cultural and political fabric of a society and how it creates new avenues of knowledge. There are beliefs that photography brings us closer to reality as it conveys a sense of time and place while some believe, it rather carries a fixed, rigid reality which is decided and propagated by the view of the photographer alone. The question of reality will be taken up in the latter part of the paper. The basic premise of this paper is to look into the phenomenon of war photography and to analyze how authentic and (un)biased is the domain of knowledge which is constructed by the photographs from the conflict zones?

With the invention of photography in the 1830s, the act of capturing the war to enhance public awareness was explored. The invention of photography changed the whole landscape of culture and communication in the West. The possibility of capturing real life events finally became a reality. Photography became immensely popular because the resemblance of a photograph with actuality was more intimate in comparison to a painting. With the arrival of photography, the dead could be remembered. Photography became a medium not only to document but create events as well. One of the debates which continue to be of great importance even today with regard to the sphere of photography is how much a photographer creates while capturing a moment?

During the mid-19th century, the photographers could not explore much because of technical insufficiency. In order to click a steady, non-hazy photograph the subject had to be still because a slight movement would ruin the image. Therefore, many pictures such as portrait images of the soldiers were often staged. During the American Civil War (1861-1865)[2], photographers such as Alexander Gardner (1821-1882) and Mathew Brady (1822-1896) played a significant role in documenting the War. However, a few questions were raised over the authenticity of the process of documentation. It is believed that Gardner and Brady recreated scenes of battle to provide a distorted portrayal of war. The inaccurate depiction of war happened through many ways. For example soldiers and army personnel were often asked to pose in front of the camera to

produce the desired images which the photographers had in their minds. Moreover, there were moments when bodies of dead soldiers were rearranged to intensify the visual and emotional effects of the battle. Can we assume that during the Civil War the photographers while recording history ended up creating an alternative history? If so then one could argue that photographs which are considered to be the source of truth and reality may in fact represent a manipulated and fabricated narrative.

In this image, one can see that the soldiers are aware of the fact that they are being photographed. It is believed that war photographs are of two kinds: one, in which you look at the subject, and second, in which the subject looks at you. This picture works both ways as some soldiers are facing the lens while the others are consciously looking away from it.

The present photograph by Mathew Brady pays equal attention to soldiers as well as guns. The soldiers, who died in the war, have been arranged in one line to enhance the frame of the photograph. Moreover, it seems the guns have been placed around them to create a spectacle. The way this picture has been taken, shows that guns are not just a backdrop prop but their presence at the forefront of this image creates a sense of a battle field.

Susan Sontag, who is an American writer and a film maker, in her work *On Photography* writes that photographs are more than mere photographs. The prevalence of photographic culture has to have an impact on our sense of reality. The relation between photography and reality is thought of as a simple and mimetic one but it is not that simple. Photographs work as a site of a witness. Photographs establish the fact that they do not lie therefore they are a tool of power. Sontag states, "Photography has become almost as widely practiced an amusement as sex and dancing – which means that, like every mass art form, photography is not practiced by most people as art. It is mainly a social rite, a defence against anxiety, and a tool of power" (8).

If photography works as a tool of power as Sontag believes then it becomes all the more important for photographers like Brady and Gardner to capture what they see and not what they would want to see as photographs which are modified by the select view of the photographer which is a misuse of power that can lead to the construction of an alternate truth. However, with the change in technology, photographers could reach closer to the war zones and perhaps there was a less of a need to stage the photographs but one cannot be certain. One needs to understand how New Media disseminates war photography and how authentic and reliable is this dissemination? Furthermore, New Media has created newfangled sources of documenting the history and memory of war and one needs to be sure about the legitimacy of this history.

Colin Ford, the British photographic curator and historian of photography in his foreword to Jane Carmichael's book *First World War Photographers* writes:

> The photographers first went to wars with bulky wooden cameras and tripods, boxes of glass plates and bottles of dangerous chemicals; in the early 1850s such encumbrances were the essential tools of a medium barely 15 years old. Roger Fenton, recognized as a pioneer of war photography, carried all his apparatus in a converted wine merchant's van which became unbearably hot and uncomfortable,

> moved slowly and was a perfect target for enemy gunfire. His consciously artistic photographs show nothing of the real action of the campaign... By technique, circumstance and temperament, Fenton and his Victorian contemporaries took photographs that were pale shadows of the events they witnessed. Mathew Brady and others in the American Civil War perhaps came nearer to revealing some of the horror of war, but nevertheless the most famous of their dramatic photographs had to be posed. (v)

Ford clearly mentions that photographs were staged and hence the depiction of war by such photographs becomes problematic and debatable. Jane Carmichael similarly opines that:

> Photographs convey a wealth of visual information in compendious format and tend to be accepted rather uncritically. However, war photographs in particular are ambivalent documents, which can range from the straightforward record of a scene to those which have been 'helped' towards an appropriate mood or a deliberately contrived misrepresentation. An extra dimension in terms of sensationalism or bias can be added when they are published. (1)

If an extra dimension of sensationalism can be added then the whole rationale behind capturing a photograph to convey a sagacity of significance gets lost as sensationalism is a manner of over-hyping the events as it chooses to report heavily on stories with shock values or uninvited attention. However, from the 1880s onwards cameras became progressively smaller and were able to take more instantaneous pictures, but during the First World War (1914-1918) these cameras were still not equipped to keep pace with the action and magnitude of the massive conflict. With the technical invention of the 35mm camera which was introduced in the late 1920s, action photography got a new dimension. During the First World War, there were three foremost categories of photographers; official, press and amateur. These three different categories brought different perspectives and politics to photography. Earlier official reporting was done by the forces themselves but with the emergence of popular media, military developed an organization of professionals. The organization included specifically appointed professional photographers to war correspondents, cinematographers and artists. The official professional photographer, who would be integrated into the service, would get a commissioned status and a special access to the conflict zones on a limited basis. However, there is a price which

the photographer would have to pay for these privileges and the price would be an undeviating attack on the art and ethics of photography as the photos would be subjected to both military and civilian censorship.

As far as ordinary press photographers are concerned, they were not as privileged as the official photographers. In fact they found themselves severely restricted as they would be excluded from the most important battle areas or they would be allowed to access the war spaces with a special authorization mostly when the battle will be over. The press photographers would be compelled to click photographs of the ground or trees from the battle zones to portray the impact of war. However, amateur photographs added another level of representation when it comes to war. As cameras became more accessible, servicemen started taking their personal cameras to war. Given the restriction of the official and the press photographers, the amateur had an interesting role to play. For instance, personal experiences of war would be recorded and on occasion the unprofessionally clicked photographs would provide a window to peep into the whole psychology of war unseen by many.

If we take the instance of American soldiers and their presence in Iraq then it becomes perspicuous why circulation of the pictures of war cannot be stopped. The first invasion of Iraq began in 2003 on 20th March by the United States as it was claimed that Iraq had possession of 'weapons of mass destruction'. However, George J. Tenet, the former director of central intelligence of USA accused Bush administration for pushing the country to war in Iraq without ever conducting a serious investigation whether Iraq had fatal weapons which could pose a threat to USA or other countries? Nonetheless, the point is that many American soldiers carried along their digital cameras instead of pen and paper to communicate from the front, and this led to the virtually infinite supply of images.

Exploring further into the dominion of reality and history with relation to photography, one needs to understand that photographs often remain entangled in between what is known and what is not. A photograph can show certain aspects explicitly but at the same time it might contain a space which may not tell us what else is there in a particular picture? To delimitate further upon history and memory, Judith Butler in her article "Photography, War, Outrage" talks about the phenomenon of "Embedded Reporting", which entails images and narratives of certain kinds of action and the gaze which remains restricted to the parameters of designated movements. The phenomenon of "Embedded Reporting" seemed to emerge with the invasion of Iraq. It is defined as a

situation in which journalists agree to report only from the perspectives established by the military and government authorities. They travel on selected trucks, look at certain things and relay home only images and narratives of a certain kind of an action. Thus, they archive a partial history and memory. "Embedded Reporting" can be compared with the official photographers of war as they too would be restricted with regard to their action and movement. For instance, the US government denounced American newspapers and journalists to show the coffins of dead American soldiers shrouded in flags during the Iraq war. The phenomenon of censoring war photographs is prevalent across nations. For instance, Fay Anderson, who is an Associate Professor of Journalism Studies at Monash University, in her article "We Censor War Photography in Australia-More's the Pity" remarks:

> What we don't see is the reality of war. It has never been shown to us… because photographers have never been allowed to present a true account. The searing, brutal images of 'our boys' have rarely been published. Australian newspaper photographers have always been forbidden to show military failure or fragility. During the first and second world wars the authorities censored all photographs from the frontline, and since the 1960s, despite the myth of the 'uncensored war', photographers have rarely been afforded unlimited access to Australian soldiers. Although more than 100,000 Australians have lost their lives as a result of war service, photographs of or dead have never been published in newspapers. And images of the wounded are only shown when it accords with dignifying iconography. (The conversation.com)

This constant censorship and restriction from the higher governmental authorities clearly indicates the involvement of power and politics in war and how it is represented to common people as photography plays an imperative role in socio-political scenarios which are far from the scene of hostilities. To conclude, one could opine that photography can be a powerful tool to come close to the reality of battles and war zones. It is also a fact that many state machineries often censor war photographs as realities of war zones can be too intense. One can understand that any war cannot be documented in its completeness through cameras as war zones apart from being highly dangerous have their own spatial limitations. One thing which probably the photographers both independent and the ones who work for the state apparatuses must realize, is that photographs can be a strong medium to project war because of their visual aspect and one

must attempt not to distort the reality which gets represented through photographs. Nonetheless, one must realise that in today's world of new media, it has become extremely difficult to define authenticity. Cellphone cameras are ubiquitous, thousands of photographs are clicked every day and innumerable images are edited to seek the desired results out of photographs. Therefore, it becomes all the more important for the photographers of the war zones to resist the oppressive power structures and their policy of censorship so that their work is not perceived as a work of fiction.

End Notes

1) Clausewitz highlights this point in his book I, Chapter I which is titled "On the Nature of War".

2) The American Civil War- Seven Southern slave states individually declared their secession from the United States and formed the Confederate States of America, known as the "Confederacy" or the "South". The war had its origin in the fractious issue of slavery, especially the extension of slavery into the western territories. After four years of bloody combat that left over 600,000 Union and Confederate soldiers dead, and destroyed much of the South's infrastructure, the Confederacy collapsed, slavery was abolished, and the difficult Reconstruction process of restoring national unity and guaranteeing civil rights to the freed slaves began.

3) The picture has been clicked by Mathew Brady. The source of this picture is *History.com*.

4) The picture is also clicked by Mathew Brady. The source of this picture is *Vintagecameraclub.com*.

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Embedding the Male in Female Body: A *Qissa*

Ankita Rathee and Rekha

'How a "man" is sculpted out of a "docile female" body?' is what the paper intends to explore and analyse through '*Qissa – The Tale of a Lonely Ghost'*, a film by Anup Singh, of which the Partition of India forms a backdrop. The paper fuses Michel Foucault's concept of 'docile body' with Meenakshi Thapan's insights and arguments on identity, embodiment and resistance to inspect and assess how a girl's body – right from her birth – is disciplined, regulated and transformed into a socially acceptable 'man'. The insights of Foucault and Thapan, two temporally and spatially disparate critic-thinkers are woven together into a critical frame to augment, argue and coalesce with our reading of the film. The paper highlights how the image of "metamorphosed man" underlines and presents the varied forms of disciplinary techniques that patriarchy manoeuvres to re-construct and contain a female body in its image. In the process the paper also seeks to put into perspective the dynamics of violence, both physical and mental, that the film tries to capture and critique through a feminist lens. At the same time, The Partition – i.e., the splitting of the whole into parts – that becomes a metaphorical leitmotif and patriarchal process of/in the film, has also been problematised and analysed through the character of Kanwar, a female body that is sought to be 'accultured' into that of a 'man'.

Qissa is a story of a patriarch Umber Singh played by Irrfan Khan, who takes control of his life after being denied the opportunity by the partition history. He sets up his timber wood business in India after leaving his homeland in Pakistan. Everything seems settled in his life, except one thing, and this is his desire to have a son who would carry forward his family lineage and his business. Umber Singh's desire to have a male child echoes a typical patriarchal setup and sensibility.

Failure/inability to produce a male child is a direct challenge to the masculinity. For Umber Singh too, the three daughters and not even a single son come in as a blot on his masculinity. Determined not to lose at the hands of fate, Umber declares his fourth newborn daughter – a son. He announces with delight to his wife Mehar (a role played by Tisca Chopra): "Dekh Mehar dekh! sadeghar putt aya. Munda hoya munda!" (look Mehar look! A son has come to our house. We have had a boy!). Sceptical of Umber's delight, Mehar tries to

uncover the baby to check the gender, but is prohibited from doing so. The denial to let the mother see her newborn becomes an incipient subjection of the female body to blatant forms of patriarchal power controls. Mehar realises that the newborn baby is not a boy as declared by Umber Singh. She requests him not to tag the newborn as a "son" and better kill rather than burden the baby with his aspirations. Umber pays no heed to appeals of the mother and keeps calling the baby girl as "My son! My son!" This repeated assertion regarding the child's gender can be seen as Umber Singh's declaration that the power lies in his hands and it is he who has the hold over every 'body' in the house. The announcement, thus, becomes the primary disciplining act, wherein, no voice should be heard accept that of the patriarch. According to Foucault:

> A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so they may do what one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. (138)

The "political anatomy" here corresponds to Umber Singh, the patriarch and the "docile bodies" are the female subjects of the house including the son. Umber Singh uses the disciplining techniques to construct the docility of his fourth born child Kanwar. Patriarchy, for long has been constructing docile female bodies within its disciplining tactics. However, herein *Qissa,* this docility construction is not within the given female body but forcing the exterior masculinity over a female body. He hires a local wrestler to train Kanwar with an aim to construct a male out of a docile female body. A cloth is wrapped tightly around Kanwar's chest to contain her feminine growth to prove his own manhood to the world and sustain the image of male body's usefulness/male heir. The layer covers all signs of femininity in/of her body. Rigorous workouts are planned for her so as to suppress her femininity and to build a man out of her docile body. The narrative thus problematises the very construction of docility.

Power is disciplinary in nature and does not solely target the body (155). Rather, it seeks to invade the body of the subject by controlling its movements and its thoughts. Power is not something that is acquired, conferred, or seized; but it is what is exercised. Power is not exercised from above; rather it is, as Foucault says, "circulate[d] through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions"

(qtd. in Bartky 147). The process of gaining access to Kanwar's body has started through physical training; what remains of her now is her mind, which needs to be controlled so that it works not in a feminine manner but in a masculine fashion. Thapan asserts that the psychological element remains an integral component in the formation of gendered selves. She brings in Elizabeth Grosz's argument that the body must be "psychically constituted in order for the subject to acquire a sense of its place in the world and in connection with others"[1] (Thapan 5). This means Kanwar's movements and thoughts have to be disciplined simultaneously for her to convert into what Umber Singh aspires her to become.

Another important technique in disciplining a body is 'separation'. Elisheva Sadan argues, "Separation is a more complex kind of lack of knowledge. It expresses itself in lack of information about others who share the same fate, with whom it's possible to create an alliance in order to resist the power" (47). Umber Singh's house becomes a microcosm of the divided subcontinent. Unseen borders are drawn within the family by the authoritative power to curtail any kind of solidarity or resistance. Umber Singh does not allow much interaction of Kanwar with the women of the house, be it Mehar, her mother or the other three girls, her sisters. According to Thapan, "the family is a crucial site for the development of gender identities in relation to both the familial perceptions as well as to those emerging from the social and public domain" (31). To deter the development of conventional gender identity in Kanwar, Umber Singh puts off any togetherness and mingling of Kanwar with the other female family members including her mother and sisters. Umber Singh does this by being a close and constant companion to Kanwar, to an extent that Kanwar too feels at ease with this companionship. When Kanwar experiences her first menstruation period, she runs out to her father only and not to her mother or any of the sisters. Umber Singh instructs Kanwar not to share the incident/experience with anybody. Determined not to be outfoxed by her biology, Umber Singh takes advantage of Kanwar's lack of knowledge and tags the incident as Kanwar's first step into manhood, much like the partition being tagged as the 'independence'. The lack of camaraderie with the womenfolk leads to the lack of knowledge about female bodily functions, which ultimately serves the aim of Umber Singh.

Often, during the teenage years, Kanwar is seen looking heartily/longingly at her mother, admiring her own reflection with hair down in the mirror, or longing to join the sisters in their games. These mediations highlight the perplexed state of Kanwar who seems vacillating between the imposed masculinity and

'fascinating' natural femininity. The confusion, however, subdues over the period under constant vigilance and discipline by Umber Singh.

Gender traits – masculinity and femininity are not the casual result of biological identity formation – male and female. In other words, there is no constant, homogenous continuity between the sexed bodies and culturally constructed gender. According to Judith Butler:

> When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as female one. (148)

Masculinity and femininity are socially constructed, i.e. they are the disciplines of body that require work. From birth, the traits such as domination and aggression to reinforce their masculinity and superiority are inculcated in men. Women, on the other hand are taught to be submissive, kind and gentle thus making them a subordinate gender. These 'natural' [sic] behavioural traits are engrained in the individuals through a dominant culture which consolidates to make a regime of truth. Cultural and social values in varying social contexts contribute to the development of gender identities. For Thapan those values "include an emphasis on female submissiveness and passivity and particular role-specific identities", thus creating "gender asymmetry and a classical femininity that is continuously looking to the external, social world for its own nurturance and sustenance" (31).

Umber Singh at every possible instance makes sure that the masculine traits such as aggression and domination are infused into Kanwar so that she becomes an absolute 'man' that he wants her to be. During the family kite-flying event, Kanwar's elder sister Kulbir runs away with Kanwar's spool. Unable to catch her sister, Kanwar comes to her father and starts crying complaining about the sister's act. Umber Singh loses his temper on seeing the 'girlish' behaviour of his 'son' (Kanwar) and warns, "I don't ever want to see you crying like a girl." He goes on, "Be a man! Pull your sister's pony and get your spool back." Socio- culturally 'crying' is taken to be a feminine trait. In a patriarchal setup, one becomes a man only when one shows toughness of emotion, violence and aggression. This is how Umber expects Kanwar to behave – with violence and aggression.

As an act of revenge from Kulbir for snatching the spool, Kanwar decides

to pee in her bed, leading to an altercation between the two the next morning. Frustrated with subaltern treatment, Kulbir tries to pull down Kanwar's pants just to find out as to what is so special about Kanwar for which she (for the sisters Kanwar is a brother figure as they have no clue about her real biology) enjoys all the privileges. However, during the conflict Kanwar falls off from the mud hillock and suffers a minor fracture. The possessive father that Umber Singh is about Kanwar, he unleashes his fury on all his daughters to showcase the consequences of challenging his authority, which in this case is his son. Violence against the women of the house, thus, becomes the agency through which Umber Singh maintains his illusion of power. This display of violence against women is done in front of Kanwar, making sure that she imbibes in the patriarchal traits of aggression and domination, and at the same time, it further detaches Kanwar from her sisters.

Patriarchy is not a rule that has descended from the heaven giving men the power to rule and tame women. Rather, it is exercised through the finer channels of dominant discourses and violence is an integral part of this dominant discourse. According to Bourdieu, "the main mechanism of domination operates through the unconscious manipulation of body" (qtd. in Thapan 166). The power, which initially directs itself towards the disciplining of the body, steadily takes possession of the mind. Kanwar successfully exercises the taught traits of machismo as she grows up. Her embodiment is therefore experienced in her everyday life as, what Thapan calls, a "lived and communicative body", to an extent that she articulates her embodied experience through language, memory and speech and uses her bodily senses to both perceive and give voice to her experience (3).

On being insulted by a free spirited gypsy girl called Neeli (played by Rasika Duggal), who happens to be a friend, Kanwar (grown up Kanwar played by Tillotama Shome) makes sure that the insult is avenged. (I would use the male pronoun 'he' for Kanwar from now on, as Umber Singh has successfully disciplined Kanwar into a 'man'). Kanwar takes Neeli to an isolated cottage amongst the hills and locks her there alone for a night. The act is carried out to assert his domination over the other i.e. the feminine gender. The "lived experience" (Thapan 3) which is premised on hegemonizing the other (read as woman) is articulated through the act of kidnapping Neeli.

Preoccupied with the ego satisfaction, Kanwar becomes ignorant of the repercussions that his act of kidnapping Neeli would bring upon both the families.

Essential to patriarchal ideology is the notion of honour that is presumed to reside in a woman's inviolate body. The patriarchal honour is not just limited to the moment of choosing the partner, but it seeps down to every moment of a woman's life. The normalization and internalization of the notion that a woman embodies a man's honour is imbibed by both the genders right from the childhood (Gupte, 1). Neeli's absence for one whole night is seen as a departure from the said norms of chastity.

"Woman's embodiment is the true repository of purity, sacredness and honour thereby suggesting that in one way or another, the female body needs to be appropriated for a sense of national, racial, or community identity to persist" (Thapan, 11). Women are the storehouses of honour, whereas men are the regulators of their conduct as per the existing Indian social norms. Neeli's absence and later her retrieval alongside Kanwar is deemed to bring dishonour to her father's position, since honour seems to be an entitlement, the loss of which can bring humiliation and banishment from one's community or group. Neeli's father fears the denouncement for not being able to defend (read as control) Neeli enough. Taking advantage of Neeli's vulnerable position, Umber Singh proposes the marriage of his son Kanwar to Neeli. Neeli's father readily accepts the proposal because when someone is perceived to have broken the honour code, especially related to sexuality (which in Neeli's case has in reality not been broken, but is perceived otherwise), a marriage may be arranged to 'solve' the problem.

Neeli does not oppose the prescribed solution as she seems to have developed a liking for Kanwar. Ignorant of the foul play, she enters the disciplined domestic set- up where every body is converted to Umber's cause. Having saved Neeli and her family from public humiliation and denouncement, Umber Singh assumes an automatic submission from her. However, the happiness soon turns into rage as on the very first night Neeli realises Umber's forgery of tricking her into the marriage with his son. Oblivious to the fact that Kanwar is biologically a female, Neeli thinks of him as an impotent man. Umber tries to pacify Neeli with promises of buying her clothes, jewellery and whatever else that she wishes to have. Mehar too is made to play along in appeasing Neeli to stay back. Confused between her fondness for Kanwar and rage at being conned into marrying him, Neeli does spend few days with Kanwar. Nevertheless, this does not stop her from asserting her stand and she decides to run away one night. Neeli resists this patriarchal repression of her female sexuality since sexuality is indeed central to women's experience of their

embodiment. She admonishes Umber for duping her into marriage with his son and at the same time wishes to come out of the shackles of this forgery without thinking of the consequences that might befall her once she crosses that threshold. Neeli becomes an epitome of feminism; she not only resists the patriarchal power but also aims to liberate herself from it. The resistance here is symbolic of Neeli's awareness of her condition.

In spite of all the precautions by Neeli, Umber Singh busts her escape. He tries to plead her to come back but when she refuses, he attempts to rape her in order to contain her resistance. It is Umber Singh's phallocentric self which under the threat of disclosure resorts to violence to assert his subjectivity. The entire process of disciplining Kanwar's female body into a man comes out as a facade – a facade to carry forward the family lineage by consummating with the son's wife which would not only fulfil his desire to have son but would also legitimize Kanwar's existence as a 'man', thus validating Umber Singh's constructed narrative.

Hearing the commotion, Kanwar rushes outside just to find his father trying to rape Neeli. Umber tries to reason his act and tells Kanwar that it is the only way to have a son in the family. To save his wife's honour, Kanwar shoots his father. Foucault in *Politics, Philosophy and Culture* sees the resistance as a potential resource of power, "as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy" (123). The elements or the material upon which the power works, are never rendered fully docile. There always remains something which evades the diffusion of power and expresses itself as indocile and resistant (Pickett 458). The firing of gun at Umber Singh for his apparent rape attempt highlights the indocility of Kanwar to accept his father's action and the resistance, which is "concomitant with the process of subjectification" (Pickett 458).

Howsoever, with the fall of Umber Singh comes the fall of Kanwar's existence which falls into crisis when Umber Singh utters his last words – "tumera putt hai.tumerachanga putt hai. Par hai tan tu Janani. Tu kudi hai kudi" (You are my son. You are my good son. But, you are a woman after all. You are a girl, a girl). Umber dies with the unfulfilled wish of having a son. Betrayed at the hands of his dead father, Kanwar questions his mother for her silence, after all he too was her child. The anguish seems just, as throughout the course of Kanwar's upbringing Mehar remains a mute spectator. True to the reality of majority womenfolk, Mehar is portrayed as an involuntary author to her child's

destiny, the one who has to play voiceless to the violence that Umber has been ushering on Kanwar's body. There are instances where Mehar shows her resistance, but without any action, unravelling the asymmetric relationship between the phallic subject and the other. It is not only Kanwar who has been disciplined to behave in a set manner; rather all the women of the house have borne the brunt of the unreasonable ways of an oppressive patriarch.

Post the murder of Umber Singh, Kanwar and Neeli are forced to flee to Mehar's abandoned maternal house. The unexpected identity crisis leaves Kanwar baffled. The body, which until now was conditioned to be a male body suddenly realises its falsity – the partition of the identity strikes hard. His reality becomes a chaos. Confused about his identity, Kanwar is once again compelled to establish a dual identity. One, as that of a husband to Neeli in front of the society (as the society does not accept two women living together for the fear of lesbianism), and the other, that of a woman trying to embrace the newfound womanhood in the privacy of the home. Thapan asserts that an important aspect of gender consciousness and identity is body image (106). Kanwar sheds his Sikh male attire along with the turban and puts on the female attire (salwar-kameez). He also lets his long hair open in an attempt to re-self-construct. Thapan says, "The body image is not just about how one is seen by another but also how one sees oneself and would like others to see us. The element of self-construction is therefore always present in both perception and practice" (106). He stands in front of the mirror while Neeli puts a dupatta on his head in an attempt to identify his body as that of a female. The mirror in that sense "constructs the 'looking-glass self' through engagement with the image reflected in the mirror" (Thapan 10). The attempt is to visualise and perceive himself "with a particular embodied image, or recognise it as a familiar shadow" (Thapan 106).

Kanwar tries to accept and adapt to the new identity but does not feel at home with it. Whenever he puts on the feminine clothes, he feels as if he has scorpions all over him. He seems torn between the two identities, "kuchnisamajhaundaki main kaunhan? Main kihan?" (I don't understand who I am? What I am?). Kanwar's discombobulation is similar to what Umber Singh and many thousands other experienced during the partition of India. There is a split and a rupture in the 'partition' of Kanwar's identity, which is consonant to what the country felt in 1947. He is a constructed male and man, but also a biological female. First, the father converted him into a man and now Neeli wants him to accept his biology and try to become a woman. The migration

from one identity to other causes a discord in Kanwar's life; he does not feel at ease with any of the prescribed identities and remains in a constant state of turmoil. Kanwar in this sense becomes a diaspora as, "it is not possible however to simply erase the known and in that sense the border between this state of lived experience and the other, the unknown, the potential for newness, change, always remains"(Thapan 171) .

An important characteristic of a diasporic experience is a strong attachment to and desire for literal return to a well-preserved homeland (Clifford 305). Confused of his state, Kanwar longs for his mother, which in Kanwar's case is his 'homeland'. He thinks only she can bring him out of the current crisis because "it is both necessary to resist as well as very difficult to surmount or transcend the obstacle" for Kanwar. The much-awaited trip to the homeland also does not bring any solace to Kanwar. When he reaches back to his paternal home, he finds a burnt down house, with a dead mother and a grief-stricken sister. Apart from this, Kanwar encounters his father's ghost who from then onwards starts following Kanwar everywhere. The ghost of the father is a reminder of the circumstances – i.e., the cause and consequences – of partition of Kanwar's identity.

Umber Singh's ghost represents the violence and power that characterises the panoptic function of patriarchy[2]. Foucault employed the idea of Panopticon to demonstrate the effects of surveillance. According to him, surveillance induces in the subject "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (*Discipline and Punish* 201). A chief factor to uphold the inexorable control is 'surveillance', or rather more precisely 'self–surveillance'[3]. Kanwar on visiting his father's room becomes conscious of his identity and finds himself in a state of flux. His docile self becomes visible to the patriarchal ideology that intends to conquer and discipline him again.

According to Louis Althusser, the ideology infiltrates itself into the lives of individuals and transforms them into subjects against their will. For him, the ideology corresponds to "misrecognition" which makes an individual submit freely to his/her subjection (196). The ghost of Umber Singh is manifestation of Kanwar's patriarchal interpellation, which becomes visible once his self starts deviating away from the prescribed system. The ghost is Kanwar's alter ego. It is because of Kanwar's internalization of his transgression that he starts seeing the ghost. This is exactly how panopticon works – inducing in the subject a sense of surveillance which ultimately transforms into self- surveillance. This

self- surveillance in the form of ghost keeps haunting Kanwar wherever he goes.

One of the high points of this cinematic text comes when the two identities come face to face – Kanwar's biological-self against the constructed-self. On one side is Umber's ghost, an embodiment of Kanwar's own patriarchal consciousness injected into him right from the birth by his father Umber Singh, hence making the ghost look like Umber, which is constantly trying to force the manhood on Kanwar again. On the other side is the biological identity, the one of a woman who wants to break the shackles to come free. The state of aporia is reached to "indicate a point of undecidability, which locates the site at which the text most obviously undermines its own rhetorical structure, dismantles, or deconstructs itself" (Harmon and Hugh 39). Sitting at the window in a woman's garment, Kanwar tries to confront this aporia to the ghost (who Kanwar thinks is his father himself). He says, "Dekho apne putt nu. Kudi hai vopapaji. Mainu kade tussivekhya hi nipapaji. Hun ta mainuvekhna hi paega." (Look at your son father. This son is a girl, father. You could never see me as I was. You will have to see me know). In this moment of crossing impossible passage, in the sense, "it is both impossible to pass the border and necessary to transcend it . . . [for Kanwar that] the edge is overrun, contradictory imperatives and opposite gestures from both sides [masculine and feminine] are fully awakened and thereby bring pressure for an answer" (Wang 46). Kanwar removes the garment top to reveal his augmented identity, he says:

> Dekho apnidhi nu. Besharamdhi nu, behayadhi nu. Ang mein nangi piyo apne samne khadi hai. Is bedzaat aurat da main ki kara papaji? Main uhnu horni lukho sakda. O hun horni lukhna chaundi. Ae meri gal nisundi, bilkulnisundi. Main ki kara besharam da? Ainu kithe le javan? Aenu te marr hi jana chaiyeda. Ae ta bohot shokhi hai. Hun ki kara main papaji? Tussi ta mainu sada hi dasde ho te hun kyuni? (Look at your daughter. Your shameless daughter. Standing naked in front of her father. What should I do with this disgusting woman? I cannot hide her anymore. She does not want to remain hidden anymore. She does not listen to me, not at all. What do I do with this shameless? Where should I hide her? She should just die. She deserves to die. What do I do father? You always tell me what to do. Tell me now what should I do?)

However, a full aporia is not reached/allowed "because it refuses the arrival of

the final destination" (Wang 48). Following the confrontation, the villagers discover that Kanwar is a biological female. Furious at such a revelation, villagers come to punish Neeli and Kanwar for breaking the moral codes. Neeli succeeds in sending away Kanwar to escape the wrath of the villagers. The ghost (now a constant chaperon) warns Kanwar that if he does not go back to Neeli the villagers would kill her and if he does then they would kill him too. The ghost says that the only way to save Neeli is when both Kanwar and ghost assimilate into one. The surreal scene of the assimilation brings out the reality of society where only man can protect a woman and a family. How a docile female body as that of Kanwar gets engulfed by his own patriarchal alter ego. Her natural self fails to assert its existence. Kanwar with this new body of masculine superiority guided by the ghost of the father saves Neeli from the villagers.

The new Kanwar is Umber Singh from outside and inside but with a little tinge of Kanwar. He takes Neeli back to their burnt down house and promises to build a new house for her where they would start their life afresh. Notwithstanding, this new identity of Kanwar becomes alien to Neeli. Unable to make peace with her destiny being guided by the patriarchy, Neeli chooses to end her life. Neeli's suicide becomes symbolic of the revolt against the 'intolerable'.

> In *Qissa*, the crisis of identity, triggered by a violent chapter of history goes beyond religion. It confronts a disturbing fact; violent histories push masculinity to a dominant position. At a time when family's 'honour' is attacked, is it only the male who can protect it? The resonance of violence haunts, it colours relationships and society in disturbing shades. At a time when women are empowered and independent, why does the ghost of patriarchy survive in certain sections of society and make its presence felt in all walks of life, not in families alone? The film underlines the need to confront these echoes. (Shukla)

With Neeli's death comes the death of the desire – the desire to have a son. The film ends where it started from, in Umber Singh's ancestral house in Pakistan, where the unbridled ambition to have a son had initially sprouted. All that is now needed is "maafi" (forgiveness) and "rihai" (freedom) from the "srapaqissa", the cursed tale. Thapan affirms that, "crossing border from this condition of existence to another are not only fraught with contradiction and struggle but always contain, within the act of crossing, the possibilities for a transformed existence, unknown newness and change" (172).

Conclusion

Simone de Beauvoir famously said that one isn't born a woman but becomes one (*The Second Sex*). Gender is a construction of civilization; it is a reflection not of "essential" differences in men and women but of differences in their situation. The docile female bodies are discursively manipulated, constructed, and schooled to uphold the authorization of their natural femininity. They have been subjugated and ensnared primarily through their biological bodies. The ceaseless biological judgement of women and their anomalousness from the canonical male standards have rendered them biologically inferior, i.e. naturally inferior to men. The male/female, *mind*/*body*, active/passive, rational/irrational, and more such binaries have denigrated and detracted female bodies in relation to male bodies. This opposition of self and other leads to an intense policing of the other's body. The women then become the repository for male desires - an incubator for honour and babies.

Over the course of centuries, the disciplining forces aimed at women have become so normative and anonymous, in a sense that, though there is no specific establishment to regulate their behaviour yet, the internalization is such that they perpetually stand before the patriarchal judgement. This form of domination is symbolic in nature and is not something that is imposed but as Bourdieu says, "is something you absorb like air, something you don't feel pressured by; it is everywhere and nowhere, and to escape from that is difficult" (qtd. in Thapan 166). The discourse has become an agent of victimization as well as control. The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is institutionally unbound, the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular (Bartky 143). In the mixed space of emotions, embodiment and selfhood, Thapan succinctly notes, "both within and outside . . . women engage in the twin process of compliance and resistance, submission and rebellion, silence and speech, to assert their identities as women in what they clearly and assertively recognise as oppressive contexts and situations" (170). Resistance is not just marking a course or waving of flag; it is rather posing the question for the future, thus opening new possibilities vis-à-vis cinema, literature, politics etc. The film has been breakthrough in this context, filled with meaning and openness for a progressive future.

Endnotes

1. Refer to Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.

2. A Panopticon is a model prison, where cells arranged in such a way that all (pan-) prisoners could be observed (-opticon) at all times without them being able to tell whether they are being watched or not.

3. The inability of the subject to decipher the moments as to when s/he is being surveyed leads the subject to self - regulation, i.e. the subject becomes his/her own supervisor making it the most effective way to control the subject.

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The *Prawah* and the *Prabhav*: A Critical Study of the Inner and the Outer Travel Quests in Select Travelogues on the Ganga

Hardeep Kaur

The River Ganga has enamoured a number of travellers and explorers who have made documentaries and written narratives about their experience with the majestic river. The stature of the quest with regard to the river has evolved since the past as in the preceding centuries the expedition was based on finding its source, and historically James Baillie Fraser is known for having first discovered the sources of the Ganga and the Yamuna. It may also be noted that until the early nineteenth century the true source of the four rivers was not known besides the two rivers, the Indus and the Brahmaputra. However in the contemporary times it has garnered attention for reaching the origin that includes an arduous journey amongst the non paved pathways. The origin cannot be a specific point from where the river emerges as the truest origin of any entity cannot be known physically. The inner and the outer quest relates to the assimilation of the self with the other. The two primary texts for study include Dennison Berwick's *A Walk Along the Ganges* and Steven Darian's *A Ganges of the Mind* that will be studied comparatively in context of their motives and conclusions. The paper proposes to study these written travel narratives in the manner of their intent in exploring the Ganga, one by means of walking along its banks and the other by probing the inner journey of the mind that comes across as a projection and not as the lived experience of the traveller.

A river is a perpetual traveller that is destined to flow into the depths of the ocean which stands still, and its everlasting flow has been the binding factor between the space of historical past, the present and the oncoming future. The *prawah*[1] refers to the flow of the river that has certain stages within its journey before reaching the sea, likewise the human lives evolve enclosing different stages and finally moves towards completion with physical death. It has many other metaphorical meanings that relate to the disruption of essence and the move towards existence as a being, or the realization of the fluidity of time space phenomenon. The *prabhav*[2] here refers to the cultures abounding the river Ganga and also the river's impact on the traveller as an individual being. The paper attempts to analyse whether the travellers themselves undergo the *prawah* or just retain the *prabhav* of their journeys. It is to ascertain the link

between the cultural and spiritual quest through the medium of river travel that not only includes physical displacement but is also inclusive of the inner journey. It will dwell on the mode of travel writing that eases the burden of literary narration which is not about furnishing plain details about the places the traveller visits, rather they engage in narrating the essence of their experience. So the traveller rather than being a mere receptor of knowledge thus becomes an agent of dissemination. Both the travelogues are written by foreigners and the motive of their quest for walking the Ganga differs: while one undertakes the journey to know more about the cultures of Ganga, the other is more interested in finding the unison between the East and West by employing Ganga as the thread of inquiry.

Pilgrimage is an important concept and a practice in relation to rivers and Ganga's origin holds special significance. It has been ascertained by some intellectuals that pilgrimage contributed towards determining the geography of certain regions and the established places of reverence denoted ritual bound spaces that became religiously, socially, economically and even politically influential. However, Makhan Jha differs in this context stating that the practice failed to "contribute to the empirical discourse of geography because its landscape was literary and subjective rather than literal and objective" (2). He also adds that the pilgrimage should "provide a gauge for measuring the complexity of societies and thereby play a part in constructing a typology of social forms" (3). While Victor Turner avers that pilgrimage takes place during the periods of "social breakdown" and calls it the "transitional periods" where the "pilgrims provide prototypes or pre-enactments of social patterns" (Jha 7). The traveler in this light carries the culture within him and is also in turn influenced by the others.

In *A Ganges of the Mind*, the author begins the journey from Rishikesh, and then towards the source making his intention clear by stating that in following the river from the beginning to the end he might come to know the "course of man's journeying". He also percieves the river as an embodiment of human life describing its flow as a witness to the rise and fall of empires and the struggle of power amongst them and their dissolution in the end mirroring river's mergence into the sea. Darian's journey is intended as internal and by travelling along the river he meditates on the river's course as a replication of the journey of the soul that is like a dew drop originating from the ocean and then becoming one with it (21). He gives an intriguing description of the Ganga's source saying:

> It is a place of beginnings; for in Indian tradition, water-as a substance without shape-reminds us of the potential (*pralaya*) that all things have before they assume name and form… if only we could leave our yesterdays behind us: the iron habits, the image of ourselves that keeps us from reaching out beyond the prison of the mind. It is the illusion-the perception-of permanence, a perception shaped by language… so that we may see things not as we are but as they are. This is the true meaning of beginnings. (30)

On the surface of it, it denotes Indian spiritual philosophy but when one looks into it deeply- it comes across as a mere documentation and not his own experience. He engages in a discursive narration of it that transpires as the *prabhav* (narration). He himself encounters a near death experience when his bus hangs onto the hilly cliff and he feels it to be the "moment[s] between life and death", where one begins to realise about the end, as man's soul was born of water and shaped into a person later. There are two Gangas here one is the Ganga of water, the source of creation and that's why sacred and the one of the mind that initiates the journey of consciousness, which is ideally the subject of travelogue but here it is the travel documentation that showcases the façade of inner experience.

In *Narmada: River of Beauty*, Vegad performs the circumambulation of the river Narmada and upon reaching the sea, he remarks philosophically that as the earth has three portions of water and one part land likewise the human physiology has the similar ratios too. And he asks whether "the throbbing of the sea" is the "heartbeat of Earth?" and that "we carry the sea inside us" (168). Now comparatively one may observe that in Darian's description the shape of being is identified in terms of "iron habits", "prison of the mind" and the "perception shaped by language", whereas on reaching the sea, Vegad realizes the origin in actual terms. The beginning not only of the river but of the Time and this comes across as a deeper statement. Here the author has tried to engage with the *prawah* of life that is induced through travelling, and in Darian's remark there is no felt experience of the self but a narrative of the borrowed term that he contextualizes within a certain framework.

In one of the travelogues on Ganga by Stephen Alter the concept of pilgrimage is dwelt upon critically apart from the religious piety. He dissociates from the idea of organised religion, saying it does not appeal to him and that his journey has not been undertaken as an act of devotion, he being an atheist, nonetheless he remarks that "doubt can often be as powerful a motive as belief"

(170). He sees himself as a pilgrim "who does not follow the prescribed tenets of any particular faith, but seeks to find the subtle and mysterious connections between human experience, mythological narratives, and natural history" (178). The travelogue is contemporary in nature as it mentions about the role of *kavars* that has not been mentioned in any of the recent travelogues on Ganga. He describes the group of kavars as a human river that carry the sacred water from Haridwar to other cities where the Gangajal is "presented as an offering to the lord Shiva, a rite of worship that re-enacts the myth of Ganga's descent to earth" (122). The kavars in such a large number "seem unstoppable, like the swollen current of the Ganga itself. Their devotion reflects an unquestioning faith in god and a uniformity of belief" although he also agrees that the "ritual itself is innocent enough, carrying water from a river to a temple, but the symbolic force of all these men walking together gives the impression of a parade, a collective demonstration of power" (135). Theirs is the example of pilgrimage that is entwined with religion, faith and a personal quest ranging from material gains to getting accepted into the social denomination through the ritual. The kavars in reality hail mostly from the socially backward classes comprising of labourers, artisans, masons and others who choose to become the kavar in order to fulfil their wishes in terms of economy, family or work. During the month of monsoon they bring the water from Haridwar and some walk on foot while others cover the distance through vehicles and reach their destinations offering the Ganga to Shiva. However Alter's journey is upstream that is towards the sources of the river known as the Char Dham Yatra. He observes that death as well as rebirth has formed an important part of the Hindu belief as the funeral pyres burn alongside the perpetual river's flow. He describes the process of origin of the river Ganga in poetic terms saying:

> By some accounts the moon is the true source of the Ganga, a circular vessel decanting her sacred waters into Shiv's long tresses. As the moon spills its oblation from the night sky it gradually wanes, like a bowl of milk that is emptied of its contents, only to be refilled again and again. Shiv is often depicted with a crescent moon in his hair or surrounded by a pure white halo. As I sat and watched the full moon rise above the Bhagirathi Valley, reflecting off the white snow peaks and flowing river, I couldn't help but imagine the goddess Ganga tumbling to earth, like a waterfall of light. (192)

The question arises regarding the choice of cross culture travel which Darian explains stating the contrast between the western world that prioritises

individuality, and India that values eternity. So the specific is placed against the general, initiating the author's awareness about understanding different selves that may have distinct language and concept of individuality, but are attuned to having universal values and spirituality. Although much had already been written about the Eastern wisdom he "wanted to experience for [him]self, to taste, to touch, to discover what role the great traditions and beliefs played in the normal course of people's lives" (Intro). But does travel quench one's curiosity to know the other- or does it end up setting up the queries within oneself. Being an American national he is already acquainted with the terms of individuality and the travel motive here is to learn more about the self, and to reintegrate his self with the larger world that he sees through the river Ganga in its final flow into the sea (19). However that quest of his does not resound with the reader. It comes across as a flagship of travelling along the Ganga and gathering information from the spiritual gurus. Later he confesses his position of privilege when he checks into the Taj Mahal hotel in Bombay and on the way comes across scavengers loading carts and the poor sleeping in the drain pipes and concludes that though India has solved its philosophic problems, the economic ones are still unresolved. In a similar vein the other travelogue *A Walk Along the Ganges* registers the outsider's view in travelling across the country where Berwick says, "It is true that we tourists are interlopers here…. We come with fresh films in our cameras, our lenses cleaned, our telephotos poised for bare female breasts and dead bodies floating in the river" and further adds that they seek to "see the 'real' India, the one we think we have not seen at the railway station or on the streets" (quoted 200). The act of clicking pictures and capturing the image freezes the scene into a certain frame, affecting the perspective of the onlooker. In his essay Pramod Nayar refers to the "visualist ideology" of a tourist who is directed to "*see*", in context of his reading of tourist brochures that present a "colonial image of the Indian landscape" (Italics, Mohanty 112) discussing it at two levels:

> One, the 'aestheticization of the landscape' by casting it as a 'scene' or a painting. Rivers and topographical features, fauna and flora and such are portrayed mostly as 'pictures'…denote a freezing, in spatio-temporal terms, of the landscape….This aestheticization thus places the landscape into a frame, with well-defined boundaries…the awe-inspiring, even frightening, hills, rivers, forests…seem pleasant (because controlled) when thus viewed. The second level is the status of the watcher. The tourist is the watcher who scans the

> landscape. The scanning confers a nearly panoptical power upon the watcher…Foucauldian gaze inextricably links sight with power…s/ he is projected as a conqueror by the act of seeing….Thus, the viewing of a ruin is to participate in an awareness of history, of aesthetics, and the 'human condition'….The gaze is thus never an objective one, it is always interpretative. And interpretation is an act of power since it bestows a certain status upon the viewer/ interpreter. (qtd. 113- 114)

The camera lens captures the still picture of the landscape and thus fixes the image of that of the wild. Likewise the tourist projects his quest onto the environment by selectively scanning it and appreciating its beauty. The traveller on the other hand participates in the process of contemplation by experiencing the aesthetics in nature. The travelogue thus becomes an extension of incorporating the dialogue between the aestheticized and the subjective rumination. Like Darian, Berwick also realises his paradoxical love for the country despite grappling with the Indian "squalor, languor and violence" and then resumes his calmer self by watching the tranquil flow of the river (195). The river provides the common ground for relating with their struggle of the exterior limitations to that of the inner expansiveness[3]. It is interesting to note that the narration is not necessarily the lived experience, so the ethos or the essence of feeling the flow of existence of the life is lacking in these narratives. It is a documentation of travel and not a travelogue which is a *samvaad*; a dialogue with the transitioning space[4].

The Projection of Inner Quest

At Rishikesh, Darian asks a *sadhu* about the speciality of that place who explains that it is the sound, that never disappears and remains there in other forms so the ones who had meditated on its banks, they had "sanctified the place and [made] it easier for one to achieve *samadhi*"[5] (44). He further delves into the concepts of being and becoming where west is related to the latter and the east with being so the Ganga acts as a medium of union between the two, his choice of the river rests on knowing about the Indian civilization and to contrast it with the given and spoken universal forms that he had mistaken for reality (49). He applies the concepts of *Brahman* and *maya* to the Indian art aesthetics and when he visits the sculptures at Mamallapuram he observes that their partial round protrusion from the stone characterises the *maya* manifestation and the stone's nature is that of *Brahma*. The engravings have

the fundamental quality of *maya*, making one realise the transitory nature of forms. In other words he comes to understand that in "religion, the mode of *Brahman* is water; in art it is stone" (57). *Sarga* is another name for *maya* that is concerned with manifestation of specific shapes while *pralaya* is the "matter in a latent or potential state" the *Brahman* that is implicit (78). The west, he says, is the *sarga* form while the east is the *pralaya* and to resolve these two visions he had chosen to come to India. One may say that the river represents the form of *Brahma* and we are the shapes of *maya*. The traveller meets a spiritual mentor who explains him the journey of mind working towards the unison between time and space. He says it can be experienced through pause, to immerse into the "depthless cavern of the mind", where one gradually learns that "all the impressions rushing through the senses are anicca, impermanent" and therefore one should not disturb the calm (146). These are the instances where the information about the spiritual India is collected by him but nowhere one sees his evolution as a traveller or any impact on his subliminal sensibility. Travelogue is one that retains the idea and moves towards collective *prawah* which is an expansion.

The Outer Journey: The Cultural Quest

The river Narmada has witnessed the evolution and devolution of certain species and civilisations and has certain places belonging to the ancient times. In the book *Narmada*: *The River of Joy*, Vegad refers to a place called Putalikhoh in the state of Madhya Pradesh that has rocks "adorned with pre-historic drawings that are about 20,000 years old" (5). He further adds that it offers "a scaled-down version of the expansive rock art of the Ajanta Caves in Aurangabad…no caves [but]…drawings…etched on the flaky surface of the rocks…" which become visible by wiping off with a wet cloth (6). This makes him ponder over the primitive man's inclination towards art and about how it was used as a means of survival. Denis Dutton, a philosopher of art opines that art evolved as an adaptation having appealed to our intuitive preferences while science appealed to the strong inclination, curiosity and is limited to the external sphere, while art studies the ingrained aesthetic patterns too (8). Likewise Brian Boyd, a professor of literature avers that the arts offer durability, variety and appeals to our intelligence and social emotions which evolved much later and induced creativity in the form of religion and science (414). Therefore arts emerged as a means of survival and the rivers have been a witness to the same.

In Berwick's *A Walk Along the Ganges*, the motive of the travel rests on exploring the mysticism of Ganga as a goddess and its cultures. His journey begins from the Ganga Sagar towards the source in Gangotri. He not only observes the people during the travel but also engages in pondering over the colonial past of the Ganga region and the factors that aided in establishing the foothold. Concerning history, he talks about the invasions in India from Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan in 6 and 7th ct. A.D. and avers that under the Mughals there was no sense of Indianness and "by the end of the 17th ct., they controlled almost the whole country". There was continuum of the internal trade where "wheat and rice from Bengal and Bihar were required up country to feed the great cities of Agra and Delhi, with the rivers being the arteries of trade" (163). As in the year 1658, when the East India Company opened a trading post in Patna where the ships weighing "300-500 tons sailed the Ganga and its tributaries carrying cloth, metals such as imported copper and lead, and food-grains" (163). The reference is also made to Jim Corbett who came in 1898 to the present state of Bihar which was a forest and he hired the local labor to clear it so as to transship goods and ferry across the river (150). The choice of Calcutta as the hub of trade was due to its humid climate and fertile soil that were propitious for jute cultivation and the abundance of water was an added advantage.

However Berwick sees the shift in the power mechanism in terms of exportation of the Indian religious practices to the west, and says, "I wondered what had happened to Western Christianity to cause thousands of people to see God through this branch of an alien religion? Now, paradoxically, the West was receiving missionaries from India" (100). At the same time he is critical of the Indian administration and the lack of morality where when he is overcharged for being a foreigner and given accommodation that is not according to the price charged, and he comments that "the incessant claims of poverty by the Government of India looked less credible when at the same time so many opportunities for development, employment and prosperity were missed altogether or thoroughly messed up" (309). Although this criticism is not limited to his subjective self rather he comes across various other places where the locales complain about the lack of services by the government, one such instance is that of Bihar where people deplore the health services and the lack of electricity in the rural areas. It may also be noted that the time of his travel is around the year 1985-86 when the Ganga Action Plan had not been implemented as yet and the surrounding areas were neglected so when he stays at a house in Bihar he remarks that "almost one quarter of the electricity generated in Bihar

in 1981 was either pilfered by illegal wire-taps or lost in transmission" (155).

While travelling through the remote areas, Berwick doesn't act like an outsider rather he chooses to smoke *beedis* in order to gel with the locales and understands that the "cigarettes are a status symbol in the countryside" (153). Whenever he stops by, the family members gather around him and listen to his account with awe and wonder just because his language is foreign to them and they keep asking him about his caste and whether he has his father's permission to travel thus. These questions appear odd to him but they transition a cultural gap between their spaces. It gives a peep into the Indian rural culture where patriarchy laid down the rules for the others. This even leads to the question about the agency of travel, the means of exploring the other regions rooted in a culture that gives one the freedom to engage in such a quest. Later he also admits of the lacunae of not knowing the Hindi language better, that acts as a barrier between him and the country people as he aptly puts it "without a better knowledge of Hindi, I was gradually becoming remote from my surroundings, like a tourist passing across a land without contacting its people" (154). Although he walks the entire length of the river Ganga to maintain the continuum of the pilgrimage and meets people along the way that had been the major attraction for him unlike Amritlal Vegad who becomes a part of the tradition of circumambulating the river Narmada and in the process enters the cultural landscape and relates, co-relates his imagination and at times questions his cultural bearings. While Berwick craves for his own space and privacy and feels agitated at the end of his five and a half months long journey "of repeating answers to the same questions" (282). There are a series of his bad experiences where he frets about getting basic daily needs from "the noisy, smelly lanes" (285) or the "DINGY HOTEL in Ramnagar" (upper case 307). Subsequently he realises that his irritation is arising from the physical fatigue. At the end he comes to the conclusion saying "the formalities of worship and dogma were irrelevant" and its purpose was to "uplift the worshipper, not the deity being worshipped" and he further says that the Indian belief of revering the Ganga river as a goddess is "no different from millions of Roman Catholics believing that the bread broken during Mass is the actual body of Jesus Christ" (202). Here the journey becomes a travel when the destination is set and the course of completion is predicted, the walk is aimed towards walking and not entering into the cultural communion of the river.

Comparatively the journey courses of both the travelogues have different directions as in the *Ganges of the Mind* the pattern of travel is from the

source to the sea while in *A Walk Along the Ganges* it is the other way round. Both the authors contemplate the wisdom gained at the end of their journeys. While Berwick reaches the source he ponders over the meaning of river Ganga for him after walking miles and says it has "personal reverence" for him. Though he doesn't claim to have understood the importance of the river for the Hindus, he rather regards her as a "symbol of something far greater than mere human endeavour" and does not categorise it as a goddess either, by saying "I doubted there could be any connection between spiritual and temporal, except for a Great Spirit in the Sky in which all Creation exists" (351). For Darian on the other hand, the Great Spirit is the *Brahma* that he associates with the East and when Berwick reaches Gaumukh at the height of 14,600 feet, he feels light headed, "subdued and silent" (380). As Darian had written at length about the source, here Berwick says he felt out of it and the encounter with the river's origin stilled him. While in his narrative, Darian comes across the devotees at Ganga Sagar who seek oneness with the still ocean and say 'we are Ganga'. For him the contention is between the Odysseus who is associated with the struggle for reaching the destination and the Buddha who has overcome the *maya* and has assimilated with the *Brahma* having the wisdom of surrender. He wishes to embrace both ends saying, "Let me be Ganga, returning unformed and tranquil to the Great Oneness" and addresses the Ganga as the river of his dreams, urging it to flow forever and wishes that it "Never, never, never, reach[es]…the sea" (182). So the inner and the outer quests coalesce where when it reaches the sea and gains restorative tranquillity (*Thehraav*) while the source subdues and prepares for the onward *prawah* of life.

End Notes

1) One of the aspects of *prawah* relates to the form that is distinct from the structure in context of its invocation of universal innate pan human nature. Literally it refers to the flow of river and in the paper it is used in reference to the realisation of humanness within oneself and the acceptance of life without the binaries. In this manner it may relate to the spiritual abstractions.
2) The effect is literally called the *prabhav* and in the paper it relates to the shape of the travel writing that follows certain schemata or a pattern. The motive or the ideology also forms a part of it. As the *prawah* lies within the river, the cultures abounding it form the *prabhav* part too as the river impacts the culture of the ghats.
3) The exterior limitation is used in reference to the marketed space of the ghats and the squalor around. The inner expansiveness relates to the realisation of the beyond, that sees the form of the space and not the shape of the place.

4) The writing forms the third stage of representation as it is followed by the perception of the traveller and then its experience. The object outside becomes the subject of writing and the travelogue is the one that keeps the lived experience stimulating through the writing and then it becomes a dialogue with that time space curvature in particularity. There is not just plain recording of the events as one travels, rather it engages the memory, experience and the cognition too. The *bhav* (essence) of the space is realised in such manner.

5) Osho, one of the prominent spiritual figures of India was more popular for his non conformist teachings and in the essay "The Alchemy of Places of Pilgrimage" he states that a *tirtha* was a unique invention by the ancient civilisation and that it has a deep and symbolic significance. The sacredness of the *tirth sthanas* is justified by him as he agrees that there are certain places of high density consciousness and the low density ones and when large numbers of people gather at one particular place their consciousness is charged. The reason for the establishment of such places according to him was due to such creation of "powerfully charged fields of conscious energies, so that anyone could easily begin his inner journey" (44). The place is accordingly charged with such energies and that affects the consciousness of people.

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Stopping at Old, Familiar *Stations*: A Review of Seamus Heaney's 1975 Anthology

Somrita Ganguly

> Between my finger and my thumb
> The squat pen rests.
> I'll dig with it.
> (Heaney, 3)

Throughout his career, that spanned an overwhelming four decades, the Nobel Laureate, Seamus Heaney, continued to do what he had begun his chequered journey with – digging into the collective psyche of Ireland. The Derry-born Catholic poet, through his remarkably geographical and archaeological approach to poetry, investigates unflinchingly into the dilemmas of both the private and the public, in work after work, charting his own evolution as a poet and a person in the process. *Stations*, Heaney's 1975 limited edition booklet published by Ulsterman is an anthology of poems which like his previous collections, such as *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) or *Door into the Dark* (1969), deals with the raw material provided by his childhood experiences. Heaney delves into his own roots and into the layers of Irish history even in this anthology, and digs up the past to present it to posterity.

Though the quest that Heaney had embarked on in 1966 continues in *Stations*, the collection is prominently different from its predecessors in two predominant ways – a) the style and the structure of the poems, and b) the poetic narrative voice recounting the past experiences to the readers. Heaney no longer looks at his childhood self with a mixture of simple, organic innocence and an adult's nostalgia at the death of that young naturalist. The homesickness prevails even in this collection as Heaney himself points out in the poem "The Stations of the West" – "I sat … homesick for a speech I was to extirpate" (90) – but the adult narrator in this anthology has lost his former sentimentality. Heaney, for the first time, writes prose-poems in this collection. Verse paragraphs are curious amalgamations of prose and verse, lying in the liminal zone between the two. Suggestive of the to and fro movement from one form to the other, or the easy blending of the two forms, verse paragraphs help Heaney articulate thoughts which are complex enough to extend beyond the metrical scheme of a couple of lines, yet profound enough to merit a poetic rendering. While a prose poem does not use conventional rules of prosody, it still gives the writer the

liberty to employ the rhetorical style used in verses usually. A verse paragraph by using enjambments, on the one hand propel us to read on – lending a sense of urgency which might arguably have been lost if line breaks, or end-stopped lines had been used; on the other hand, paradoxically, the verse paragraph form help us to stay for a moment with the work and reflect on it; to enter the consciousness of the work, as it were, and converse with it. A prose poem or verse paragraph is a contradiction in itself, it controversially breaks rules of both prose and verse, yet the mood it upholds is poetic enough to make this form one of the most interesting modes of communication. Heaney makes marvelous use of this form in *Stations*. One must briefly pause at the etymology of the word "station" because Heaney was a master craftsman and for him the language that he employed to express his emotions was as important as the emotions themselves. A man of few words, his poems are precise, crisp and compact, with every word, every punctuation having earned its place in Heaney's scheme of things. A station is a stopping place – a place where travelers halt before journeying on. The modern word station comes from the Middle English word 'stacioun', which was a derivative of the Anglo-Norman word 'estation' and the Latin word 'statio', which means to stand and stare. As someone who had translated the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, Heaney was evidently well versed in antiquity and aware of the history of the word station which had come to be used in its modern sense for the first time arguably in the fourteenth century[1]. The title of this anthology of poems is therefore exceedingly significant, because all the poems in this collection are about pausing at and pondering over moments of his life. All these poems contain instances of revelation, the ordinary moments which brightened up suddenly into moments of profound epiphany. The title of the collection *Stations*, along with the poetic form that Heaney employs in this anthology, prepares us to engage with the author in his moments of deep realization. This review of Heaney's fourth published anthology explores such few moments as stated in the text, "the sandmartins' nests were loopholes of darkness in the riverbank. He could imagine his arm going in to the armpit … but because he had once felt the cold prick of a dead robin's claw … he only gazed" (83).

The adult Heaney stops at different stations of his life as a child in Northern Ireland and gazes at those experiences objectively and critically. 'Nesting-Ground' is one of those stations. As a child he had peered into sandmartins' nests – dark holes waiting to be explored. One such attempt at examination had gone awry. He had felt the cold touch of death. Yet another examination had

led to the discovery of warm, new life – "moist pink necks" amidst husk, chaff and cornstalks (83). Heaney powerfully juxtaposes images of death with those of life and Henry Hart opines that "new life seems just as grotesque as old" to the child's eye, which leads him to respond with "fear and bewilderment as boys often do" (112). The adult voice situates itself on the perimeter of these experiences, as a spectator quietly listening and intently gazing. And as he stands "waiting" it occurs to him to put "his ear to one of the abandoned holes … listening for the silence under the ground" (83). Heaney, the patriot, was digging into these holes, looking for traces of the Irish Republic Army that had perhaps gone under cover. Heaney the poet was perhaps trying to discover hidden truths of life and life's mysteries through his creative pursuits.

Born to a Catholic family in Northern Ireland just prior to World War II, Heaney lived through the contradiction and the horror of the War. The poet revisits this experience in the next couple of poems of this anthology, "England's Difficulty" and "Visitant". The title "England's Difficulty" is evidently a euphemism for Irish difficulty, and the Irish insurrection. The young self of the poetic persona would move "like a double agent among big concepts", big concepts such as enmity, friendship, rivalry, right doing and wrong doing, making choices, taking a stand (85). The innocence of childhood, the blissful state of ignorance, still untouched by the Blakian concept of experience, gives the young boy the freedom to not take sides, unlike the adults who were forced to choose between friend and foe. He could therefore imagine the word "enemy" in actual, physical terms (85). He has a semiotic response to the word, picturing it as a large "mowing machine" (85). He cannot fathom the abstract concept of enmity. The poet too, like the young boy, refuses to take sides and his poetic sensibilities prevent him from participating in such sectarianism. For a poet in search of truth, taking sides is crippling. To find real solutions to a problem the poet will have to live with every aspect of the problem and not be blinded by a parochial approach to it. Heaney, therefore like his young self acts like a "double agent" saying "I lodged with 'the enemies of Ulster'" (85). The poet, like the boy, occupies an ambivalent position as he is not unequivocally happy at the defeat of the enemy when the Germans bombed Belfast and the Protestant occupied "Orange parts were hit the worst" (85). Both exist in this liminal space with their ephemeral notion of antagonism, hostility and enmity. The young boy moved almost like a spy through enemy camps – "I crossed the lines with carefully enunciated passwords, manned every speech with checkpoints and reported back to nobody" (85). In a world where drawing lines is an art almost forgotten,

and controlling one's speech a lost etiquette, Heaney's sensibilities inform him otherwise. He can draw lines. He can man his speech. And as a poet, he does not need to report to anybody; that would make him merely a spokesperson, a propagandist with an agenda. In the young boy's psyche, friends and foes lose their conventional distinction. Heaney reflects in this poem on such "big concepts" (Heaney 85) and his being an artist confirms "his freedom to scout and judge all positions" (Hart 114).

In "Visitant" too, Heaney mocks "the convenient stereotype that reduces opponents to straw figures" (Hart 114). The visitant in the poem is a German bomber pilot who parachutes to safety near the young Heaney's home in Northern Ireland. The boy suspends all sense of judgement in order to see the man as he really is – "He walked back into the refining lick of the grass, behind the particular judgements of captor and harbourer. As he walks yet, feeling our eyes on his back, treading the air of the image he achieved, released to his fatigues" (Heaney 86). Hart points out how Heaney's eyes transform him from "a stock image of war propaganda into a more complete image of flesh and blood" (114).

However, Heaney succumbs to his judgements at least once in this anthology and his neutral poetic sensibilities are overpowered by his dislike for what the Orange Order Parade, usually held on or around July 12th every year in Northern Ireland, stood for. In "July" Heaney, while talking about the carnivalesque parade, does not fail to mention the incipient violence associated with this march. The parade only intensified the archaic sectarian division that had been plaguing Ireland for centuries – "The drumming didn't murmur, rather hammered … Through red seas of July the Orange drummers led a chosen people through their dream … policemen flanking them like anthracite" (84). The Orange Order was the largest Protestant organization in Ireland and their call always was, "No Pope" (139). The undertones of prevailing violence associated with a parade of this kind, betrayed by Heaney in this poem, are later expressed more explicitly by him in "Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966" where he blatantly caricatures the Protestants leading this parade in his attempt to show how such marches only lead to further fragmentation and division. Heaney captures better than any statistical data the bitterness and hatred fuelled by such parades,

> The lambeg balloons at his belly, weighs
> Him back on his haunches, lodging thunder
> Grossly there between his chin and his knees.

He is raised up by what he buckles under.

Each arm extended by a seasoned rod,
He parades behind it. And though the drummers
Are granted passage through the nodding crowd,
It is the drums preside, like giant tumours.

To every cocked ear, expert in its greed,
His battered signature subscribes 'No Pope'.
The goatskin's sometimes plastered with his blood.
The air is pounding like a stethoscope. (139)

Heaney continues this exploration of the self and the Other in "Trial Runs" as well. In this poem we are presented with a 'station' close to the end of the World War II. A Protestant Irish soldier returns home and his welcome is splashed on fading walls over old graffiti – "Welcome home ye lads of the Eighth Army" (87) over dated banners reminding people of the Catholic suppression in Northern Ireland, such as "Remember 1690 and No Surrender" (87). The historical allusion is to the Catholic uprising of 1690. Heaney problematizes the notion of home right at the beginning of this poem. Could a Catholic born boy ever feel fully at home in the Nationalist, Protestant Northern Ireland? However, the Protestant soldier returns home, still clad in his "khaki shirt and brass-buckled belt" now demobilized (87). He drops by Heaney's house (drops by but does not enter) with a present for his Catholic neighbor, Patrick Heaney – a rosary. They attempt at friendly banter,

Did they make a Papish of you over there?
Oh damn the fear! I stole them for you, Paddy, off the Pope's
dresser when his back was turned.
You could harness a donkey with them (87)

Apparently neither minds the jokes but the latent hostility brewing underneath is almost tangible; "behind the 'crack' and wisecracks sectarian tension whispers" (qtd. in Parker 6). In his moment of epiphany the young boy realizes that despite the attempt to ease the situation by cracking jokes on one's own identity, his father and his neighbor were like two birds testing the field; not confident of each other, since prejudice encrusts every layer of a person's behavior in such conflict zones, "Their laughter sailed above my head, a hoarse clamour, two big nervous birds dipping and lifting, making trial runs across a

territory" (87). The joke evaporates and the sense of alienation pervades. Henry Hart opines, "Their friendly two-faced masks are donned for the sake of peace" (115). One can, of course, recall to mind the Protestant priest from Heaney's previous collection *Wintering Out* trying to understand his Catholic neighbors and betraying a sense of restrained reverence when he lingers by their door choosing not to disturb them when they were reading the rosary,

> we would hear his step round the gable
> though not until after the litany
> would the knock come to the door …
> he might say, 'I was dandering by
> and says I, I might as well call.' (Heaney 60)

Helen Hennessy Vendler sees the poems in *Stations* as a development of the notion put forth by Heaney in "The Other Side" – "a far more confident vignette, treating the uneasiness of even cordial relations between the two 'sides' is offered among Heaney's poems-in-prose that make up [this] sequence" (qtd. in Vendler 80). She also points out with reference to "Trial Runs" how in this "Joycean epiphany the stereotypes are still present – the half-military British dress of the neighbour, the hands-in-pockets stance of the farmer, the worn sectarian joking exchanged between them" (80). Furthermore, what is also noteworthy in this poem is the implicit suggestion that despite the deep seated aggression the Protestant soldier had for his Catholic neighbor when he was away at war, he brought Heaney's father a gift of not something which he himself would like, but something which he knew the recipient would appreciate – a rosary, and a generously big one at that. Vendler suggests, "the two men will not be able to go farther into amiability than their awkward joking but the son hails it none the less as the marking out of an intermediate territory where Catholic and Protestant might feel neighbourly good will for each other rather than enmity" (80).

In an interview with his fellow Irish poet, Dennis O'Driscoll, when asked whether he identified with Wordsworth and his attempt to describe throughout his poetical career the intense experiences of his early life, Heaney said,

> The early-in-life experience has been central to me all right. But I'd say you aren't so much trying to describe it as trying to locate it. The amount of sensory material stored up or stored down in the brain's and the body's system is inestimable. It's like a culture at the bottom of a jar, although it doesn't grow, I think, or help anything else to

> grow unless you find a way to reach it and touch it. But once you do, it's like putting your hand into a nest and finding something beginning to hatch out in your head. (O'Driscoll, Heaney, n.p.)

Heaney considers a poem to be a "truth-telling arena" (O'Driscoll, Heaney, n.p.). *Stations*, Heaney's 1975 anthology of prose-poems, is an attempt to locate some of those inestimable moments which helped shape his life and literature and revisit them in this "truth-telling arena"; an attempt at reliving, creatively, memories buried deep inside "loopholes of darkness" (83) which when scratched with the pen that rests "snug as a gun" (3) become the nesting ground for new ideas and new poetic sensibilities.

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The Metaphor and Matrix of Mysticism in the Verse of Guru Nanak and Fernando Pessoa: A Comparative Overview

Neeti Singh

Two significant poets from two distinct mystic traditions pitched across the planet and time, are discussed here. One is Guru Nanak the Punjabi saint-poet located in 15th century India and the other is Fernando Pessoa from early 20th century Portugal. The essay thus explores through Guru Nanak, the dynamics of Nirguna Bhakti and Sufism in the medieval Indian context; and examines the dynamics of Gnosticism and Paganism through the fabric of Fernando Pessoa's work. Nature as metaphor and matrix for spiritual transcendence makes for common ground between the two poets who essentially were mystics and modernist rebels. In their own ways, both come across as ambassadors of peace – as nature poets who resisted orthodoxy and hierarchy in religion, and opposed pointless ritual and conservative norm. While Nanak was a popular saint and an integrated family man, Pessoa remained all his life a confirmed bachelor, a reclusive mystic and a chronic drinker conceptually opposed to the idea of sainthood.

The two poets, Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), hail from two different continents, religious contexts, cultures and time periods. However, they were both mystic poets who drew inspiration from Nature and the ancient spiritual systems of the world – the Greek and the Indian. They both lived unconventional lives according to the contexts in which they were placed, and both wrote verses that were seeped in sublime and symbolist representations of Nature. Also their work was modern in ethos as it was an expression of their extraordinary lives - harnessed and dyed by the history and indigenous mystic traditions of their times. While Guru Nanak in 15th century India, was a leading mystic who wrote poetry and was located at the helm of a new line of Nirguna-Bhakti[1] saint-poets; Pessoa was a reclusive postmodernist genius. He wrote and lived in Portugal of the early 19th century, led a life of a deconstructionist and was much ahead of his times. While Nanak was a householder, a legendary traveller and drew a huge following, Pessoa was a writer who courted anonymity, he neither married nor travelled except in poetic imagination through the adventures of his alter egos – the heteronyms[2].

With three centuries, two different continents and an ocean to set the poets apart - besides the obvious difference in language, history, culture and socio-political contexts - what can then possibly yoke these two great poets here in this comparative, academic enterprise? The fact is that they both were poets who wrote from/ for the margins. They both perceived Nature as transcendental, sublime and as cosmic principle, and both turn to Nature for succor, guidance and peace. This approach manifests in the sympathetic fabric and energy of their writing and in the structures that inform it, namely the ancient pagan and mystic traditions of the Orient and the Hellenic.

This paper yokes through two significant poets, the traditions and histories of Eastern and Western religions and metaphysics. It reads through their poetry, the dynamics of their mystic involvement, growth, semiotic and poetic strategy. The dynamics of Nirguna Bhakti and Sufism in the medieval Indian context is explored through the compositions of Guru Nanak. The resurgence of Gnosticism and Paganism at the threshold of the 20th century is explored through the trajectory of Fernando Pessoa's work.

Nature in both their writings becomes a symbolic portal, an extended metaphor and matrix for spiritual expression and transcendence. Nature and mysticism make for common ground between the two poets who were essentially iconoclastic, modernist, and located in the space of the subaltern. In their own ways, both resisted orthodox hierarchical religion, and conservative social norms. While Nanak was a popular saint and an integrated family man who earned much recognition and regard as a saint, poet and leader; Pessoa was overly self conscious, reclusive and a chronic bachelor who in all probability met a virgin death. A brilliant intellectual product of the early modern period, Pessoa was a mystic who lived in denial, beleaguered all through by a life mired by heavy loneliness and chronic drinking, it was the life of a saint conceptually opposed to the status of sainthood. The basic difference between the two mystic poets is as follows: Pessoa writes from the labyrinths of deep mystic wisdom and an unresolved struggle, while Nanak writes from the premise of one who has stilled the mind and is reaping the rewards of an inner harvest which from time to time he tries to shares with those around him.

I
Guru Nanak (1469-1539)

According to popular belief Guru Nanak was born in April 1469 AD. His father Kalyan Chand Das Bedi, was a Bedi Khatri by caste who lived in the

village of Rai Bhoi di Talvandi now located in Pakistan. Kalyan Chand was the village patwari/ accountant for crop revenue and his mother's name was Tripta. Both of them were Hindus and belonged to the merchant caste. Nanak had just one sibling, a sister who was five years younger to him and named Bebe Nanki. When she got married to Jai Ram and left for Sultanpur, Guru Nanak who was deeply attached to his sister followed her there and took up employment under Daulat Khan Lodi. Two years later at the age of eighteen he too was married off to Mata Sulakkhani with whom he had two sons, Siri Chand and Lakhmi Das. The elder son Sri Chand was a born mystic. He received enlightenment from his father's teachings and went on to become the founder of the Udasi sect – in contemporary times we know them as the Nanakpanthies[3]. Although Guru Nanak lived the regular life of a householder, a major part of his life was spent meditating and travelling to far off lands, sharing the light he had seen, dissipating the darkness, singing, writing hymnals in praise of the divine whose imprint he saw in all that surrounded him. Popular accounts of Guru Nanak's life narrate several incidents that indicate the fact that Nanak from an early age was blessed and marked by divine grace for a sublime destiny.

Notable lore recounts that as a child Nanak astonished his teacher by describing the implicit symbolism of the first letter of the alphabet, which is almost straight stroke in Persian or Arabic, resembling the mathematical version of one, as denoting the unity or oneness of God. Other childhood accounts refer to strange and miraculous events about Nanak, such as one witnessed by Rai Bular, in which the sleeping child's head was shaded from the harsh sunlight, in one account, by the stationary shadow of a tree or, in another, by a venomous cobra. (Simran Saab)

Nanak's world of late 15th century Punjab – located in the north of an 'India' not yet formed, must have been a land of agriculture, bullock carts, no electricity, long distances, forests and palanquins and horses. It was, as history paints it, a land populated by simple folk, oppressed equally by the Brahmins and the proselytising Moghuls. A landscape furnished by simple ritual and ancient esoteric wisdoms, trammelled for centuries by the splendour of Brahminical ritual and Buddhist lore, and in the more recent past, a landscape of severe compromise and chaos harnessed by the plunder and pillage of Islamic invaders. The indigenous traditions of Saguna and Nirguna bhakti, the Sufi silsilaas of Muslim mystics who had followed the invaders, and the wandering Nath yogis – all must have spread God's love, light and some relief as they hobnobbed in the margins with the poor, the low caste and the Dalit by bringing them back to

humanity, releasing 'god' from the pyramid of hierarchy and ritual rigidity. On the other hand were also the grand decaying universities, the great bejewelled temples and the grand Buddhist monasteries that tragically fell under the sword wielding terror of the horse backed Moghul and Turk invaders.

Before approaching the verse of Guru Nanak, it is essential to first examine the conceptual dynamics of Indian mysticism through terms like, 'Bhakti', 'Saguna', 'Nirguna', and 'Sufi', which define, locate and structure the semiotic of medieval Indian poetics. The term Bhakti can be translated as deep love and devotion – it is an intense personalised way of forging a connection with the divine lord. Bhakti is the devotion of a Bhakta/ devotee. It is based on an intense emotional surrendering – an intense, intimate spiritual bond which is expressed through devotional compositions and hymnals (referred to as kirtana) which in some cases were accompanied by spiritual trance and dancing. The Bhakti movement emerged from within the Hindu fold as a rebellion against the hierarchical aspect of Hinduism. Its primary structure was a life of simplicity, high morals and divine surrender. The means to God was the path of love which often took the form of following a saint/sant, yogi/sage or a sufi, listening to his/ her discourse and participating in a kirtana - group singing of hymns composed by the poet-saint - in praise of an incarnate god in the form of Vishnu or Shiva, or in praise of the idea of god who was formless. Mystic schools that centered on an incarnate god-form were known as Saguna, while those that approached god as formless divine energy were known as Nirguna – without guna or physical attribute.

The Bhakti movement per se had begun with Saguna bhakti where a mythological heroic god was symbolically reproduced and worshipped as idol, stone, totem, piece of wood, tree etc. In time however, there came a shift in the general schema of Bhakti and the bhakti as a movement developed a new branch that varied in its perception of god, as one that is formless, without any physical features, and monotheistic. This approach was called Nirguna Bhakti and Nanak along with Kabir were the major proponents. Nirguna Bhakti was also known as the Sant tradition. It evolved as the fallout of many factors – primarily the arrival of Islam, the socio political chaos, their aggressive policy of religious conversion, the loot and plunder that followed and the already Dalit despised in the name of religious sanctity and barriers of caste – all of this must have carved among the marginalised low caste and native poor, a burning need for spiritual succor and god. This need was served by the emergence of the path of Nirguna bhakti. Unlike its Saguna cousin, Nirguna bhakti was totally

free of temple/ masjid, totem, idol, religion or rituals. No wonder the chief proponents of Nirguna bhakti – Saint Kabir and Guru Nanak – enjoyed a common following of both the Hindus and Muslims. Their poetry is iconoclastic and heavily debunks rigid religious beliefs and practices. It does however continue to draw and rework its metaphors from the Indian common pool of history, religion and religious philosophy, myth, topography, and literature. God according to Nirguna Bhakti was amorphous, monotheistic, transcendent and formless. As Nanak describes him in the Japji

There is One Being
Truth its name
Primal Creator
Without fear
Without enmity
Eternal in time
Un-born
Self Existent
The Guru's Grace.
(GS, Vol.1, p.1)

Nanak's writings were canonised and subsumed into the Adi Granth – also known as the Guru Granth Saheb – which is a mega storehouse of mystic verse but is primarily read as a religious text by the Sikhs. To extricate Nanak from the thick labyrinth of religion and engage with his work as poetry is also an aspect of this essay which examines him as a mystic poet alongside Pessoa four centuries away in a distant distinct Portugal.

Nanak's poetic oeuvre[4] consists of some long poetic compositions like the Japji, Dakhni Omkar, Siddha Goshti, Kirtan Sohila and Asa-di-Var. And several short poems -over nine hundred in number which draw inspiration and form from the folklore and indigenous traditions of the people of Punjab. Since his poetry is the focus of this essay I have shifted details of his works to the Notes section at the bottom. The tenor of Nanak's poetry can primarily be summed up within the following terms: German Romanticism and Sublime and Transcendental verse. Speaking in the Indian critical parlance his poetic genius can be compared to the poetic style that one finds in the Rig Veda and the Upanishads. It is incantatory, filled with wonderment, with broad strokes of symbols and imagery drawn from nature and the cosmos and seeped in a sense of continuous calm as Nanak transcends Nature to find a meditative sublime sense of God – God energy. To quote from the Dakhni Omkar:

The various shapes He weaves,
through wind, water, fire, space,
the One soul wanders
through the three worlds.
Hanging low the ambrosial rain,
incessantly drizzles,
the sublime word alone
can establish the mortal.' (GS, 3036-37)
'The mercurial mind remains not still,
like the deer it nibbles,
secretly upon green shoots of sin.
But he that enshrines thine lotus
feet in his heart lives, eternally.' (GS, 3044) (Tr. Mine)

The formless anthropomorphic god with lotus feet, the image of an ever falling ambrosial rain, and references to the One soul that wanders through the three worlds trace their steps to the semiotics of Saguna Bhakti[5]. While the lotus feet recall an image of Lord Krishna, the ambrosial rain links up with a spiritual state in the matrix of yogic practise and its original proponent Lord Shiva. The state of spiritual ecstasy, the harnessing of the mercurial mind and the enemy within that feeds like a deer, on the green shoots of sin also recalls the Sufi interpretation of the word 'jihad' or 'holy war' as a battle that is internally fought between the vagrant lower self and the higher impulse which leans towards a surrender to God. And the vigour that Nanak brings to the verse with his own organic assembling of it all, along with his unique employment of the deer image that comes towards the end of the poem. The deer that is regarded as a sylvan image of innocence and the delicate denizen of a verdure landscape, when juxtaposed here with the idea of sin, transforms into an agency of darkness and terror, thereby infusing an element of shock and bringing the poetic tenor to an unexpected turn.

Living in the age that he did, Guru Nanak wrote poetry more as a spiritual expression – a celebration of the transcendental sublime which he saw reflected in the universe around him – be it then the starry night sky or a scene from the village fair. Everything and all that he saw around him got transformed into metaphor and material for his poetic enterprise. Nanak wrote verse for the following reasons: i) to celebrate and share his own spiritual journey and divine insights ii) to discuss the nitty-gritty of the mystic trajectory in order to inspire and encourage other travellers on the way, and iii) to critique and expose the

corruption of established religious orders which continued to exploit and manipulate the common people.

Therefore, Baba Nanak's work is not sheer nature poetry, rather it is a poetics that ingenuously metaphorises nature and natural landscape, to paint the inner spiritual state of the mystical experience and onward journey. In the following poem - a morning hymn called "Parbhati" - the five senses become the five thieves held responsible for stealing the mind's composure and peace. The condition of a realised soul seeped in compassion, continence and patience is described through the metaphor of grains, rice and wheat and milk. And the cow-calf symbol used to refer to purity and innocence reminds us of the lamb symbol as used in the poems of Blake and Pessoa. Both are symbolic of the pagan world and both are associated with the image of God as shepherd. While the lamb reminds us of Jesus Christ the calf/ cow is associated with stories of Lord Krishna, the cowherd. The "Parbhati" composed by Guru Nanak, from the Guru Granth Sahib:

I ask for but one boon from Thee
Bless thou me, O Lord with thy name.
The five wandering thieves are held,
the mind's self conceit is stilled.
Sinful seeing and evil thoughts flee away.
Such is the Lord's divine knowledge.

Bless thou me with the rice of continence and chastity,
the wheat of compassion and the leafy plate
of thy meditation, O Lord, Bless thou me
With the milk of good deeds
and the clarified butter of contentment,
such are the alms I ask of thee.

Make thou forgiveness and patience my milch-cow,
that my mind's calf may easily in drink the milk.
I ask for the dress of the Lord's praise,
and modesty and this wise Nanak
shall continue uttering the Lord's praise.
(GS, Vol 8, p. 4385)

Nanak's poetic control, the sophistication with which he handles language and the subtle employment of suggestion and symbols is apparent in the poem quoted

above. One is amazed once again by his extraordinary use of ordinary metaphor. The rice of continence resonates on two levels – one being the chaste whiteness of the grain and two being the plethora of opportunity and temptation in a single lifetime just like the innumerable amount of rice grain contained in a single handful. The 'wheat of compassion' is another brilliant image as it holds with remarkable subtlety a hint of the poor man's hunger and the humility of the one who shares his wheat. The rich synecdoche of the expression 'leafy plate' cannot be missed either. The 'leafy plate' could be a literal reference to plates made from leaves stitched together, but it could also refer to the canopy of a tree overhead - an extension of the village landscape which in turn alludes to the intimate and wholesome connect between nature/ trees and the mystic dynamic.

A significant feature of Nanak's poetry is his improvisation of the esoteric semiotics of Saguna Bhakti and Hatha yoga. For instance in the poem above, the ambrosia of immortality which indicates in Nath terminology the ecstatic opening up of the crown chakra and a great spiritual high, transforms in Nanak's hands to the 'milk' that his 'mind's calf may easily in drink'. Previously that same 'milk' was referred to as the milk of good deeds. The metaphor is further extended to convey that just as clarified butter is obtained from milk, so too is contentment obtained as a result of good karma or deeds. Another refreshing metaphor, which is also a brilliant case of synaesthesia (sense transference), is the poet's supplication for a 'dress of the Lord's praise'. The poet's dress is not of cotton or silk, it alludes in fact to the thoughts we wear like a fabric – an energy field dyed in the hue of patience and modesty. A dress made of thoughts of such humble devotion would help the mystic cancel false pride and ego and help him/ her weave a place in the rain of grace. This sentiment of the poet Nanak resonates with a similar sentiment expressed by Fernando Pessoa in his "Caeiro" poems. Where he says he'd 'rather be the dust of the road/ And trampled on by the feet of the poor… or be the miller's donkey/And have him beat me and care for me… than… go through life/ Always looking back and feeling regret.'

Before moving on to Fernando Pessoa, we shall examine yet another short "Parbhati" which showcases the Saint poet's assimilation and improvisation of the Shaiva, Vaishnava and Sufi semiotic - thereby creating within his poetry, a space that was secular, interactive and enriched with his own personal metaphysic, vision and mystic idiom. The poem/ "parbhati":

When the ray of gnosis spreads across the heart lotus,
it joyfully blossoms
and in the house of the moon enters the sun
attaining unto the Lord, by the guru's grace,
i have overcome death
and nipped my desire in my head.

I am now imbued with the colour deep red
of the Lord's supreme love
and am rid of other hues.
Nanak my tongue is imbued with the relish
of that Lord who is pervading all over.
(GS, Vol 8, p.4395)

The first stanza which is an unbroken sentence with a chain of metaphors (the blossoming heart lotus – the moon entering the house of the sun and the overcoming of death) is an expression from the esoteric science of Hatha yoga. It refers to the poet's deep spiritual awakening – the rise of the awakening Kundalini – serpent energy from the base of the spine to the crown chakra – the tenth threshold or as the poet says in Punjabi[6], the dasam dwaara (the crown chakra). The colour red in the next stanza is a reference to the Sufi Dervish[7] who dresses in robes of deep red – red being the colour of the muladhara – root chakra - is also the colour of life-giving-blood that runs through the veins and is symbolic of the divine father's love and compassion. The poem ends with an erotic union with the Lord. In a brilliant expression of synaesthesia the poet says that he has relished with his tongue, the taste of the sweet all pervading Lord. The cheeky sensual intimacy of the tongue-taste metaphor intensely resonates with the vigour of the Saguna bhakti semiotic. It also brings home the paradox contained herewith.

The poet Nanak says that he dissolved himself totally and thereby attained the Lord. By dying to himself he was born to the Lord who demands a complete surrendering – thus Nanak has found liberation from personal desire and overcomes death in order to gain birth in a higher realm where a higher taste enables the poet Nanak to be dead and yet more alive and in bliss than he has ever been. To be partially alive or partially dead is a space in the mystic journey that is rant with suffering and pain. And this is where we intermittently find Fernando Pessoa when not draped in the great peace that surrounds nature in its pagan non mind's space; we find him struggling to come to terms with the

trauma of being half alive / half dead. Pessoa writes:

> My heart is a poured-out bucket.
> In the same way invokers of spirit invoke spirits, I invoke
> My own self and find nothing. ("The Tobacco Shop" p.176)

II
Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935)

On one hand is Nanak's pure celebratory and reforming mysticism and on the other hand we have the tormented genius of a Pessoa, a Lorca or a Baudelaire – social misfits and mystics with hearts stained by the divine light in varying degrees, but corrupted and way laid from the hidden path by the disenchanting impacts of industrialization, urbanization and the general shift that they triggered in humanity from a space of humble faith to the bramble bush of fear, doubt and despair.

Fernando Antonio Nogueira Pessoa was born in Lisbon on 13th June 1888. When scarcely five years old he lost his father and his mother remarried two and a half years later and took Fernando to Durban, South Africa, where his stepfather served as the Portugese consul. Fernando attended an English school in Durban where he lived with his family till the age of seventeen. He returned to Portugal in 1905 for good and remained there till his death. Like most writers Pessoa seems to have preferred to write about life than to live a life. He was mildly touched by some ills of the chaotic times in which he lived – he smoked and enjoyed drinking, enough to have died at forty seven from sclerosis of the liver. Barring this his was otherwise a clean life spent mostly in the company of his own literary creations and experiments - besides reading, writing, exploring the occult, meditating and observing the self. This in itself must have been a huge achievement when we consider the fact that Europe in the first half of the 20th century was gripped by the dark cloud of "internecine warfare, economic depression, ethnic cleansing and racist genocide" (Konrad Jarausch). The spiritual poverty, the insecurity and the collapse of peace which ailed the general atmosphere in which Pessoa lived is yet another aspect that connects the two mystics at hand. It must be acknowledged however, that the density of the darkness that plagued Pessoa's age was far more insidious, poisoned as it was by the masochistic tendencies of intelligence, advancement and the intellect.

Scholarship confirms that it was Pessoa who translated the esoteric texts

of the theosophists into Portuguese; that he possessed a keen knowledge of astrology and was actively involved with automatic writing, the practice of medium-ship and the esoteric occult. All of this added to the philosophical insights and mystic symbolism that underlie his poetry, his conscious distancing from the usual swift sand of issues of human desire, identity and attachment, his creation of alter egos in the form of heteronyms which not only gave him a cloud of anonymity but also involved a certain amount of un-Selfing of the Self – all of these aspects and the reclusive lifestyle he so jealously protected, point towards the fact that he was a modern poet, philosopher and a mystic who defined himself as a 'mystical nationalist'. The following lines in Pessoa's own words convey his nihilism and hermit like tendencies:

> Want little: you'll have everything.
> Want nothing: you'll be free.
> The same love by which we're loved
> Oppresses us with its wanting. (p.133)

Fernando Pessoa is regarded as the greatest poet in the Portuguese language and among the greatest poets of the 20th century. It would not be remiss to say that he lived to write rather than wrote to live. He was a bilingual, and wrote intensely from an early age onwards. He left behind him a lot of unpublished work both in poetry and prose. Only two of his manuscripts were published in his lifetime – The Book of Disquiet, published under the semi-heteronym Bernardo Soares, and Mensagem (Messages), in his own name in 1934 - it is regarded as his greatest work and consists of forty four historical nationalist poems in Portuguese. Other than these most of his poems and prose pieces in English and Portuguese – over 150 of them were published in various journals under different names from his own tribe of heteronyms and orthonyms. When he died of cirrhosis in 1935, he had left 25,000 pages of a lifetime of unpublished, unfinished work.

'Love the nothing and flee the self', that seems to have been Pessoa's philosophy, in Mechtild's[8] words. Pessoa's engagement with early Christianity and pagan Christian mysticism has often been documented by scholarship. Unlike the hierarchical structure of the Christian church, the pagan[9] Christian seeks a direct experience of the supreme impersonal oneness underlying all of life in nature. And that is exactly what Pessoa strived for both in life and in his poems - to bring to his readers some comfort and tranquility. He hopes:

> And as they read my poems, I hope/ they will think I'm something natural

... [like] 'That old tree, for instance,/ In whose shade when they were children/
They sat down with a thud, tired of playing,/
And wiped the sweat from their hot foreheads/
With the sleeve of their striped smocks. (p.47)

Although the poet refrains from any direct reference to it, his poems reaffirm again and again his mystic orientation and his sympathy with the early pastoral Christ. Why else would he write like one who is one with the undulating landscape, the vast peace and as one who has gnosis – is a Gnostic? The Gnostics according to mystic lore were the bearers of a secret mystical wisdom that Jesus had reserved for his closest initiates. They were by contrast, a truly spiritual Christianity concerned with the direct realization of eternal truths. The mystical Gnostics were practising an experiential Christianity in which they sought to become a 'Christ' – one who was enlightened and had become, a realised soul. Here is a short poem of Pessoa's seeped in mystic wisdom of the here and now, and brimming with unlettered humility:

I'd rather be the dust of the road
And trampled on by the feet of the poor...
I'd rather be the rivers that flow
And have washerwomen along the shore...
I'd rather be the poplars next to the river
With only the sky above and the water below...
I'd rather be the miller's donkey
And have him beat me and care for me...
Rather this than to go through life
Always looking back and feeling regret... (p.54)

To simply live and be in the present moment, than to be thinking and fretting in loops of human ego and suffering that is the poet's aspiration. Considering that Pessoa lived in Europe of the pre world war times when the effects of materialism, political unrest, genocide and modernisation had rendered human society and faith into shreds of despair, anguish, darkness and violence; Pessoa's was a remarkable voice. It was a voice that spoke sometimes, like a pagan Christian who saw a spirit, a god in every element of nature's manifest expression. In the poem "Ah, You Believers in Christs and Marys" he says:

Leave me with only the Reality of the moment
And my tranquil and manifest gods who live

Not in the Uncertain
But in the fields and rivers. (p.104)

He writes as though he were conversing, often employing antithesis and paradox to release moments of epiphany, he uses the exploratory mode to dig gently his way to reality as it is thereby pointing to gaps between what we think, feel and what we think we feel. Thinking is often seen as a malaise that masks the real sense of the moment and keeps one away from the reality and bounty of the immediate present. In order to merge with the cosmic sublime in the only way available to the human mind – which is through feeling and an experiential knowing (Immanuel Kant too supports this in his Critique of Judgement) Pessoa goes to the extent of disowning himself. For only one can exist in the sacred space of the sublime, the individual ego must dissolve.

In Pessoa's poetry we find the search for emptiness and an "unknowing" which St. Dionysius[10] describes in his work, The Dazzling Darkness: "Leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, that you may arise, through 'unknowing', towards the union with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge" (World Mysticism 94). Here was a poet with a strong mystic calling that prompted him towards the cloud of 'unknowing' as he struggled in an atmosphere of doubt and disbelief – a modern malaise, totally at variance with the poet's needs. His life and poetry is proof of his strong mystic leanings, flummoxed sometimes by the bramble bush of doubt and modern thought culture that prompts the tendency to overly rationalize, to doubt the promptings of the inner voice, to depend only on that which can be proven and thought, and thereby live in a state of constant denial, disillusionment and despair. The following lines from his poem, "The Tobacco Shop" are an example:

I'm nothing.
I'll always be nothing.
I can't want to be something.
But I have in me all the dreams of the world.
.....
Today I'm bewildered, like a man who wondered and discovered and forgot.
Today I'm torn between the loyalty i owe

To the outward reality of the Tobacco Shop across the street
And to the inward reality of my feeling that everything's a dream. (p.173)

His poetry charts the poet's inner journey, his struggle to reconcile the life outside with his deep insight into the reality of things, and the hopelessness of it all. "The Tobacco Shop" gives expression to this life-long enterprise of the poet to make peace with the contradictory laws of the material politic and the regions within. The very fact that Pessoa led a life of solitude and was so unconcerned about the creation of an identity in the publishing world – the very existence of the numerous heteronyms and orthonyms (81 in all have been discovered so far) under which he published his poems and prose pieces – all point to the poet's distance from general human entanglements in the form of relationships, social status and identity. The cultivation of the observing mind, the un-selfing of the self and his efforts to stem all suffering by being in the space of the non mind (reference, the "Caeiro" poems) is itself a stage in the mystic consciousness and journey. The following poem, "I've Never Kept Sheep" personifies nature as an amorphous macrocosmic being that evolves into an extended metaphor evoking pastoral images of sheep, flock, shepherd, lamb, peace and the poetic muse.

I have no ambitions and no desires.
To be a poet is not my ambition,
It's my way of being alone.
……
When I sit down to write verses
Or walk along roads and pathways
Jotting verses on a piece of paper in my mind,
I feel a staff in my hand
And see my own profile
On top of a low hill
Looking after my flock and seeing my ideas,
Or looking after my ideas and seeing my flock,
And smiling vaguely, like one who doesn't grasp what was said
But pretends he did. (p.45-46)

The emphasis here is on feeling rather than on thinking, for thinking as the poet says is the root/ route to all sadness attachment and discomfort – it is thinking that removes one from the fullness of the present, it is thinking that uproots the mind from the moment and the mind is bent on feeding the plant of dismay and dissatisfaction. The images that Pessoa crafts with such delicacy blend in with the mood of the poem:

Like a sound of sheep bells
Beyond the curve in the road
My thoughts are content.
My only regret is that I know they're content
Since if I did not know it they would be content and happy
Instead of sadly content. (p.45)

While he refers obliquely to Christ as Gnostic, shepherd/ poet – himself, in this poem, in yet another poem he denounces Christ and Mary who are portrayed in their righteous Christian image. In a dramatic address to the unseen reader, he appeals to the divine resplendence of nature and the pagan elements that are its godly keepers and "believers more ancient." He says he would rather turn to nature for spiritual solace and succor than go searching for a Christ or a Mary in other pastures. An excerpt:

Leave me with only the Reality of the moment
And my tranquil and manifest gods who live
Not in the uncertain
But in fields and rivers.
Leave me to this life that paganly passes
……
Ah, useless suitors of the better-than-life,
Leave life to the believers who are more ancient
Than Christ and his cross
And weeping Mary. (104-105)

III

Fernando Pessoa has often been called a neo-pagan and neo-romantic - closer in his sympathies to late romanticism of the German variety. The Christ, poet and a mystic with a staff shepherding a flock of sheep upon a hillside, and the sound of silence and peace that we find in the green landscape of his writings resonate with the spiritual thought culture of the mystics belonging to the pre Christian era or to the mysticism of early Christianity as it was practiced by the Christian monks, the Rosicrucians and the Gnostics. The routes to the mountain's peak might be several, but the destination of all spiritual systems is the same space of surrender. He that climbs on uphill is the pan mystic - the nirguna saint, the hermit Gnostic, pagan simpleton, forest dweller, and the Sufi. And this is where the two merge – Nanak and Pessoa – torch bearers of the mystic

order embodied in their persona and work, an impression of their socio-political contexts as well as the semiotics of the cultures and the traditions they were embedded in.

Both lived in the times of violent unrest and political struggles. If Nanak's lifetime was spent in the dark cloud of Babur the pillaging Mughal, Pessoa's adult life passed in the grip of fears of an imminent first world war. The image of Christ the lamb and shepherd finds a parallel in the image of Lord Krishna the cowherd, flute-playing god. Descriptions of nature and the natural terrain in Pessoa and Nanak may vary from gentle undulating hills to the Indian flatland and steep heights of the Himalayas, however, both poets personify nature in her verdure resplendence as transcendental and as manifest personification of the formless divine in its wordless sublime aspect. To compare a few lines from two poems by the two mystics: First I quote from Pessoa's "Caeiro" poem, "Yesterday Afternoon A Man from the Cities",

> What I was thinking about……
> Was how the distant tinkling of sheep bells
> As the day began to close
> Did… seem like the bells of a tiny chapel
> Calling to mass the flowers and the streams
> And simple souls like my own. (Tr. Zenith 58)

And the following is a stanza from a composition of Guru Nanak's poem – the "Aarti" that is part of the Sikh scriptures and is read during the evening prayer-service:

> A plate-like sky,
> The sun and moon its prayer lamps,
> The milky-way a string of pearls!
> The sandalwood trees are incense sticks
> Their fragrance, the breeze fans constantly.
> And the verdure wealth of forests makes flower offering.
> How beautiful is your prayer service!
> Celestial symphonies play within,
> O eraser of the life-death ring. (Tr. Myself, GGS Vol.8, 2174)

The poetic style and the general semiotic of the two poems may vary, however the tone of reverence is unmistakable, so also their perception of the lush green landscape which they compare to a temple, church or chapel hinged in a

continuous state of reverence – a hosanna to the amorphous divine. The tinkling of sheep bells in Pessoa's poem become the bells of a chapel summoning all of nature to come for the evening prayer. In Nanak's "Aarati" poem, all of nature and the cosmos – the flowers, the gentle breeze, the moon and the stars join in to perform the ritual temple prayer, and give expression to the sound of bliss that arises from within the human heart.

The difference in their styles and the depth of mystic perception vary. While Nanak's verse arises from a deeper knowing and celebration of the divine, Pessoa is at a stage where he has grasped the futility of worldly desires and all the needless industry, however, he has yet not stilled completely the pendulum movements of desire and despair within. Both however, appropriate Nature as macrocosm, metaphor and matrix of divine play and spiritual transcendence. This makes for common sharing ground between the two poets who were essentially mystics and modern in orientation, and rebels in their own contexts. In their distinct ways, they both resisted orthodox hierarchical religion, and conservative social norm. While Nanak was a popular saint who was also an integrated family man, Pessoa from his location in the midst of a hubbub modern city life, set a unique example by remaining a confirmed bachelor and a reclusive mystic all his life. His solitary, bachelor status led him to being a heavy drinker, who was conceptually opposed to sainthood but was in fact (to borrow a concept from Derrida), a deconstructed saint.

I conclude therefore on the premise that although the spiritual status, the mystic semiotic and the isms that Guru Nanak and Fernando Pessoa followed were different, and although they are poets embedded in disparate locations in terms of history, geography and time, the two poets are yoked together by a sympathy of poetic expression that exudes a neo-romantic sensibility, an idea of God as monotheistic and amorphous, and a deep engagement with the mystic divine regions which derive expression in their poetry through a semiotics that is pagan, sublime and transcendental in its drift.

Endnotes

1) Nirguna Bhakti: Bhakti which began essentially as a Saguna tradition incorporating idol and temple worship in its folds at the inception, went on to address another facet of worship which spoke of a god that was essential and formless - without any physical totems or attributes and without any religion. This was the Nirguna Bhakti marga/ path of which Guru Nanak and Saint Kabir were chief proponents. Nirguna Bhakti was also referred to as the Sant tradition. "The Sant tradition was

essentially a synthesis of three principle dissenting movements; drawing its features mainly from (a) Vaishnava Saguna Bhakti, (b) Shaivism and Hatha yoga based on the Samkhya metaphysics (c) and the Sufis – the spiritual unorthodox face of Islam." (NS 173). *From Bhakti Poetry in Medieval India*, 2004, by Neeti Sadarangani.

2) Heteronym: A term coined and put into practice by Fernando Pessoa who created several heteronyms. Unlike the pseudonym which an author adopts for reasons of aesthetic sensibility or from a desire for anonymity, the heteronym as Pessoa created it was not just another name that represented the poet. It possessed a distinct biography, temperament, philosophy, appearance and writing style as well. Of the 81 heteronyms created by Pessoa, three heteronyms were central to his writings. They were, Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis & Alvaro de Campos. "Introduction", Selected Poems: Fernando Pessoa & Co. Edited and Translated by Richard Zenith.

3) According to Dr Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro, Head of the Department of Development Studies at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad, the Udasi Panth priests preached the Sikh doctrine which in turn led to the Nanakpanth sect which is a blend of Hindu and Sikh religions. In the last 10 to 15 years, new Gurdwara Sahibs have been built in every district and major towns of North Sindh, Pakistan. These Gurdwara Sahibs are run by Nanakpanthi Hindus. The congregation and Keertaniyas and Granthi are all Nanakpanthis and they celebrate with great fervor, the birthday's of each of the ten Sikh Gurus. (Taken from "Sindhi Hindus & Nanakpanthis in Pakistan," by Inderjeet Singh. Abstracts of Sikh Studies, Vol XIX, Issue 4. p. 38-39.)

4) Nanak's Poetic Oeuvre: Five long poems and several short poetic compositions (over 900): The Japji, composed by the poet when he was in a state of deep spiritual inebriation, is a theological composition. It is a summation of Nanak's spiritual vision – his insights into the Niraakaar, the cosmos that is His Creation, and the laws that determine and sustain its business. The Dakhni Omkar and the Siddha Goshti on the same lines enter into theological debate as they critically expose the futility of ritual and the corruption of intent that has seeped into the folds of Brahmin community and the yogic orders of the Siddhas and the Nath yogis. Over and above these are the shorter poems written in the form of Vars – ballads of love and war, the Prabhatis - hymns composed to be sung in the morning, the Allahnian which are closer to the English elegy and the Ghorian – lyrics that are usually sung during celebrations and weddings. Other short forms include, the Sodar (doorstep/ threshold poems), Wanjare (poems if the gypsies and vagabonds), the Pahare and Birhaarasa - poems inspired by ordinary life and poems of lament respectively. *Bhakti Poetry in Medieval India*, 2004, by Neeti Sadarangani.

5) Saguna Bhakti: The term Saguna means that which is equipped with physical and material attributes. The gods at the helm of the Saguna bhakti were the two major

gods of the Indian pantheon – 1) Lord Vishnu/ Krishna, 2) Lord Shiva/ Mahadev. And thus there were two streams to Saguna Bhakti – Vaishnav bhakti and Shaiva bhakti – alternately known as Vaishnavism and Shaivism. While Vishnu as Lord Krishna is the prince in hiding, flute playing cowherd charmer and god, Shiva is the great young sage in the Himalayas, seeped in deep penance, chaste and powerful – an Adi-yogi, husband of Sati/ Durga and one who has mastered the elements of esoteric knowledge. Both the gods formed the two schools of Saguna bhakti. Taken from *Bhakti Poetry in Medieval India*, 2004, by Neeti Sadarangani.

6) Punjabi: The language spoken by the natives of Punjab – a variation of the old apabrahmsa dialect. Nanak is the first major poet of Punjabi literature. He is also known as the father of Punjabi poetry. The Punjabi script (the Gurmukhi) was formalised by Guru Nanak.

7) Sufi Dervishes are sufi saints.

8) Mechtild of Magdeburg, was a thirteenth century German Christian seer and poetess, who defines the mystic as one who empties him/ her-self of his sense of self, and so becomes nothing that can contain everything. Following the example of Jesus of Nazareth, who was a penniless itinerant teacher, Christian mystics have sought to transcend the personal self through the cultivation of a 'devout humility.' 'Christian mystics have often been hermits living a simple, reclusive life of prayer and prayer in its highest stages is but a silent meditation and communion with the divine. In the words of Meister Eckhart (a Christian mystic), "the inward man is not at all in time or place, but purely and simply in eternity." "Spiritual knowledge is available to the mystic in proportion to his freedom from self-importance and limited personal preoccupations which bind him to his separate self." (91) *The Complete Guide to World Mysticism*. Eds. Freke & Gandy.

9) Paganism represents a wide variety of traditions that emphasize reverence for nature and a revival of ancient polytheistic and animistic religious practices. Some modern forms of Paganism have their roots in 19th century C.E. European nationalism (including the British Order of Druids), but most contemporary Pagan groups trace their immediate organizational roots to the 1960s, and have an emphasis on archetypal psychology and a spiritual interest in nature. Paganism is not a traditional religion per se because it does not have any official doctrine, but it does have some common characteristics joining the great variety of traditions. One of the common beliefs is the divine presence in nature and the reverence of the natural order in life. Spiritual growth is related to the cycles of the Earth and great emphasis is placed on ecological concerns. Monotheism is almost universally rejected within Paganism and most Pagan traditions are particularly interested in the revival of ancient polytheist religious traditions including the Norse (northern Europe) and Celtic (Britain) traditions. Wikipedia

10) St. Dionysius was a contemporary of St. Paul (author of the New Testament), and his works are treated by Christian mystics with the same veneration as the biblical writings. Dionysius's writings are a subtle marriage of Mystery School mysticism and Christianity. *The Complete Guide to World Mysticism*. Eds. Freke & Gandy

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Virtual Reality, Cyberspace and Adolescent Dissipation: A Close Reading of Kirsten Krauth's *Just a Girl*

Ketaki Datta

Just a Girl is a novel by Kirsten Krauth, an Australian writer, who has won popular attention with it. This novel starts off on a usual, much-trendy note, where the craze of social media is portrayed through a fourteen-year-old girl, Layla, who keeps on going out for meeting up new friends, especially men, with whom she strikes friendship in the virtual world. Sometimes she goes overboard to think aloud, "He's not bad enough to make me run away. But he's older than I thought. Old enough to be my…maybe" (1). It is a bit daring of a wisp of a girl of fourteen to think in this vein and that too, with a man who is not just handsome, but, old enough to be a doting parent to her. Is it just making friends on the social media as we all to some extent do or something even more perilous, sending potential threats to the security of the individual, especially when she is a girl of a tender age and un-mellowed sensibilities?

An online review (Goodreads) says, "*Just a Girl* is a novel about being isolated and searching for a sense of connection, faith, friendship and healing, and explores what it's like to grow up negotiating the digital world of facebook, webcams, internet porn, mobile phones and cyber bullying- a world where the line between public and private is increasingly being eroded." It is quite interesting to note, how the virtual world takes on the real existence of a little girl, who grows up abruptly because of her regular access to the computer. Though her "mum says she needs to focus more on the here and now" (5), and, she decides to dance at the school social, mingle with her friends and even to have occasional flings with boy-mates. But, where would the child in her go? Hence, she also indulges in asking her mother foolish queries, while taken away to a museum:

> Would a tyrannosaurus eat a stegosaurus?
> Why are trees different colours of green?
> How do you know god really lives in the sky?
> Can you find gold if you crush up rocks?
> If there was a drought forever would we all die? (7)

How can such a child-like girl change into an abruptly-grown-up sporty adolescent who is somewhat strange at her age? Perhaps, the call of virtual world can hardly be denied by her. She looks up to this world of many shades

with interest, may be, to ward off her loneliness or a sense of insecurity as her father walked out on her mother, leaving them in the lurch. She doubts her mother having an affair with the pastor in the local church and she, too, thinks of finding comfort and shelter in the lap of virtual reality, a world she can explore on her computer. Her loneliness is writ large on her face and she recounts, "On Christmas day it's always just me, mum and Rusty. On the verandah, in Spingwood. Sometimes I wish she had some friends. Or family who'd want to drop by. But since Auntie Jeannie died, there had been nobody" (7-8).

Though, the world of virtual reality for 14-year-old Layla is for making a foray into the world of men and pleasure, the child in her stays in two minds listening to the dictates of her mother and flouting them, at the same time. Layla disgruntles,

> Mum's not happy that I've been going out with Davo. She's never had that little talk to me about sex. But I know that's what it's about.… My mum's just not touchy feely. She doesn't even really like being cuddled. When I used to try as a kid she went stiff. Her face smiled but her body said no. But I know a lot more than she thinks. I've seen it all on the internet…. Mum told me never to trust a man. Who doesn't look you in the eye. ..But a lot of sleazes give you heaps of eye contact. (25-27)

After all, Layla still nurtures a fairy-tale image of a lover and a beloved. The world of internet may win her male-partners but not a true lover. She still fantasizes of a true lover, who would pen romantic billet-doux for her. So on her birthday, apart from expecting a birthday present, she says, "What I've always wanted from a guy is a love-letter. Not an email but actual words down on paper. A romantic sentence that's just about him and me. But Davo's not a love-letter kind of guy" (14-15).

In the age of internet, the virtual reality sometimes tends to obliterate the physical distance between the friends and they often meet up, without any prior information about each other. It leaves room for charm, and there are chances of dreadful conclusion too. Aleks Krotoski in his celebrated book, *Untangling the Web: What the Internet is Doing to You* writes,

> A virtual lover is so much more attractive because the blanks can be filled in according to what you want to believe, and if something turns up that doesn't match the fantasy, the online affair can be

> turned off with the click of a button. There's a big difference now in the age of the internet. Our romances aren't curated by human matchmakers, but algorithms, and we're falling in love via machine, not via candlelight…But by letting the machine do this for us, we may be ignoring the possibilities that the web uniquely offers, not to mention the fact that it also has the potential to divide us, rather than bring us together. (107-8)

Thus, Layla's scope for altering her mates she made on the internet was quite wide and varied. This, of course has a deadly impact on her getting used to meeting up this man in the morning and that bloke in the afternoon, quite indiscriminately. The adolescents of this era, are smart enough to start dating at such a tender age that it becomes detrimental to the society very often. In fact, since the last twenty-five years, since internet made a foray into almost all nooks and crannies of the globe, scrounging a 'global village' out of it, especially the youngsters are keen on making the most of it.

Layla, a girl of impressionable age is vulnerable to any kind of emotional entanglement, the internet might offer and she enjoys it too. As an adolescent of modern times, Layla should use the social media as an open platform for making friends but daring out to meet them or spend hours with them in a hotel room can be dicey, risk-involving ventures. But, fighting off her solitary confinement in a fatherless ambience, she gets desperate enough to try out any relationship that comes her way. This is, no doubt, one aspect of Layla's using the internet. The other aspect is absolutely innocuous and common. She uses the internet for research purposes too. That is laudable, but, a little guidance to her understanding of the figures she was researching on would come handy. To quote directly from the book:

> I google *girls+guns.* And I click through to YouTube and come across this video. It's a woman who's been in prison. Since she was 18. Now she's on some talk show. She says she was raped by the guards. She has recently been let back into society. And the audience boos her when she comes on stage. But I feel really sorry for her. Because she has this beautiful long and shiny brown hair. Doesn't look like someone who's been in prison at all. So it turns out she's known as Long Island Lolita. I've heard about this book called *Lolita.* Lolita must be the name you call a girl in trouble. So I thought I'd tell her story to my class. (Krauth 31-32)

Layla's generalization of the name 'Lolita' needed some proper guidance to who she was and how Nabokov intended her to appear. Her foray into the world of internet was not just for making friends but also for some honest intents and purposes. Another aspect of her use of internet leads her to precocity in her snide remarks on her mother's behavior, especially when her mother wants her to stop spending too many hours in front of the computer. She could guess her mother's train of thoughts while she herself chanced upon all covert matters related to sexual union. Being a girl of fourteen, imagining her mother's inner thoughts is nothing but a serious offence on her part. Times are changing and so are the norms of behavior of the adolescents. And, in the age of virtual reality, no set rules of behaviour are tenable in case of the young adolescents like Layla.

The world of reality and virtual reality run hand-in-hand in *Just a Girl*. Layla's introduction to the readers starts off with her mention of a guy who was 'formerly known as *youami33'*. This pastime of making friends on a social networking site and going out to meet him, on a train or elsewhere, keeps her busy. The detrimental aspect of it could not be felt by her immediately. Thus, she got to know Davo, almost her age or a little older. But, Layla did not stop at him. At Newcastle, she did not even bother to snatch a small-time fling even with a cab-driver. She was so engrossed in the world of virtual reality that she did not even fumble when asking the cabbie, "Have you ever been to Google Earth on the World Wide Web?" to the cabbie, the words sounded like Latin and Greek (109).

She enjoys the company of men and loves dating them and hates her mum keeping an eye on her. At the tender age of twelve, she feels she can easily be judgmental about everything her 'mum' tries to impose on her. For example, when she says that over the past couple of years, her 'mum' had not given her anything more than just a few knick-knacks, which had a shrewd motive of boosting up her morals: "An interactive board game about the life of Jesus (which we played once and she annihilated me, of course); novels cunningly disguised as being about teenage girls on the eve of destruction through drugs and sex (cool) who then are redeemed by following the true path of god almighty (gag); and a CD of top ten Riverlay hits even though I don't go to church any more." (9)

Layla's mother had broken down after she was left in the lurch by her father. In her soliloquy, she confides in the readers:

> *I pray the Lord is proud of me because it's my first time in nine years without antidepressants, and I know I can do it, I'm doing a self-help workshop with Pastor Bevan at Riverlay, and it's the right time to attempt it because I don't have any streets right now, you know, it's school holidays and my clients are a bit on the quiet side , and it's a new year and all, can't believe we've arrived here already, 2008, and I'm trying to stay focused and keep up with how my mind works and use the Power of Now, so I'm asking the Lord for the strength to get through this and find my way back, because whie the drugs have evened me out, a lot of thepast feels a bit foggy and I'm worried that my memories are slipping away from me, like wet little fish through my fingers, but I have faith that this is a new beginning for me and for my daughter, a chance to wash away those fears, and I need to get up to check on Layla because she creeps around and comes and goes, and I'm noticing that with no meds I get more anxious about her whereabouts and what she's doing, but I'm watching , and I'm starting to feel angry and upset at being out of the loop.* (11)

In order to flout all norms of a normal existence, Layla had taken recourse to the world of virtual reality to get an added pleasure of life. Though, from her real lover, she expects nothing 'virtual' but all 'real and tangible'. Layla, naturally being bitten by a bug of promiscuity, sells her heart to Tadashi, another man, and then another, someone else again in search of mental satiety as well as physical. Her tender age had not left much room for reason and logic, and hence, physical urge and its immediate gratification became her sole aim. Internet helped her come in contact with new contacts and these were based on extracting immediate gratification and were flimsy, fake relationships, which stayed based on the bond of physique only. But, what exactly drew her to men, she picked up from the social sites? This game of random pick and choose, no doubt, reflects the psychology of the lonely adolescents, being reared up by a single parent. Yet, it also acts a pointer to the hyper-real presence of man's world reflected in the psyche of the adolescent damsel. This nest-leaving tendency among the young adults in the West, has categorically been analyzed by Frances K. Goldscheider and Calvin Goldscheider in the jointly-composed essay "Family Structure and Conflict: Nest-Leaving Expectations of the Young Adults and their Parents" who write,

> The family environment where children are raised is also likely to influence choices about living arrangement. Disrupted and newly-blended families may foster preferences for children's earlier residential independence, compared with persons living in more stable, nuclear families…. Persons in one-parent households or those in families with a stepparent should have higher expectations for PRI [Premarital Residential Independence] than those in other families. (89)

It is really applicable to the family of Layla. But Layla was not that mature to go for premarital residential independence. She, at the most loved to indulge in promiscuous flings, one after another, like a precocious girl of her age. This world of virtual reality is no stranger to the adolescents of today. They find refuge from the world fragmented in smithereens and play with their own demands and tastes in their specific fashion. Through Facebook, she gets to know Tadashi, a Japanese guy, who she meets often on the train to school, but, he appears quite vibrant on the social site than on his interaction in person. Layla writes,

> He visits me on Facebook and asks to be my Friend. He has a question mark where his face should be. We start to chat online… I can tell by his rhythms. I've heard them enough. Projecting his voice…. We talk about music and TV and shopping. I type so fast it's hard for him to get a word in. Boys my age can keep up. But he cares about spelling. About getting the emphasis right. And I kind of like that. So I change tactics. I sit and wait for him on the other end. While he sorts out his words for me. But I don't think so much about what I type. I want to impress him but not that much. (61)

When Layla gets a laptop from her dad, she goes crazy online and tries nasty tricks to impress prospective guys, much older than her. Automatically, we are being invited into the word of simulation, which tries to make virtual and the real more permeable to each other, 'hyper-real' grabbing the space of the 'real', outshining the other. She tries to build a community, comprising young men, she loved to be with, virtually, and if possible, really. Sherry Turkle in her interesting book, *Life on the Screen* opines, "We are moving from a modernist culture of calculation toward a postmodernist culture of simulation" (20). Layla really thinks on the internet, dates on the internet, makes love on the internet, and, lives by the internet. For her, the virtual and the real existence change places.

Turkle cogently argues, "if the politics of virtuality means democracy online and apathy off-line, there is reason for concern" (244). While commenting upon the significance of permeability of virtuality and reality, Turkle in an article in *American Prospect* suggests, "We don't have to reject life on the screen, but we don't have to treat it as an alternative life either … Having literally written our online worlds into existence, we can use the communities we build inside our machines to improve the ones outside of them" ("Virtuality" 57). For Turkle, the culture of simulation "may help us achieve a vision of a multiple but integrated identity whose flexibility, resilience, and capacity for joy comes from having access to our many selves" (*Life on the Screen* 268). James Slevin writes, "For Turkle, virtuality is to be understood as a transitional space that can be put in the service of the embodied self" (105). For Layla, it is something more. It is a way of life. It is an escape into a world of charm, a world of adventure, altogether. The adolescents of today, especially, those who are alone, having a single parent or the relationship between the parents soured, fall back on the world of virtual reality in search of friends and solace. It may be a mode of staying connected with a wider world, to fight off the sense of loneliness or insecurity. Aleks Krotoski comments quite relevantly,

How is the web affecting what they think or do? You can see this most clearly in the group that's going through the biggest social change: adolescents…. Pre- to late- teenage kids get their culture, gossip and attitudes from Google and Facebook. They, more than anyone else, are constantly on, constantly showing off and constantly connected…. Do they really think filming their mates slapping strangers and then putting the videos up on YouTube is hilarious? Are they really sexting like hormone-fuelled…. well, teenagers? Is everyone a cyberbully, or being cyberbullied?.... Youth culture, on the surface dominated by musical tastes, slang, fashion and objectionable hairstyles, is nothing but part of growing up. It's about expressing yourself, becoming part of a tribe, making your mark. It's about defining yourself as separate from your parents and everything that's ever come before, ever. It's also about finding out where the boundaries of social acceptability lie. It's usually about reinventing the wheel. (81-82)

For Layla, virtual reality had a specific meaning, for Tadashi the world of make-believe had some other meaning. For him, it is to trawl the internet in quest of support networks in the form of online clubs or the ilk. He had found Mika, his doll-friend, he still needs in his twenties to fall back on, in hours of craving for togetherness. He came in touch online with Orient Industry, the

'official supplier of love-dolls and the rest is only silence and togetherness. He wanted Layla to be his soul-mate, but, later he understood that save occasional meetings in the train, nothing substantial would result. He thought about Layla, the girl on the train, but, he loved Mika, who "wouldn't argue over small things, wouldn't try to impose herself" (Krauth 157).

Though Layla ventured out with total strangers, on the train or elsewhere, Davo her boyfriend kept vigil on her surreptitious movements. Davo intrudes upon her privacy even and she relates an incidence,

> Davo grabs my laptop and starts scrolling through my inbox. Through my Marco's and Mr. C's.
>
> - What's his name? Show me.
> - We chatted on the web. I don't even have his email.
>
> Davo tears the printer and internet cables out. I wait for him to throw the laptop but he just walks…. (159)

And, traversing through the infatuated links with Davo, Mr. C (Pastor Bevan, in reality, who happened to be her mother's heartthrob), Layla had to settle down with Marco, in the long run. Her mum got the shock of her life when she found Pastor Bevan waiting for her daughter in her bedchamber. And, Tadashi remained referred to as 'the man on the train', and, he had his Mika to turn to in his hours of distress as ever. Why then Layla had been wooed by the lure of the internet, the hyper-real? No doubt, the young adults are restless, unfocused, impulsive and indecisive. But once the things start falling in places, the reality outruns virtual reality, they come out of make-believe chimera and accept the reality—hardcore and unalloyed.

In conclusion, it is interesting to point out that, this novel has a reversion back to 'real', though, 'loss of the real' was about to leave all relationships topsy-turvy. Let me quote from Chris Snipp-Walmsley's famous essay titled "Postmodernism":

> In the age of the hyperreal, the image dominates, the 'normal' relationships are turned on their head. Simulacra [a term Baudrillard uses which not only refers to representation, but carries with it a sense of the fake, the counterfeit] pervade every level of our existence, and we cannot escape from them or express ourselves in terms other than through the codes which saturate us…. Through internet chat-rooms and discussion groups, we can create and remould

> our virtual selves, promoting an image that frequently has little basis in reality; through twenty-four-hour news services we are bombarded with information to the point where the representation becomes more important than the events being represented. Every social role we adopt has, to a certain degree, already been pre-coded to such an extent that there is no possibility of breaking free from the matrix of representations into a genuine, personal response. (412-413)

No doubt, *Just a Girl* ends on a positive note, though with multiple tortuous bends and turns. The postmodern criterion has been successfully flouted by its desired return to 'real'. At the end, the novel leaves the reader happy, seeing poetic justice established, at long last.

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Fantasy and Historiography: Dymystifying Cromwell

Ranjita Pati

Thomas Cromwell, ancestor of Oliver Cromwell, has received scant attention from the readers and researchers alike. Son of an abusive blacksmith, he rose to power under the rule of King Henry VIII, by dint of sheer hard work, intelligence and cunning. Hilary Mantel in her Booker Prize winning books *Bring Up the Bodies* (BUTB) and *Woolf Hall*, reimagines a historio-biographical portrait of this brilliant, persuasive path breaker who achieved feats that sowed the seeds of the modern world and changed the history of England forever.

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" writes Karl Marx (*The Communist Manifesto*, 79). The literary artist dealing with history treats the subject as one of power struggle that leaves its imprint on all artistic productions of that time. He creatively presents a time and a state under transformation. The Marxist critic George Lukács also argues that a literary work, especially writing of a novel, necessitates holistic representation of a time with all its "inherent contradictions, tensions and conflicts" (*Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 493). And history bears proof of the machination of time. The dominant power, as scholars like George Lukács & Antonio Gramsci suggest, seeks to homogenize the diverse and discrete voices of resistance. Power attempts to unify the polyphonic voices of dissent to serve its own goal.

Histories are concerned with rebellion, conspiracy and war. The idea of fate is, of course, present, with historic expiation and retribution. The turbulence of spirit makes a character dangerous and they leave the imprint of their mind on political order. Therefore, the studies in loyalty and treachery are not the outcome of psychological makeup of a character but rather of historical imprint. History is more than chronicled events, or an offshoot of economic and political causes. It is interesting to study how the "pattern" is sustained in the action of characters. The primary activity of a character is apprehended as shaping or mis-shaping a political order. He cannot be projected as possessing any private emotion. These emotions are translated through imagery which plays an important part in determining in what world, and in what manner, those emotions are felt. It is imagery which finds the equivalents for emotions in the world of public and political behavior, and so this emotion takes a relevant part in our imaginative apprehension of the political order.

> History and Literature differ in their empirical and imaginative uses of language. History is primarily a discourse of the given and the known. Whereas literature combines this knowledge into frescoes of an ideational contention the basis of structured flights of imagination. (Charu Sheel Singh, 39)

Literature seeks to plumb the depth of history to record the trajectory of a man's fortune/ evolving identity. People constantly try to delimit themselves to construct an identity. Novels hold mirror to the violent political upheaval and man's role in it. The novels of Hilary Mantel encapsulate Cromwell's personal agenda. Mantel uses the novel form to imaginatively reconstruct the past. Her novels can be read as an attempt to read the Gramscian notion of organic intellectual. For Gramsci, social change could not be brought by an elite group but by intellectuals that emerge organically from the working class, who articulate the feelings and experience of the masses.

The present paper deals with the actions and emotions of Thomas Cromwell. It is a gripping tale of Tudor England where the king Henry VIII and his courtiers come alive through the creative imagination of the writer, Hilary Mantel. *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, these two Man Booker Prize winning historical novels present a "speaking picture, an audacious vision of Tudor England…" (BUTB, Blurb). By an artistic amalgamation of history, biography and politics Mantel brings out the class-struggle of that era and also shows how Cromwell, the kingpin, rose from a mere blacksmith's boy to becoming the most powerful man of England. In presenting the story of Thomas Cromwell, Mantel creates a complex and intertextual connection between history, historiography and a bloody struggle for power. It reflects the disillusionment of the populace vis-a-vis the political ambition of the protagonist; while unknown to all, King Henry VIII had his own vicious, greedy personal and political agenda.

The purpose of the paper is to examine how history has been appropriated and utilised in the production of these literary works and "attempt a serious study of the relationship between personal fortunes and social conflicts..." (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 155). So I shall view the socio-political contexts in which the novels are implicated- the multifaceted Cromwell- and the imaginative recreation of historiography.

These two novels of Hilary Mantel are the story of love for power and power struggle set against a very turbulent time of British history. Set in the Tudor England, it covers a time-span of about three years (1533 to 1536), from

Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn to her execution and then the king's third of the six marriages. Presented as biography of Thomas Cromwell, it bears testimony to Henry VIII's (mis)rule, his selfishness and cruelty, and Cromwell's aspiration for power and pelf. The famous Sir Thomas More succinctly summarises Cromwell's character, "... lock Cromwell in a deep dungeon in the morning, and when you come back that night he'll be sitting in a plush cushion eating lark's tongues, and all the gaolers will owe him money" (*Wolf Hall*, 605).

The early stage of Henry's reign was dominated by Cardinal Wolsey, the Lord Chancellor, and his endeavor to raise England's position in European politics. But when he opposed the idea of the king's divorce to Katherine, as it was against Catholic religious belief, and also because the Emperor of Spain, Charles V was her nephew, he was sentenced for imprisonment and later execution, though he died before that. Cromwell, Woolsey's protégé, accepted his advice and blindly supported the king in his entire mission, though he nursed a grudge against Wolsey's enemies. These novels deal with the power struggle of the time; and also with the rise and fall of Anne Boleyn. The reading is engaging as "the circumstances surrounding the fall of Anne Boleyn have been controversial for centuries. The evidence is complex and sometimes contradictory..." (Author's Note, BUTB, 409). The king went to great length to marry Anne. He deserted his wife, broke up with Roman Church and incurred the wrath of the emperor of Spain. But he soon fell out of love with her.

It is said that the cruelest of rulers give us the most dynamic and fruitful development, and it is proved by the many far-reaching changes in the religious and political domain brought on by the king, stemming of course, from his greed and selfish interest. The first book, *Wolf Hall*, which won the 2009 Man Booker Prize covers the period of the King's wooing to execution of Anne Boleyn. It bears testimony to Cromwell's growing power and riches. The king's interest in Jane Seymore and ultimately making her his third wife, immediately after Anne's beheading, sums up the story of the second book – *Bring Up the Bodies*. In between the novels there were other events like the setting up of the Church of England, translation and introduction of the English Bible in these Churches, the plunder of monasteries, and cessation of England from the Papacy, overall the emergence of England from the barbarism of the Middle Ages to a modern world. The novels seek to examine some of the vital issues of the day, along with the inner workings of the protagonist. The political issues surround Henry VIII's many marriages, his need for money and absolute power over the

parliament. The personal issues are Cromwell's desire for accumulation of power and wealth. But his inner world cried out for revenge on all those who were responsible for the fall of Wolsey- the person Cromwell loved and adored. And the writer tries to reconstruct the past from Cromwell's stand point.

The ideological point can be reconstituted from Marxist philosophy. The Marxist critics define class struggle as the fulcrum of history and its social factors. Marxist criticism has been devoted to the reconstruction of the past on the basis of historical evidence to underscore the similitude of representation of any given time. The "reflection" theory of the Hungarian Marxist philosopher George Lukács, problematises literary works to unravel the social system of a given time. In his view, "the novel … revealed or ought to reveal underlying patterns of the social order and provide a sense of the wholeness of existence with all its inherent contradictions, tensions and conflicts" (*Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 493). And the well read, brilliant Thomas Cromwell, one who was instrumental in bringing sweeping changes in Henry VIII's England, would have argued, had it existed then, that he was only dealing with the "reflection" theory. Hilary Mantel's novels endeavour to sketch the biography of this charismatic, least researched persona.

The origin of biography can be traced to the Old Testament, in the accounts of monarchs or heroes. However, the Roman historians Plutarch, Tacious and Suetonius were pioneers of the form. Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (1st cent. AD) proved an important source of plots for many plays of Shakespeare. It was in the 18th century that Johnson's *Lives of Poets* and Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791) decided the course of biography. In the mid-Victorian age prudery enforced restriction on writing, so the writings were glozed to lend respectability to the work. Biography takes on mythic proportion that impacts the community's shared story. The biography manifests into the story of community, as well as the individual. It relies on a balance of presenting facts and interpreting the meaning of events. These two novels of Mantel exemplify biography of a person and a movement. These novels vividly portray a socio-political upheaval through the life story of Thomas Cromwell. The novelist reimagines and reinvents a Cromwell that unfolds hitherto untraded vista of history.

Set in the pre-modern era of Henry VIII, the story moves around the shrewd, manipulative, vengeful Thomas Cromwell and his rapid ascendance to power mainly due to the teachings of his harrowing childhood and the last words of his mentor Wolsey. Presented as biography, the story plunges one into

the whirlpool of romance, crime and punishment. The narration eschews panegyric and euphemism and by using interior monologue, psycho narration and dialogue presents the life and time of Cromwell since his childhood to his role in the third marriage of the king. “Son of a brutal blacksmith, a political genius, a briber, a bully and charmer...Cromwell has broken all rules of a rigid society in his rise to power,...” (Blurb). During his childhood he had run away from home to get rid of his abusive father. Later he visited many countries in his struggle for survival. On the way he picks up many trades and learns many customs to ultimately land up with Cardinal Woolsey where he learns polish, politicking and the art of panegyrics. Though Woolsey himself was rigid in his views in aiding the king in his desire to divorce his first wife Katherine, as per Christian rule, his last words taught Cromwell that pleasing the king should be his motto.

British history, during this time was ridden with multitudinous problems. The king, Henry VIII, a self-seeking, cruel and a philanderer initially was disillusioned by his first wife Katherine because she failed to provide a male heir and had made many rules to marry Anne Boleyn. Anne Boleyn’s beauty, brain and above all her sexual acrobatics, kept him enthralled. But like Katherine she also failed to provide him a male heir. Also her sexual prowess made him feel emasculated and he asks Cromwell seemingly innocently, “Cromwell, what does it mean, when a woman turns herself about and about in the bed? Offering herself this way and that? What would put it into her head to do such a thing?” (BUTB, 290). Two things are to be noted here, the cool tone of the king revealing his most secret activities with the queen to Cromwell; and Cromwell taking the side of the king for his trust in him, and turning the situation to his advantage.

Moreover the king was already captivated by Jane’s docility and plainness and starts imagining a more dominant role as a lover. Cromwell shrewdly watches, observes and deduces the situation and helps the king marry Jane by eliminating Anne Boleyn. Behind this was the vested personal agenda of taking revenge on Anne for being instrumental in the death of Woolsey and also fear of her wit and power. The brain and brawn he had are utilized for the growth of his and the king’s coffer. In return he climbs the social ladder and becomes the closest confidante of the king and at the same time distancing him from the others. He confesses his trouble to his nephew, Richard Cromwell: “... How many men can say, as I must, I am a man whose only friend is the king of England? I have everything you would think. And yet take Henry away and I have nothing” (BUTB, 176). Such was the sad situation of the most diplomatic

man of that age. But not for a moment Cromwell forgets the Damocles' sword hanging over his head, as "he is not one to boast of a coolness no reasonable man would possess. Henry could, at any moment, gesture to the guards; he could find himself with cold metal at his ribs, and his day done" (BUTB, 232). As history stands testimony this premonition of Cromwell would come true. Only three years after the death of Anne Boleyn, Cromwell would face the axe. But as things stand now he is enjoying the power and pelf of the King's proximity and is instrumental in the epoch making changes that sweeps through England.

A lot of research has gone into the writing of these books. And through the imaginative and artistic pen of Hilary Mantel, Cromwell's time comes alive for us. But one cannot claim it to be a factual representation of history, though it provides us a gripping tale of political saga. As Pasupati Jha writes:

> ...when history itself is a record of half-truths cherished through centuries, it is fully justified then if a historical novel applies historical facts in modified, artistically transformed way.... truth in this case is confined to creating the verisimilitude of history; a history novel is not history but literature, and creative art has its own needs and compulsions. (Das, B. K.,ed, 58)

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The Personal Forever at War with the Public – A Study of the Patient(s) in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

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If one does not care to notice the dominant practices that contribute to the formation of the public, one is likely to offer resistance in order to rescue the personal. Those who intend to lead their life to fulfill basic necessities allow themselves to fall prey to some greater design (read disease). In the absence of any alternative, the personal reluctantly lends itself to be the part of the public, but the personal drag, howsoever infinitesimal, is potent enough to cause misalignment. If the public is construed after some structured system, then the personal can be held responsible for the misalignment. But when the public is supposed to be there due to some metaphysics, then the personal is expected to be steadfast to the metaphysics in fashion. And in so doing the personal adapts to living with an absence of ease (disease). The notion of disease is in itself a complex and enigmatic phenomenon. It is a condition one suffers from, a state one craves for, a temper one may fake, a mood one rehearses, a frenzy that catches unaware, a panic that sets on, and a resignation to what surrounds. Depending on the nature of disease, a patient must toil to acquire patience. The more one tries to understand it, the more one faces impasse. Solving this riddle is like sphinx's thread that leads nowhere. Even when the term is well assumed and regularly used in fiction and reality, no one has defined it once and for all. Victor J. Schoenbach writes in "The Phenomena of Disease" that general definitions of health and disease involve biological, sociological, political, and many other considerations. These are highly contextual, therefore, any present attempt to rely on any definition of disease must badly fail if we look at who defines it, when and in what conditions and of course for what people. One also has to keep in mind the pharmaceutical companies in the market, as B.M. Hegde argues in his article "Disease as Invention", that 'invent' diseases to run their business. Michel Foucault in his *Madness and Civilization*, from the European example, puts forth the theory of social construction of disease. According to him, disease carries with it the notion of social rejection and stigma. What is socially accepted – in terms of behavior, ability and action – is generally termed as normal. And anything that is deviant from it is labeled as abnormal, disability and disease. J.L. Scully in his article "What is disease?" calls disease

a historical term. What was considered divine punishment and thrown out of the town in the ancient times is considered a part of the civilization in the twentieth century. Therefore, "complete physical, social and mental wellbeing" (WHO, Preamble) is not possible as Rene Dubois in Man Adapting terms this definition a failure as "It [Health] cannot become a reality because man will never be perfectly adapted to his environment that his life will not involve struggles, failures and sufferings" (346).

This research paper attempts to explore how Michael Ondaatje in his novel *The English Patient* seems to question the notion of disease by focusing on clash between subjectivity of the characters and their objective national circumstances. The title of the novel suggests thematic presence of a disease. There are four major characters – Hana, a shell-shocked Canadian girl of twenty; the English patient, an anonymous man, burnt beyond recognition as Hana's Patient; Caravaggio, a thief-cum-spy whose thumbs are cut by the German army; and Kirpal Singh, an English sapper who "had given his trust only to stones" (110). But the author has given the tag "English Patient" only to Almasy, a map maker, who is completely burnt in the mid-air explosion in the novel. Since all the major characters are either mentally ill or physically disordered, it becomes pertinent to question the very title of the novel. Therefore, the paper attempts to analyze, after all, who the patient(s) or the English Patient is. Does the term in italics refer to 'of England' or any disease named 'English' just like dengue patient, TB patient? Does the author sketch the characters in mental illness only to present a critique of English Nationalism? The answer to this seems to lie in the impact of national circumstances such as war on the subjectivity of the characters, Hana's refusal to move out of the ruined villa Girolamo and of course, the behavioral patterns of the other major characters – Almasy, Kip and Caravaggio.

An emotional letter by Hana to Clara, her stepmother, who chose not to be part of war in any sense: " Though you, in spirit, I know are still a canoe. Still Independent. Still Private. Not a barge responsible for all around you"(310) gives in many ways clues about Hana's disintegreated self. 'Canoe' is a lightweighted boat used with peddles whereas 'Barge' is used for heavy transport pushed by towboats. By comparing Clara with canoe and most probably herself with barge, Hana wishes to express the loss of agency over her own personal wellbeing and her state of ease. It not only leaves her feel burdened with traumatic events she has no control over, but also brings out a clash in her mind

and body between what she looks for as a citizen of a warring nation and an indivdual being. She further writes: “from now on I believe the personal will forever be at war with the public” (311). It suggests that Hana has become aware that her mind, like that of million others, would be a space of eternal clash – clash between the personal interest and objective circumstances forced upon by the nation. For her, thenotions of madness and rationality depend upon how well one live with this clash.

All the characters are swayed by what is considered normal in the public– to die for a “greater good”- an expansionist policy of countries wrapped in the fake patriotism demanding loyalty from people at the cost of individual well-being. In the novel, the characters are innocent victims of English nationalism for their participation in its destructive motives, because it is against all forms of humanity and world peace contrary to individual wishes for these two things for their well-being. Nationalism divides people on the basis of superior – inferior, white – black, rich – poor etc. Hana, Caravaggio and Kip served the Allies during the World War II – Hana as nurse, Caravaggio as spy and Kip as sapper from India. All of these get allured in hope of some reward in the name of honor, glory, medals and permanent job. In the hope of these rewards, Hana joined after her boyfriend and father; Caravaggio joined because the Allies offered legitimacy to his otherwise shameful profession of a thief and Kip joined because he wanted to be *pakka* in the army.

In the beginning of the novel, Hana is presented as a ‘shell-shocked’ person. According to Dr. Charles Meyers as quoted in “Shell Shocked” by Edgar Jones, it is a “psychological casualty” and “an overt manifestation of repressed trauma” (n.p.) that people suffer in experience with the death and the dying. Hana was pregnant before she joined as a nurse in the WW II. She had thought it would only be temporary and she would soon join her boyfriend and marry him. But,

As the war grew, she received reports about how certain people she had known died. She feared the day she would remove blood from a patient‘s face and discover her father or someone who had served her food across a counter on Danforth Avenue. (Ondaatje 52)

She, a naïve mind, becomes vulnerable to the war trauma and loses her child in the womb while performing her duties as nurse. After the death of her child, she becomes cold to death and dying: “Hello buddy, good-bye buddy. Caring was brief” (53). The novel is not about war but about how the destructive

policies of a warring nation take away from its citizens the will to live and how innocent people become patients at the hands of a winning nation. Hana mourns at the loss of her innocence and her childhood. She is so much frightened by the dance of death that she cuts her hair that touch blood in a wound so that she has "nothing to link her, to lock her, to death" (52). She refuses to look into her image in the mirror for a year. Her repeated attempts to commit suicide by deliberately walking over supposedly mined area, playing piano and gardening with a furious passion "aware always of unexploded mines" suggests that she is mad and as she is living with a survivor's guilt, she wishes to die (45).Ondaatje makes her wish very clear when she says, "I wanted to die, and I thought if I was going to die I would die with you, someone like you, young as I am, I saw so many dying near me in the last year" (109).

Kirpal Singh alias Kip is also shell-shocked and hyper-anxious. Overtly, he does not show any signs of mental illness but Ondaatje observes, "He had given his trust only to stones, moving as close as possible against them in the darkness…he would place his head on the lap of such creature and release himself into sleep" (110). This disease naturally takes him over as he is a sapper by profession and his job is to clear landmines laid down by the enemy. But his cause of suffering is not just his being a sapper, but his being a sapper from the colony working for his colonizer. Throughout his training, he is treated as second rate citizen. Ondaatje exposes his wounds by commenting:

> In England he was ignored in the various barracks and he came to prefer that. The self-sufficiency and privacy Hana saw in him later were caused not just by his being a sapper in the ltalian Campaign. It was as much a result of being the anonymous member of another race, a part of invisible world. (209)

Kip, what he considers himself at the personal, is never acknowledged rather mocked and made fun of. Therefore, he could never trust Hana and the inhabitants of the ruined villa. His failed relationship with Hana and the English Empire is largely a consequence of distrust and inferiority with which he is made to live due to the nationalist policies of England. Like Hana, he too thought he was fighting for the greater good of civilizing the non-European nations. On the one hand, he comes to believe what was considered glorious in the public and on the other hand, his personal beliefs get bruised because of it. The western world never accepts him with his brownness and religious beliefs.

Moreover, the protagonist Count Almasy innocently becomes the victim of western nationalism as the reader learns from Caravaggio that Almasy's turmoil begins with the entry of Katherine in his life. He never knowsthat he has been put into a British trap as her husband Geoffrey Clinton was sent by the British Intelligence. This is confirmed by Caravaggio, "Geoffrey Clinton was with the British Intelligence, He was not just an innocent English-man, I'm afraid (267) ….You had become the enemy not when you sided with Germany but when you began your affair with Katherine Clifton" (270). Caravaggio, who was thief by profession, loses his thumbs as a prize for siding with the Allies. The causality he suffers at the hands of war is his confidence- "I've lost my nerve"(36) are the words he utters when Hana asks him to steal for survival in the villa. He does not come to the villa to mingle up with others but to have a space to hide his own condition in the dark. Ondaatje informs, "He feels more comfortable, more disguised from her in the dark garden" (41).

But the question remains how the characters approach the psychological illness that results from the awareness that they are infected with disease of English nationalism. The story begins with the sense of mental disharmony and Hana's refusal to leave the ruined Villa for the "safer place". Her decision to stay back in the villa Girolamo can be read as a reaction against callous nationalism and against people silently obeying its rules. She refuses to leave along with other nurses for safer place as she has nothing left to keep safe; "Coming out of what had happened to her during war, she drew her own few rules to herself. She would not be ordered again or carry out duties for greater good" (15). Her approach is to reason out her madness by quarantining herself as she painfully becomes aware how her body and mind has become a site of struggle between her individual happiness and selfish motives of elitist governments. And she questions, "Who the hell were we to be given this responsibility, expected to be wise as old priests, to know how to lead people towards something no one wanted … their vulgar rhetoric. How dare they!" (89). Kirpal Singh approaches the infection of nationalism a bit differently i.e. deeply cleansing the mind of everything English. He leaves the villa as well as his job. If Kip goes back to his country India, it is not that he reacts to one kind of nationalism to embrace freedom struggle of his own country rather he leaves everything English because his own faith Sikhism teaches him to work for the welfare of the entire humanity. In the moment of realization in Italy, Ondaatje makes it clear on the behalf of his character that "his name is Kirpal Singh, and he does not know what he is doing there" (305). Complete shedding of the

English is the only solution left for Kirpal Singh to decontaminate his mind and body. Caravaggio approaches the disease by numbing the psychological pain that results from it, Ondaatje writes, "he can return to no other world as he is, wearing these false limbs that morphine promises" (123). Almasy, the fourth major character, envelops himself in the past - an attempt to escape his present diseased condition.

From the above deliberations, one can aptly conclude that all the major characters – Hana, Kip, Caravaggio and Almasy – are patients and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder with varying degrees of symptoms such as suicidal tendency, hyper-vigilance, anxiety disorder, depression etc., all due to their affiliation to the English at various levels. They are unable to face the reality; they experience meaninglessness in present reality and therefore, hide in their own cocoons. Disintegration in the self caused by the objective circumstances in the form of war not only impacts their lives adversely but also changes their perspective on life. The novel presents a debate over the relationship of national and personal wellbeing. By becoming participants in the war, the characters realize how adversely they have been affected by the disease called English. This peculiar disease masquerading as honor, glory, a state of permanent bliss traps the characters, who once tempted, fail to break free of it.

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From Margin to Centre: A Study of *Gem of the Ocean*

Nakul and Renu

The centre-margin dynamics is perhaps as old as the history of human civilization and history of ideas are. From Indian Varna system to European Catholicism, Roman slavery to modern trans-Atlantic slavery, ancient and medieval political discourses to the 20th century, Cold War between the Capitalists and the Socialists, European Imperial powers to the colonized natives, everything had been permeated and shaped by the subtle and latent dynamics of centre-margin. But in the 1960s, the dynamics of centre-margin was configured and re-configured from diverse perspectives. The struggles of the African-Americans and other numerous minorities or marginal ethnics found allies in a diverse range of groups that claimed to wage a war against the politics of the centre: "the persistence, expansion and rearticulation of this discourse [of the margin] have been connected with the ongoing performance of a cultural and political critique from feminist, African-American, third-world, gay, lesbian, and other positions self-identified as marginal, or capable of being so regarded" (Crewe 121). And in Derrida's works, centre and margin became available as terms of a radical critique. His deconstructive procedures and proclivity offer the rhetorical strategies for the articulation of subversive discourse – directed against the metaphysical centrism or phallogocentrism of the Euro-American culture. His critique denuded "production in traditional Western discourse and from the putative centre – of a set of valorized oppositions in which the marginal term was always devalued" (Crewe 122). Derrida's methods were the logical culmination of a spate of great thinkers with radical ideas – 'Nietzschean critique of metaphysics', 'the critique of the concepts of Being and truth', 'the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is the critique of consciousness of the subject, of self-identity' and Heideggerean destruction of 'metaphysics, of onto-theology', of the determination of Being as presence. Derrida was later joined by a huge group of subversive thinkers who adopted his methods or developed their own strategies to fell the cultural and intellectual premises of the Euro-American centrism. Lyotard declared this move as the "incredulity towards the metanarratives." These metanarratives had been functioning as the universal yardsticks or parameters of normalcy, validity, truth and knowledge. Michel Foucault offers a commensurate subversive critique of the enlightenment and modernity, claims of reason and truth, strategies and methods of ordering the

apparently sublime, inchoate world in a specific, dominant discourse that, through the procedures of inclusion and exclusion, claim to validate and censor the aspects of human experiences. Lacan and Baudrillard nihilistically profess the groundlessness, play and floating as the only alternatives present in the postmodern world.

All these diverse waves and their proponents share a concern – liberation of the dispossessed people. They endeavor to dismantle the discourse of monologism that invalidates the experiences, interpretations, values, artistic and aesthetic concerns of the margin or other and disseminates the center's perspectives of the world as the truth. The Enlightened, Western, White, Cartesian individuals turned out to be the capitalistic agents who through epistemological violence turned the marginal others into passive hearers, receivers and recipients, inherently incapable of comprehending and plumbing the reality on their own. African-American community is one of these 'others' whose experiences of this centre have been a long saga of horror, violence, dispossession, deprivation and exploitation. And to achieve freedom in the real sense of the term, the dominant discourse has to be countered as much on socio-cultural front as much on literary-aesthetic front.

And among the diversity and polyphony of these voices of the margins, August Wilson has his own significant place. Wilson seems to carry and extend Larry Neal's project coded in these words: "A main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for Black people to define the world in their own terms. . . . We advocate a cultural revolution in art and aesthetics" (272-73). Through his Century Cycle, August Wilson offers an aesthetic statement on the politics and violence of the mainstream culture and sensitizes his audience towards the urgency and requirement of a redefinition that can be mutually inclusive, culturally tolerant, cathartically redemptive, intellectually enlightening and aesthetically pleasant. Wilson possesses a clinical insight into individual and cultural issues, and despite the cultural and aesthetic acrimony between American mainstream and African-American community, he weaves his project into an aesthetic medium that illuminates, enlightens and sensitizes people of all cultures irrespective of their color, class, creed or gender.

His plays are a strong critique of American racism. American Manichean aesthetics conceives African American people as the embodiment of all cultural and behavioural features that the mainstream derides. Consequently, blacks are treated like animals, bereft of any human emotions and feelings, lacking

social and moral virtues and without taste for higher and noble cultural pursuits. This derogatory image can be seen the way blacks are treated in the American society. His plays are full of incidents where blacks are treated like animals. *Gem of the Ocean*, set in 1905, also known as the Jewel of his plays, has a number of incidents where black people are depicted as having a hard time with the newly found Constitutional Emancipation. This play testifies the fact that without cultural reversal of normativity, the Constitutional Emancipation would remain elusive and unrealistic. Slavery was abolished in 1865. But in the post-Abolition era, whites became quite fierce in their desire to retain their slaves. It was likely to demolish their economy and shatter the southern plantation culture and their quasi-aristocratic life style. According to Mary Ellen Snodgrass, "Emancipation did little to free African Americans from ignorance, want, oppression, and fear, thus elongating the miseries of a marginalized non-white people" (185). Gunnar Myrdal also underlines this issue: "After the War and Emancipation, the race dogma was retained in the south as necessary to justify the caste system which succeeded slavery as the social organization of Negro-White relations" (90). Having been long debarred from any exposure to culture, education, public sector services and business, blacks didn't have any infrastructure to predicate their community. Nor could they hope to realize the Constitutional ideals of equality and American Dream in the southern states, as the decision of the abolition was taken by northern leadership, much to the dismay of southern senators and politicians who, mostly, happened to possess big plantations. It triggered a mass move towards the northern cities to seek job or other means of survival. There has to be a change in the way people see black people in America. In the opening scene, it is suggested how blacks had to escape to the north to avoid inhuman treatment in the agrarian south. Solly Two Kings, the suitor to Aunt Ester, receives a letter from his sister, Eliza Jackson, who lives in Alabama. It is worth quoting at large as it states the conditions of the blacks in the deep south:

> Dear, Solomon.
>
> I am writing to let you know the times are terrible here the most anybody remember since bondage. The people are having a hard time with freedom. . . . The White peoples is gone crazy and won't let anybody leave. They beat one fellow on the road so bad his mama say, 'Who is he?' They killed some more and say the colored can't but any tickets on the train to get away. Say they will sink the ferry if any colored on it. I want to leave to come North but it is too bad. (Wilson, *Gem of* 15)

The urgency, anxiety and the desperation of the tone of the letter is reflective of the grave repercussions of this northward movement at the turn of the 20th century. As the blacks reach north, they have to wander in the streets, facing hunger and bad weather without any accommodation. Since they don't have good education and professional training, they are not offered good jobs. They are not even given jobs involving crude physical labour. The mill, the symbol of the northern industrialized progressive civilization, exploits the blacks in multiple ways. It aggravates their emotional frustration and culminates into further disintegration of their very being. Daniel Patrick Moynihan underscores the significance of family in his report which was later published as a book also: "At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of Negro family" (qtd. in "The Negro Family"). Andrew Billingsley also marks the outgrowth of slavery in his study: ". . . the slavery system had a crippling effect on the establishment, maintenance, and growth of normal patterns of family life among Negro people . . . . This crippled the development not only of individual slaves, but of families, and hence of the whole society of Negro people" (qtd. in Willie 2). This black cultural and familial disintegration further mars the black people. With no family to soothe their anxieties and frustrations, they develop different and distinct measures of retaliation as the dominant regime forbids the shared and concerted measures. Citizen Barlow, when denied his wages, steals a bucket of nails. The mill owners, in the absence of any trace who committed this theft, charge another black, Garret Brown, with robbery, thus consolidating the popular image of a black man as a thief. But Brown, an honest man, drowns himself in the river to assert, "I'd rather die in truth than to live a lie" (Wilson, *Gem of* 47).

Wilson sees such circumstances as the dramatic sites on which the central conflict of his drama hinges. In the face of these situations, his characters resort to a variety of survival strategies. For example, Caesar Wilks, who has had his own share of torture, exploitation and systematic denial, decides to surrender his ethnic manhood, his self to the white people becoming a policeman who is used to keep "the niggers in place." He sees in the poor blacks coming from the south an opportunity to make money through his "magic loaf". He is quite vocal in his disgust towards fellow blacks. Schwalbe et. al. call such measures and strategies of the subordinate others as "defensive othering" or "intra-group othering": "Furthermore, intra-group othering allows the oppressed to present themselves as like the oppressors. By demonstrating that they share the same attitudes and disdain towards co-ethnics who fit with the

stereotypes, they attempt to join the dominant group" (qtd. in Pyke 557). This intra-othering, hatred and disgust for his own brethren to mark his distinction and difference sever his ties not only from his community but from his own family. When he kills Solly, his own sister, Black Mary, snaps all her ties from him. People like Caesar tend to forget that despite their behavioural sophistication and appeasing attitude towards whites, they will never be fully assimilated in the mainstream culture. His voluntary distancing from their own community has already closed the doors of true ethnic and humanistic connections for him.

In contrast to these assimilationists, Wilson's ouvre contains characters like Solly also. Wilson challenges the centre but he does it by making his drama a statement. And his statement upholds the African American experiences, values, traditions and rituals. It was something they learnt in America. Blacks had to develop their own networks to ferry the southern blacks to north. Popularly known as the Underground Railroad, it was "a network of secret routes and safe houses used by the 19th century enslaved people of African descent in the United States in efforts to escape to free states and Canada" ("Underground Railroad"). Both Eli and Solly Two Kings had been railroad conductors. Solly too had been a slave in the south. He recounts how he was kept in chains like so many other slaves, thus confirming their animal status who couldn't be trusted and left free. Solly was helped on his way by many people including the white Abolitionists. Dogs and Ku Klux Klan members and other chain gangs posed a great threat to black lives. Those who escaped the elimination had to undergo severe physical hardships and that was a price to be paid to get freedom: "I'd guard the rear. You had to fight a lot of times. I done been bit nine time by dogs" (Wilson, *Gem of* 60). But after facing all kinds of afflictions, when Solly reached Canada in 1857, he realized that individual liberty meant nothing so long as "my mama and all the other people still in bondage" (59). Solly's character represents those African-Americans who, without any training and weapons, developed this railroad and liberated and migrated large number of slaves from under the nose of the white dictators, thus, challenging and cancelling the prevailing slavery notion that blacks lack in intelligence, management and leadership skills,. Further, Wilson highlights the ethics of community, and cultural identity that tend to bind majority of black people. This black ethnicity puts the culture and community above self, thereby subverts the white capitalistic rhetoric that eulogizes the self. Consequently, for people like Solly, individual emancipation meant nothing so long as the fellow blacks remained shackled in the south.

Gem of the Ocean deals with the psychological and spiritual crisis faced

by the newly emancipated slaves moving towards north. Citizen Barlow suffers from guilt of causing the death of fellow black, Garret Brown, and seeks to "wash his soul" with the help of ageless and wise counsellor, Aunt Ester. This intention and act itself tend to be subversive since in those times, black churches were not allowed to hold confessions and offer pardons. The ways, methods, strategies that Aunt Ester adopts are quite bizarre and peculiar. She asks the seeker to either find pennies or throw away dollars in the river. She does this just to restore their faith in the ritual and in themselves. This throwing of property also implicitly denigrates the capitalistic ethics of mechanical accumulation. The rituals she performs seem to have the traces of Africanism, slavery, racism and emancipation all at the same time. She makes a boat of her "Bill of Sale" and uses it to ferry Barlow to "the City of Bones" an underground graveyard at the bottom of the Atlantic. These bones are of the people who couldn't make it to the Americas and drowned in the sea. This city has twelve gatekeepers, and Barlow's entry is ensured when he confesses his crime. At the end of the ritual, Citizen Barlow, "now reborn as man of the people, sits down and begins to cry" (Wilson, *Gem of* 73). Aunt Ester's mediation and elaboration is worth quoting here:

> AUNT ESTER. Them people you see got some powerful gods, Mr. Citizen. . . . They don't know to call him on their own. God don't answer to no one man. God answer to the all. All the people. They need all the people. . . . When we get to the City of Bones I'm gonna show you what happen when all the people call on God with the one voice. God got beautiful splendors. (Wilson, *Gem of* 69)

Here, the spirituality practiced and projected has quite explicit socio-cultural dynamics. Aunt Ester, as she claims to be 285 years old in 1904, thus was born in 1619, the year first ship came to America carrying the African people to Jamestown. As a trope, she is an embodiment of the experiences of African presence in America that facilitates, as a formidable matriarch and counsellor, the reconnection and redemption of the black people. This ritual, in it's cumulative and collective experience, necessitates and, thereby, prescribes the ethics of community. "The City of Bones" as the destination of visit and shrine for redemption corroborates the fact that Wilson's definition of African-Americans goes back to the time when the first slave ship embarked off the West African shore with slaves. Thus, only those figures who underwent through the ordeal of the middle passage and their descendants can subscribe to Wilson's normative African-American pool. Unlike Garvey and many of his followers, he does not

refer to Africa as a continent or site where he seeks to retreat; rather, in his definition, Africa, instead of a spatial location, "is but a ritual, a dance or a nuance" (Shannon 30), a cultural-spiritual-ethnic totality that the slavery as a system tried to extinguish. But the connection and resurrection to the "City of Bones" and consequent redemption requires the personal ethics of faith, honesty, truthfulness and confession. Wilson's dramaturgy thus is a responsive African-American spirituality that negotiates the living presence of the dead in the contemporary times. Aunt Ester remains an absent presence in *Two Trains Running* and *King Hedley II* as well; her presence throughout the Century Cycle underscores the significance she has been imbued to carry and possess for the African-American community to sail through this and many other centuries.

Wilson started writing the Cycle of plays as an attempt to revisit the African-American past, reassess their choices and decisions, re-evaluate their strategies of survival and probe the role of African-American community and culture in helping the black people survive in a capitalist white dominated world that intends to exploit and erase the black culture and presence. African-American men and women have had a bad experience even in the wake of Emancipation. So long as dominant racist ideology was there, African-American people could not find redemption. These figures often need a counsel or spiritual leader. Given their ferocious engagement with the hostile world, they need an embodied Afro-centricity, the personification of black ethnicity and Wilson effects it through Aunt Ester Tyler. She is present in different plays sometimes on and sometimes off stage and she also claims to have been born in 1619, the year when first African-Americans were brought to America. Her unusually long age – three hundred and odd years – substantiates the idea that she stands for the totality of the black experience in America, an embodied past that counsels the characters to act wisely and shape their future. Wilson devolves on it in a 1993 interview: "Beyond that, of course, she represents the entire 349 years that blacks have been in American. She represents our tradition, our philosophy, our folk wisdom, our hobbies, our culture, whatever you care to call it. All of that is alive, and you can tap into it if you know where to go, and what to say" (Wilson, "The Historical Perspective" 160).

Her counsels and messages are rooted in her spiritual connection. She tries to guide the mentally and emotionally deranged figures to root themselves, identify their heritage and past, and all this is done in typical African fashion. Moreover, she embodies or represents a double liminality. On the one hand, she

exists between the material Afro-centric, and the Euro-American cultures, where she helps the black characters, who are mentally, emotionally and spiritually splintered and deranged by the Euro-American capitalist racism, move and identify with their roots and history. On the other hand, she stands between the material African-American world and the black metaphysical spiritual universe, "City of Bones," the centre of the black world. Most of her counsels, advice and ways are antidotes to the endemic epidemic of capitalistic white world. In *Two Trains Running*, she asks characters to throw away twenty dollars in the river. Whereas, Memphis, Sterling and Holloway do it, West finds it futile to throw and waste one's money. Through their capital renunciation ritual, she tries to initiate the characters in the right direction, i.e. acknowledging their roots, and it could be done only after they have registered willingness to dissociate and separate themselves from the American capitalism symbolised by the dollar and property. After meeting her, these characters start seeing themselves as part of the community which erases the typical capitalistic patriarchal narcissism from their personalities. Holloway tells Memphis: "Aunt Ester give you more than money. She makes you right with yourself" (Wilson, *Two Trains* 24). Consequently, Sterling's love towards Risa is purified of all its earlier capitalistic celebration and glorification of masculine virility, sexuality and crudeness and what remains is true and tender love. It helps Sterling recognize significance of Risa whom he comes to perceive in a new light. Memphis learns to "pick the ball" and go back to the south and claim his land and by his rights and fruits of his own labour. Similarly, in *Gem of the Ocean*, Citizen Barlow is taken on a spiritual journey to the "City of Bones", where through a complex of dialogues and rituals, he is made to recognize his guilt, confess it and thereby relieved of it. Her rituals are a mixture of Africanness, experiences of slavery, and Americanness. She makes a boat of her "Bill of sale" and uses it to accomplish a voyage to the "City of Bones." It is symbolic of the recognition of one's past of slavery and recourse to it as a channel of transformation, of redemption and of resurrection without acknowledgement of the significance of slavery as part of their being, black people can never get reunited with their ancestors and past.

Wilson has been criticized by many scholars for producing predominantly male-dominated plays. Harry J. Elam highlights the issue of women's marginality in Wilson's oeuvre: He asserts that Wilson has been accused of ". . . constructing women who, in his male-dominated dramatic vision, not only exist in subordinate position, but also operate solely in reaction to men and are defined and confined

by these relationships" (88). However, these critical views cannot be considered the final verdict. His ouvre contains a number of such dynamic, multidimensional and complex women characters. Further, the act of embodying the past, history and legacy in Aunt Ester is a conscious move on Wilson's part. Time and again, he claims this Century Cycle to be his autobiography. He also declares that Aunt Ester is the mother of all the characters. Wilson himself owned the name and culture of his mother and learned the rituals, oral traditions and black values from her. Similarly, Aunt Ester as an embodiment of African-American culture guides all blacks. This close parallel between the larger structural aesthetics and his personal life underscores the amount of reverence, love and sincerity he accords to his art as well as women characters.

Wilson's redefinition outrightly rejects simplistic solutions. Recognizing the dynamism, complexity, polyphony and richness of life, Wilson creates characters that defy simplistic definitions. They are mix of complex emotions, feelings and inclinations. Further, Wilson does not see life in black and white terms that validates and glorifies all black people and criticizes all whites. His gallery of characters is life-affirming and hence complex. And Wilson's gallery suggests that he sees human identity as dynamic and ever-evolving, hence resistant to the fixities. His characters feel at ease once they recognize and accept their African-American cultural and experiential roots. This acceptance and recognition must be accompanied by the ethics of natural tolerance and respect for the differences. His theatre thus sensitizes the black and the white both about the ramifications of uni-centric and narcissistic culture of Euro-Americanism and necessitates its erosion and replacement.

Wilson's drama systematically undermines the meta-narratives of Euro-American culture that claim to set the norms of truth and knowledge. His theatre can be deemed what Ihab Hasan avers, ". . . an antinomian movement that assumes a vast unmaking of the western mind" (qtd. in Waugh 345). The fact that he had hardly read any canonical or full length western drama underlines his desire to claim and establish that his art and aesthetic are rooted in his experiences as a black man living in the hostile American society. His characters and the narratives emanate from his perspectives of life. In his theatre, the cultural and aesthetic meta-narratives of the western civilization crumble. He challenges the objective and universal claims of knowledge. Nietzsche's words, ". . . there is only a perspectival knowing"(qtd. in Waugh 349) appear more illuminating in the context of Wilson's drama and cultural vision. To the richness, dynamism and polyphony and thereby validity of the African-American, he

creates a world that is prominently peopled by black figures. His characters and narratives mark his distinction from his predecessors like Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Ed Bullins and many others whose characters and art defined itself in relation to the mainstream white society. But in Wilson's theatre (*Gem of the Ocean*), white figures and culture is kept mostly offstage. Further, his theatre negotiates the problematic of postmodernism. bell hooks, in her epochal papers, "Postmodern Blackness" avers, ". . . when this diversity is ignored, it is easy to see black folks are falling into two categories: nationalist or assimilationists; black-identified or white –identified" (2514). As in *Gem of the Ocean*, Wilson's aesthetic upholds and eulogies the cause of those blacks who seek redemption and realization in terms of their African-American experience. The exclusivist concern with identity – either purely American or purely African – falls outside Wilson's cultural model as bell hooks avers in her essay: "We are empowered to recognise multiple experiences of black identity that are the lived conditions"(2514). The rise of Aunt Ester to the level of motherly figure, her counsels, advice and strategies all evince the recognition of the dynamism, complexity of human identity. Black critics and thinkers mostly abstain from the Postmodern discourse because of its potential threat to black identity and community. But Wilson orchestrates in *Gem of the Ocean* a variant of postmodernism that not only fells the white cultural meta-narratives, but also shows the ways in which it can be truly emancipatory

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Inclusions, Exclusions and Interpolations in the Critical Edition of *Mahabharata*: Debates and Dilemmas

Shruti Sharma

I

It is impossible for an Indian to even remember their first brush with the epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. They exist within our consciousness as stories and metaphors. A.K. Ramanujan in his essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas" rightly says that the various tellings[1] of the ancient epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* often remain unread and the stories pervade the Hindu consciousness through their oral narrations. For it is through oral narratives that they are introduced to us. But, it is within the written form of epics that they have the potential to influence the readers globally. It becomes especially important when the more popular the *Mahabharata* episodes that are retained in the Indian consciousness find no trace in some of the most eminent editions and translations of the classical epic. One of the most significant amongst them is the Critical Edition (CE) or Poona Edition, edited by V. S. Sukthankar, which is considered to be the most authentic source of the epic both for the domestic as well as the international scholars. Most of the modern scholarship on the epic is based upon this version. The critical edition is claimed to be the "veritable thesaurus" of the epic which was a culmination of the decades of research into nearly a thousand manuscripts by most notable scholars in the field (Sukthankar 13). Within this edition, an attempt has been made to steer clear from interpolations that have seeped into the epic due to its repeated oral enunciations and codification into written script.

This paper discusses the dilemmas and debates arising out of the excision of a particular episode as an interpolation from the critical edition and its influence upon the modern critical scholarship of the epic which largely relies upon the manuscript tradition. These will be explored through the prominent episode of Krishna's intervention for Draupadi in the disrobing scene. The various critical interventions regarding the episode will be included and a discussion into the formulation of the CE will also be made.

The manuscript tradition of the *Mahabharata* was derived out of this oral tradition, which still continues to be prevalent with the epic being memorized and recited in its various versions. The variations and mixers of these versions

produced were partial to corruption, elaborations and interpolations[2]. These variations exist both in the oral as well as the manuscript tradition existing in nearly all Indian languages. To retrace all the extant versions of the Sanskrit epic and to locate a fixed and authentic archetype seems to be an impossibility that was faced by the critics and commentators of the much loved epic. But still there was a necessity for an archetype that would provide a basis for modern critical study of the *Mahabharata*. The need for such an archetype had been voiced by Sanskritists such as Professor M. Winternitz[3] who wished for a *correct version* of the *Mahabharata* as a basis upon which critical enquiries could be made into the text. This call was answered by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) which took it up and accomplished this herculean task in 1966, with the completion of their Critical Edition of the *Mahabharata*. Its completion marked a rare accomplishment as it enabled the formulation of a much more condensed version of the epic based upon both the Northern and the Southern recensions (divided according to the scripts) which had previously been studied in isolation. The epic contained within itself manuscripts from all over the country, assimilating within itself the commonalities of the different manuscripts to construct the CE. The critical edition and the translations based upon it were different than the existing translations which were said to be based upon the *Mahabharata* written by Ved Vyasa containing an account of the most popular episodes of the epic. Many of these translations lacked a strong manuscript support while some had no authentic manuscript support at all. It was argued that many episodes included within them were spurious popular imaginations and some interpolations that were later added to the original nucleus of the epic. In an attempt to create the *purer Mahabharata* many of these interpolations and exaggerations had been omitted from the CE. Its creation is a feat of scholarship which is seldom surpassed. Its importance lies in its extensive research, detailed analytical notes and appendices.

While the text has contributed immensely in the study of the *Mahabharata*, it has also confronted the researchers with doubts about its claim of authenticity and its relevance in the anthropological and textual study of the same. One such conundrum that has perplexed the Indian and Western critics alike is the excision of Krishna's intervention in the very prominent disrobing scene of Draupadi in the Sabha Parva of the *Mahabhrata*. The episode of Draupdi's prayer for Krishna's help and his intervention has been regarded by critics as an element of bhakti tradition (primarily Vaishnavism) that was added to the epic in the 4th century by the redactors of the epic. It was characterized as an

interpolation for its absence in various manuscripts. This deliberate omission aligns itself with the assertions of the oriental scholars that had oft regarded the bhakti elements as interpolations added later to the epic. It was argued that the presence of gods and godly interventions takes away, rather than enhancing, the humanist values embodied in the original nucleus[4]. The popularity of this episode within the oral tradition as well as literary and cinematic adaptations has made it an intrinsic and unalienable part of the epic for the Indian consciousness and culture. It is a metaphor embedded in the iterations of the generations of Indians. Its absence in the 'authentic text' does not remove it from the minds of the Indian masses. Furthermore, this contention has been noticed by researchers of the *Mahabharata* tradition (such as anthropologists) who have been dissatisfied and have often perceived the CE as being rubbish. They rather point deliberate upon the notes and appendices of the CE which contains all that has been left out of the epic. As James Hegarty, Professor of Indian religion in Cardiff University, pointed out that the notes have a richer material for study and become source of translating entire manuscripts or various variations of the *Mahabharata*. The semblance of an authentic text may lead away from plurality of the epic which has evolved over generations of revisions and reinterpretations.

II

An understanding of the excision of Draupadi's prayer has become problematization of the creation and codification of the epic with a several critical commenting upon the omission. This episode persists in the Northern recension is among the popular episodes of the epic. It appears in Sabha Parva within the chapter "Dyutta Parva", when Draupadi is brought down to the assembly hall by Dushasana, having been 'lost' in the game of dice by Yudhishtra. When both rationality and pleading fails to sway the entire clan, she is then forcibly stripped by Dussasana. Having no other recourse she prays to Krishna. The cry of "O Govinda!" calls upon Krishna who is still in Dwarka. He miraculously rescues Draupadi with a never ending garment instantly establishes him as a godhead even before he proclaims himself as one in the battlefield to Arjun. This episode is credited with various critical responses from scholars and it still remains one of the most disputed episodes in the *Mahabharata*.

One such critic is M. Winternitz for whom the entire episode of the Draupadi's disrobing scene is an interpolation. He considered it to be a later addition, added after 4th century. Interestingly, the CE also considered the scene

to be a later interpolation due to its absence in some manuscripts. Sukthankar, the general editor of the CE, in his notes mentions this omission and claims that this scene is most assuredly a later addition, representing a phase of Krishna's worship.

The disrobing scene also becomes relevant in analyzing the epic where Draupadi's prayer to Krishna can be perceived as the interpolation in the epic which has been summarily eliminated in the CE. The narrative continues with Draupadi's garments reappearing though a supernatural element but without divine intervention of Krishna. The text reads:

> 40. Then Duhsasana, O king, forcibly pulled off Draupadi's garment in the middle of the assembly, and began to strip her.
>
> 41. But whenever one of Draupadi's garments was removed, O king, another similar garment repeatedly appeared.
>
> 42. Then there rose a mighty roar of approval—a terrible roar from all the kings watching the greatest wonder in the world. (II. 61)

Franklin Edgerton, the editor of Sabha Parva in CE, felt that the act "implied that cosmic justice automatically… [and] prevented the chaste Draupadi from being stripped in public" (quoted in Hieltebietel 250). This version explicably relies on the chasteness of Draupadi which could not be disregarded and her honour upheld by dharma itself. The intervention of Krishna was not required; thereby his status as a divine being which had been established in the scene is revoked only to be later revealed in the epic battlefield before Arjun.

Interestingly, this episode can also be seen as an example of religious verbosity from which the venerated text must be rescued within the critical edition. This is further substantiated when Edgerton claims that later redactors felt the need to embroider the story whereas he preferred the "original form," for its brevity, simplicity and forcefulness. The implicit meaning being that the almost magical act of Draupadi's garment being recreated could not be understood in its simplicity by the redactors. Therefore, there was no other recourse available to them than to ascribe it to godly intervention, thus embroidering the tale that is more 'preferable' to Edgerton. The matter is further complicated due to these assertions for the "cosmic justice" or dharma mentioned by Edgerton that stopped Draupadi from being stripped publically. Does dharma allow her to abide by this humiliation? It is a question asked by Draupadi in the

court and one that should be considered by the critic as well. The question is one pertaining to law within the epic and has thus been greatly argued by the critics.

Iravati Karve in her critical commentary on the *Mahabharata, Yuganta,* claims that Draupadi had no legal right to question the authority of Yudhishtra over her, irrespective of his status as a slave to Duryodhan. The scathing commentary establishes the legality of Draupadi (with emphasis on Draupadi being the property of Yudhisthra) being dragged to the assembly hall. The act is allowed to go nearly undisputed though goes against all unwritten law of humanity. The unspoken sanction underlying the act is reflected in the silence which is the response to Draupadi's question regarding her status. Thus, can't it be inquired whether dharma could truly save Draupadi if no *adharma* took place in the sabha? It must be reiterated here that the text is historically situated with its own rules and laws. Karve's remarks are of relevant here as they allow for the possibility of dharma not being breached. Thus, could the same dharma proclaim her chastity and disrupt the happenings within the hall when so many remained silent. Furthermore, in this instance wouldn't Krishna's intervention be a better argument for the "cosmic justice" that takes place within the epic. This devious deity is not bound by the rules of dharma that bind the humans and he often circumvents them as seen in the later *parvas*.

Some other critics who have also attempted to justify the exclusion of the plea present some interesting arguments. The eminent critic M.K. Dhavalikar in his text "Draupadi's Garment" accepts Krishna's intervention as a 4th century interpolation and further expound upon the garments being removed from Draupadi as merely an "upper garments" or *uttariyas* which were worn by Kshatriyas. Thus the act of removal of the garment from the bodies of Pandavas and Draupadi become symbolic of their reduced status in the assembly hall rather than an attempt at stripping her. Similar argument has been made by M.A. Mehendale, who also maintains that the garment being removed was merely the *uttariyas,* thereby disregarding any need for divine intervention. This notion has been contested by Alf Hiltebeitel[6] who claims that Draupadi's garment has nowhere been called *uttariyas* but rather *vastra*, *vasa*, *vasasa* and *ambara,* none of which implies upper garments. He argues that Mehendale and Dhavalikar's insistence on the *uttariyas* is an "attempt to claim a purer past" (Hiltebeitel 250).

Among the various arguments put forth by the critics there still remains

an element of unease. While some have replaced divine intervention for an equally if not more ambiguous cosmic justice, others have attempted to do away with the episode of Draupadi's stripping devolving into arguments over verbal jugglery. It must be noted that the abrupt removal of the interpolations that has been incorporated within the epic for centuries is bound to leave some loose ends that would disrupt the flow of the narrative of the epic. The original kernel of the epic may have contained instances that are better able to justify the dilemma that arises in the episode. But, it cannot be denied that they could have been lost over the centuries and been replaced by the interpolations that have been embedded within the epic. An attempt at stripping the epic and culling out traces of nucleus is a herculean task. And there exists possibilities that what will be derived is a forced articulation designed out of the scholarly expectations. It would be worth considering Hiltebeitel claim to consider the episode more than a mere interpolation. It should be accepted as the oldest variation[5] in the *Mahabharata* manuscript tradition.

III

The western scholarship has often characterized the Sanskrit epic of the *Mahabharata* as a literary monstrosity. The claim belongs to the existing western scholarship that characterizes the epic as a literary 'unthing' which is further burdened by their perception of what the epic ought to be rather than what *it is.*[7] The biases and influences often seep within the text constructing it in the image we wish it to be. This urge to assimilate and recreate the most apt version may have been the reason for the very existence of the variations present within the *Mahabharata* tradition. This also leads to problem within the scholarship that is based upon such texts that are not free from influence and are marred by their own complications and problematics. The biases within the base texts also influence the critical commentary based upon it. Draupadi's prayer symbolizes risk in interpreting the ancient epic without an understanding of the *Mahabharata* tradition which has evolved over generation of revisions and reinterpretations within the manuscripts.

The sureness of the CE being the original construction is a reminder that the CE holds the stamp of approval by critical thinkers of the epic. Its claim of being original is tenuous at best, yet the repeated emphasis on it being the *Ur-Mahabharata* alienates the other variations of the text. It endorses all the alterations made to the epic in the CE and also vilifying the variations such as the one mentioned above as mere interpolations. This recourse offers a host of

complications, central among them being the rejection of all the instances that are not included in the text as interpolations and thus summarily rejecting them in the critical evaluations of the epic.

In fact it is nearly impossible to reconstruct an original Ur-*Mahabharata* from the corrupted manuscript tradition of the epic. Therefore, it is impossible to consider CE as a source text of the epic tradition while disregarding the existing manuscript and oral epic tradition. This deliberate elimination of the episode points towards the flaw in considering the CE to be an archetype or a source text that may have been prevalent in certain time period and from where the subsequent versions had evolved. It is problematic to consider the CE to be a true version of the *Mahabharata* and considering it to be a genuine historical[8] reconstruction of the original epic. To claim that is to deny plurality of the *Mahabharata* with its various versions and variations that exists within the South East Asian landscape. The CE is rather an edition based upon the common denominators in the certain manuscripts selected for the study. The dismissal of such scenes as interpolations may disregard the evolving tradition of the *Mahabharata* manuscripts available.

Moreover, the plurality of the epic makes its critical interpretation an impossibility while perceiving a singular text as authentic. Indeed any enquiry into such a tradition calls forth multiple perspectives derived not only from what has been classified as original, but also those elements with have been reviled as being popular interpolations. The propensity for alteration in the *Mahabharata* is such that it is difficult to reconstruct an original which may have been completely lost to us in various revisions that led to multiple variations available today.

It can be safe to assume that if episodes and instances have been added within the *Mahabharata* many may also have been lost. Thus, it would be futile to ignore the generations of revisions and reinterpretations to look for an ideal archetype that may never be reconstructed as it once was. As with the CE, for it has become what it wished to eliminate, another variation of the *Mahabharata*.

End Notes

1 A.K. Ramanujan in his essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas" calls the various versions of the Indian Sanskrit epics as *tellings*, a word he uses in lieu of variations which presupposes the existence of an original epic.

2 The evolution of the manuscript tradition from the oral has been provided within by V.S. Sukthankar in his Foreword to the Adiparva, Fascicule I.

3 Professor M Winternitz at the XIth International Congress of Orientalist, in Paris, in 1897 drew attention to the South Indian manuscripts of the *Mahabharata* and in his ending remarks emphasized upon a great need for a critical edition of epic which could provide a basis for the studies to be undertaken in the field of the *Mahabharata*.

4 This argument is especially relevant for Van Buitenen, the man who began translating CE in 1970's (an endeavour that is being continued by his students after his death) and successfully published first three books of this enormous epic. In his introduction to Book 1 Buitenen argues that the *Mahabharata* can be read in two major perimeters. The first perimeter, he claims, is the original 'nucleus' of the epic called *Jaya*, which tells the story of a clan war fought over the rightful claim to the throne of Hastinapur. The second perimeter, he argues, was added later upon *Jaya* adding episodes of divine elements such as gods and demi-gods. The enormous narrative thus created was the *Mahabharata* as we know it today. Buitenen believed that these later inclusions destructed the original kernel of the epic which talked about 'human values'.

5 Hiltebeitel uses the phrase oldest variation for the episode in the northern recension.

6 He contests the argument in his text *Rethinking the Mahabharata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King.*

7 This argument has also been perpetuated by Alf Hietebeitel who claims that the *Mahabharata* should not be saddled with the scholarly expectations but rather must be seen as a conscious artistry.

8 The terminology is taken from John Duncan's essay "Manuscripts used in the Critical Edition of the Mahâbhârata: A Survey and Discussion."

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Pash, Peasantry and the Green Revolution

Lakhvinder Singh Bedi

Pash appeared on the poetic scene in Punjab with the publication of his first collection of poems entitled *Loh Katha* in 1970. This was a period of political, economical and ideological turmoil in Punjab. The Naxalite[1] Movement had caught the fancy of the young people as some of them saw in it as an answer to class exploitation. Pash was deeply influenced by the political and ideological climate of the day (time). His poetry can be seen as an attempt to voice his protest against rampant injustice and inequality as he perceived these in the society in his day. In fact, he sees his poetry as a weapon in his war against injustice, exploitation and dehumanization. The rise of the Naxalite Movement in Punjab was intertwined with the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution brought enormous changes in the society, economy, culture and politics of Punjab. It can be argued that an appraisal of Pash's poetry must take into account the backdrop of the Green Revolution.

In 1963, Norman Borlaug[2] ushered in the Green Revolution through a combination of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and cheap energy along with high yielding variety (HYV) of seeds, popularly known as "miracle seeds". The objective of the Green Revolution was to increase food production in India in order to make the country self-sufficient in food grains. Since the greatest achievements of the Green Revolution were noticed in the state of Punjab, it has generally been considered and projected as the best example of a positive transformation unleashed by the Green Revolution in India. Ironically, the fruits of the Green Revolution were not all sweet. The changes it unleashed in Punjab were of a complex nature and included, according to observers like Vandana Shiva, widespread violence at various levels. Even the communal politics of the 1980s can be seen as related in important ways to the consequences of the Green Revolution.

The Green Revolution did not bring prosperity to all people engaged in agriculture. It has been remarked that it further impoverished the poor farmers, pushing them into the trap of debt. On account of its reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the Green Revolution extracted an extremely heavy ecological balance. In fact, the techno-political dimension of the Green Revolution was intended to bring material abundance to farmers but this was

never achieved on a wide scale. The Green Revolution brought in its train, misery and poverty for the debt-ridden farmers, in addition to contaminated and toxic soil resulting from the excessive use of fertilizers/ pesticides.

Studies indicate that the basic aim of this revolution was to cause general economic abundance through increased crop production. This phenomenon was visible in the initial stages of the revolution. Yet scarcity too emerged as a by-product of this process. Interestingly, the consumption level of fertilizers per hectare and the purchase of tractors through easy loans were considerably higher among the farmers with small holdings. The class of small farmers had little capacity to return the loans. The pressure on the farmers by money lenders and the private agencies forced them to sell their small holdings. The social relations were also poisoned by the materialistic tendencies which flourished along with the Green Revolution. Conflict and violence were therefore not far away. While the Green Revolution was basically considered to be meant for the farmer and his welfare, the interests of the Western countries were well served in the prosperity of their multinational corporations than that of the farmers. Jashandeep Singh Sandhu observes:

> As the success of the new seeds depended on chemicals and fertilizers produced mainly in the developed West, an argument pointing to the creation of relationship in which the third world governments would become inextricably linked to the multinational chemical producers was put forth. (216)

To check the likely growth of inequality, the government agencies established the cooperatives, which however could not serve their purpose. The cooperatives were also controlled by the elite who backed the system which favoured large scale production through the use of fertilizers. The elite were also to get major chunk of subsidies and the support of banking sector. As a matter of fact, there was an unprecedented increase in population in Punjab which ran concurrent to the Green Revolution. Whether it was an offshoot of the initial success of the Green revolution or not is debatable, but the increase surely led to greater number of small farm holdings. Sandhu refers to Norman K Nicholson's observation that "[t]he 21% population increase in Punjab between 1961 and 1971 is cited as the most plausible explanation of the increase in the number of small farm holdings" (217).

Thus, a consequence of the Green Revolution was the increasing inequality between the large and the small owners of agricultural land. The limited

availability of land combined with high input costs to increase the productivity of land resulted in the prices of agricultural land skyrocketing. Explaining this, Surjit S. Sidhu writes:

> Due to the relatively inelastic supply of land, increased productivity of land resulting from the introduction of new wheat was reflected in as subsequent years in rising land values. This became a windfall gain to the owners of farmland – a gain at almost no cost to the owners…. [T]he 'effects' of the 'Green Revolution' seem to have increased existing inequalities of income distribution in favour of larger land owners. (221)

The small farmer (owning less than 2.61 acres of land) did not afford to avail the facility of credit also, which further made him uncompetitive (Sen A35). Apparently, though the Green Revolution was intended to avert the threat of violent class-based unrest, as Vandana Shiva also observes:

> The Green Revolution was conceived within this orthodox view of scarcity and violence. The Green Revolution was prescribed as a techno-politic strategy that would create abundance in agricultural societies and reduce the threat of Communist insurgency and agrarian conflict. (14)

Against the intended benefits, however it brought misery to a large number of families involved in farming. The process of the Green Revolution also caused imposition of the policies and power of the centre on the states. The contradiction between the centre and the states ruled by opposing political parties was thus further aggravated by the Green Revolution. With the planning and allocation of resources by the Centre (considered to be ruled by a party which wasn't the Akali party, which, in turn, was a party catering to the interests of the Jat Sikh farmers) the polarization of differences between the farming Sikh community and the trading Hindu community was allowed to grow as a bogey in the game of political one-upmanship. The allegations of discrimination received added credence when the centre mishandled the issues of violence in Punjab, Delhi and elsewhere, particularly the events leading up to Operation Blue Star, the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the anti-Sikh programme. These events can be seen as a result, direct or indirect, of disruption of a society by the complex sociological, cultural, economical and political forces unleashed by the Green Revolution.

Vandana Shiva's study reveals several important facts about the Green

Revolution in the Indian Punjab. She asserts that it did not bring either prosperity or peace to the state. It rather riddled the state with discontent and violence through "...diseased soils, pests-infected crops, water logged deserts and indebted and discontented farmers. Instead of peace, Punjab has inherited conflict and violence'' (Shiva 19). The cost of the Green Revolution thus included the loss of at least fifteen thousand lives in six years. Unlike other studies of the usual kind on the Green Revolution, where abundance has been projected as its outcome, Shiva has traced "aspects of the conflicts and violence in cotemporary Punjab to the ecological and political demands of the Green Revolution as a scientific experiment in development and agricultural transformation'' (20). It has also been observed that the imposition of the American model of agriculture through the use of pesticides and fertilizers in Punjab probably resulted in a similar situation also in America where the fertile prairies turned into deserts.

The demands of the Green Revolution on the farmers included increased expenditure on a variety of pesticides, fertilizers and energy for which they could rely only on heavy loans which pushed them into debt. There was also a vast and subtle shift in the social relationship caused through changed agrarian structures through the Green Revolution. The neighbouring countries of India had already passed through similar movements of peasant unrest whenever the political or economic considerations motivated an effort to change the existing though primitive agricultural practices. Above all, the results of the Green Revolution, immediate or far reaching, could bestow abundance only on a few but they brought scarcity to the majority. The resulting inequality thus became the root cause of violence that appeared in Punjab under different forms from the 1970s onwards.

The poetry of Pash needs to be understood in the context of the specific conditions prevailing in Punjab from the 1960s to 1980s, to which the Green Revolution had contributed significantly and in several contradictory ways. The sharpening of the class conflict, with marginalisation of the poor from the mainstream society, was noticeable. The gap between the rich and poor farmers also increased as a consequence of the revolution. Such social and economic conflicts sharpened by the Green Revolution are articulated in Pash's poetry.

Pash, who has often been addressed as "a son of soil" and who is visualised as lying "spread over the fields" in the poems dedicated to him by his comrades, was both a witness to the fate of the poor farmers of those times and himself lived that fate (Dhanjal and Sandhu 71, 30). The interest of Pash for observing

and celebrating the chores of a farmer and paint the panoramic village life indicate that he was attached to the life and concerns of a farmer including the miseries of his likes. His romantic allegiance to the countryside is almost inspiring, "So beautiful was the night today! All through I had intimate talk with it, with dew-covered wheat lying asleep on the earth's vast bridal bed, with heaps of sugar-cane stalks aglow in the moonlight...." (Gill 4). Identifying himself as a peasant, Pash could write about the poverty and misery of the peasantry. In fact, it was an issue of cardinal significance for him as a poet.

As we have noted above, the economic, political, social and cultural upheavals set into motion by the Green Revolution caused a breakdown of the traditional structures. Tejwant Singh Gill highlights the situation of the farmer of those times caught in the effects of the Green Revolution in his study *Pash: Jeevan Te Rachna* (Pash: Life and Works). Gill asserts that effects of the Green Revolution were visible by the mid 1960s when the use of fertilizers and pesticides had doubled the agricultural production. However, the cost of agricultural production had also grown four times due to the expenditure on inputs. The small farmer could not celebrate the emergence of the Green Revolution for long. The large land holders reaped the benefits of the Green Revolution both ways: rich agricultural production on the one hand and on the other grabbing the land holdings of the small farmers, who had been reeling under heavy debts, raised to meet the cost of production and hence were forced to part with their small holdings. These developments left no options for the young like Pash who were forced to look for jobs as landless farmers or to migrate to other countries as labour. Gill finds Pash as both sufferer and sympathizer in this situation and giving expression to the disaster unfolding around him. The expression of angry protest against rich landlords who dispossessed the small farmers of their holdings can be found in many places in his diary:

> Capitalists and landlords who are a few in number have led my loved country to nothing. So will it remain till these butchers are not deprived of this outrageous right. What after all is meant by democracy and freedom? The biggest joke that the Law of the Republic plays with the starving labourer and ragged farmer is of granting the right to own property to their heart's content. Every clause bestows the right upon them to increase their wealth at will and keep it intact as well. This freedom gives the rich the right to exploit, at the same time extending to the poor the right to be thoroughly exploited. (Translation by Gill 18)

Like Gill, Kesar Singh Kesar also observes that the poetry of Pash comes out of a close study of the economic, political and cultural experiences of the Punjabi peasant (Singh 20). In fact, Pash's portrayal of the poor Punjabi peasant is not that of a meek sufferer. The source of his strength is his religious faith. Kesar cites poems like "Bedawa", "Sharadanjali" and "Joga Singh Di Swai Parchol", etc. as examples….incomplete sentence. Gur Iqbal Singh notes that the Green Revolution was an effort of the Indian Government to find a solution to the problem of food and scarcity through a plan framed by the Western policy makers. This led to the enrichment of landlords and the humiliation of the small farmers. Hence the farmer, defeated on all fronts and with all illusions shattered, was longing for a revolutionary upheaval.

Surjit contends that Pash emerges as a front runner to express the experiences of the rural people by touching upon their lives marked by misery, poverty and misfortune (Singh 114). The poetry of Pash records the impoverished farmer's conditions, his resentment against the system and projection of class struggle. Pash has a clear idea of his obligation as a poet in a given situation. In "Word, Art and Poetry", he sees poetry as "…words which neither fear nor die" in the face of any operation (Ghai 100). According to him, poetry brings about in "the brightness of night" what is prohibited in "darkness of the day" (100). Pash, as a poet, perceived the need to deal with the consequences of the Green Revolution as a serious act of commitment.

In his first collection of poems "Loh Katha" (Iron's Tale), his first poem titled "Bharat" ("India") sketches out an image of the Punjabi farmer:

> This name owes its essence
> To those who toil in the fields,
> And still measure time,
> By the length of shadows,
> They have no other concerns
> Except their bellies,
> And when they are hungry,
> They can chew their own limbs. (Ghai 43)

The life of the farmer has been reduced to searching for food. The images here representing hungry farmers, would probably appear indecent according to the bourgeois norms of literary discourse. In this, the struggle of the poet at the level of poetic conventions comes to the fore. The giver of food to others becomes a helpless seeker. The starving peasant feels like chewing

his own limbs. For him life is nothing more than "an empty ritual" and death might give him relief from this burden. The real India is not found in "Dushyant"; it is, rather, synonymous with the tiller who tills the land and grows food. The conflict between the peasant and his exploiter is also used by Pash directly to exemplify class struggle. The hard-earned labour is snatched away by the exploiter, "Where peasants grow food/ And robbers break in...." (43). In another poem, "To the Rotten Flowers", Pash puts the exploiter and the exploited together in a sharp comparison. For him the exploiter is a barbarous rich city dweller and the exploited are the people of the countryside:

> When we were being robbed of our bread
> And disrobed of our dignity
> We the illiterate country bumpkins were dumb-
> Why had your literate blathering tongues
> Gone mute in the coffee houses? (55).

The bourgeois society turns silent at the sight of the poor suffering and prefers to let them face it singularly. There is reversal in the treatment of the exploiter and the exploited; the exploiter is considered in the term of disrespect labeling them 'literate blathering tongues' whereas the exploited are called in terms of respect as 'the illiterate country bumpkins'. The complicit poet is dubbed as 'gone mute in the coffee houses?' The protest does not end here. The poor farmer believes in living a dignified life even in the face of starvation:

> We don't grumble even when we starve
> You who carry multicolored flags
> Are overfed and yet cry for more –
> Why this howling and breast beating? (55)

The poor Punjabi farmer who could eat dry bread with a slice of onion shall surely rise one day to 'Have come to devour your roads and rooms' (is it a quote). The class conflict also adds to the level of patience and fortitude of the starving farmers.

In yet another poem "Hath" ("Hands"), Pash invests the body with new signification by including violence for the cause of justice. The poet enumerates the actions, sometime duties and also the power bestowed on hands, starting with the mention of his beloved's hands; he concludes the poem in a revolutionary strain:

> Hands are given not merely to toil.
> They are also given to break a tyrant's hands.

Those who fail to do the duty given to hands
Those who insult their grace
Are cripples
Hands are given to lend support
Hands are given to say 'yes'. (93)

The affirmative 'yes' stands for life and dignity. The poem also speaks of the duties of the village people, including the teacher, the tailor, the barber, the midwife, the wage earner etc. When it comes to the tiller of the land, his duty is not restricted to toil only; his hands are also meant to smash the hands of exploiter. If the hands of a farmer can lend support, they can also extract a 'yes' from adversity.

Pash underlines the rights of the common farmer in "We Shall Fight Comrade", saying :

We shall fight
... … …
Until those who till the land
[Can] inhale the fragrance of mustard blossoms. (95)

The larger political vision of the struggle until victory is achieved inspires Pash to evoke the sensuous experience in the life of a farmer. However, the fight would continue:

If we don't have the gun,
We shall have the sword
... … …
We shall fight. (95)

The poet's keen observations of the life of debt-ridden peasantry are memorable. The irresistible temptations of the capitalist to trap the naïve and innocent farmer in the vicious circle of debt have been portrayed thus:

The debt incurred for the sister's marriage
Cannot be cleared in our lifetime
All the drops of blood used up in the fields
Will not add up to paint
Even one peaceful smiling face. (77)

The lust for ill gotten money does not end here. The exploiter eyes poor farmer's the land too (reframe) :

Leering at our green fields
On our greenery around the wells

Those who have seen
The golden corn shrivelling upon rooftops
But not their prices shrivelling in the market. (78)

The greed of the exploiter and the exploitation of the farmer in the market constitute a vicious, endless process. In the poem titled "To Her", Pash points out the whims of the exploiter who indulges in exploitation of all kinds. The painful losses are recorded thus:

All my pain passes through the eye of only one needle
Our peace of mind is gone, so is the exuberance of our fields.
They who have usurped the wealth of our fields
Have also become the enemies of your beauty. (110)

The response of Pash to this exploitation is decisive and uncompromising. The vow to fight it out is visible in the later part of the poem, when he assures his beloved of freedom and the restoration of justice:

All my dreams are bound with the liberation of these crops
The story of your smiles is the story of each peasant
My fate is the fate of changing times
My story is now the story of a blazing sword. (111)

The dream of the poet is to see the peasant liberated. The fate of his beloved and peasant is pitiable. The bold and unflagging determination of the poet is to resort to the use of power to bring an end to the systematic exploitation and repression by the exploiter.

In a mode of wider socio-economic critique, Pash protests against the brutalization of human beings and their enslavement to basic needs:

Centuries have gone past and even today
Bread, toil and crematoriums might still think
We live only for them. (167)

The story of the exploiter and the exploited has been the same for ages now. The plight of peasant has not changed for centuries. The poet observes that a peasant follows a rut to work ceaselessly to earn a living and waits for death as a relief.

The above discussion demonstrates that the poetry of Pash projects the peasant as protagonist whose concern is strong at the heart of the poet. The miseries and sufferings of peasantry become rather prominent against the

backdrop of the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution brought a qualitative change in Punjab's economy through growth in agricultural production to large land-holders only. The poet is pained to see that the plight of the peasantry which is caused by none other than his own countrymen has not undergone any radical change. Pash's poetry speaks of the determination of the sufferer to bring a definite change. It is reflected in the condemnation of the attitude of the exploiter. The voice of protest of peasant is to interrogate the injustice, exploitation and dehumanization of peasantry.

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Delhi, a Postmodern Vessel of Consumerism: A Critical Study of Maneesh Sharma's *Band Baja Barat*

Priyadarshini Yadav

From the beginning of modern western philosophy till the mid-twentieth century, time has been given preference over space. And then roughly around 1960s a recognizable spatial turn in literary and cultural studies occurred. The emphasis on perceiving the world spatially was an answer to the ontological and epistemological bias which space has suffered. But this spatial advocacy is neither against historical interpretation and nor is it a substitution of spatial for historical determination. It is basically "an attempt to develop a more creative and critically effective balancing of the spatial/geographical and the temporal/historical imaginations" (Soja 12). Contributing towards this spatial advocacy, the present paper wishes to study the urban space of Delhi as a postmodern vessel of consumption of changing cultural dynamics through Maneesh Sharma's film *Band Baja Bara*t (henceforth BBB).

Contemporary cities are dominated by a 'consumer society' in which "identity and status are acquired and social inclusion or integration is considered to be achieved through participation in consumer activity" (Smart 228). The industrial capitalist society of Karl Marx was a work-based society, a society that engaged its members primarily as producers with its focus on material issues of class and production, in contrast, our society in its "late-modern, second-modern or post-modern" stage engages its members primarily as consumers (Bauman 24). Consequently, increasing prominence is given to consumer activity and consumer choice. Individual identity and satisfaction now "appear to be less and less bound up with job, work, and career and more and more with lifestyle, consumption, and shopping'' (Smart 228). This inclination towards consumption is closely linked with postmodernism. According to the French theorist, Jean Baudrillard, postmodernism is "a flow of ultra-technological images in a consumerist hyperreality across a media scape or mind screen to which we can only passively surrender" (Powell 149). Central to his analysis is his notion of *simulacra* (an image or representation) and his claim that society no longer uses reality as a referent for its representations. The distinction between the real and the simulacrum has blurred, and therefore now "the value of material goods lies not in their use but in their symbolic value" that is their images (Song

113). Interestingly, our desire to control and manipulate these images fuels consumerism.

Contemporary Delhi, essentially dominated by business-oriented Punjabi class is undergoing continual changes in ideals and values under the influence of globalization, urbanization, economic liberalization and the rise of the middle class. Weddings which were earlier a personal family affair have now acquired a consumerist potential under the hands of sophisticated wedding planners. They have become bigger than ever, almost like a corporate affair with theme weddings, destination weddings, and so on. Due to Bollywood (Punjabi) influence the ceremonies like *mehendi* and *sangeet* have become a requisite part of any wedding. The protagonist of the film, Shruti Kakkar (Anushka Sharma) knows how to materialize profit by modernizing these traditional ceremonies and satiating the consumerist cravings of Delhi-ites. With her partnership with Bittoo Sharma (Ranvir Singh), she reaches the zenith in her business and then falls back beacause of emotional complications with him which she dreaded from the beginning. Later, it is not their metropolitan rationality, but simple love which resolves the problem. The film depicts that with the changing cultural platter more business and marketing opportunities have evolved which cater to the altering tastes of the society. It presents an example of rise and manipulation of innovative entrepreneurships (wedding planning) in the competitive city space and culturally maps specific areas of the city such as Delhi University, Janakpuri, and Sainik farms through the protagonists' professional journey. It depicts how consumerist habits vary from class to class and from region to region proving that the effects of liberalization cannot be viewed in a homogeneous manner. Consumerist culture thus finally emerges as an inevitable condition of the city of Delhi.

The film opens with the scene at the University of Delhi, the space for ideas, freedom of expression, youthful energy, carefree attitude and dreams. This space not only introduces the audience to the protagonists, Bittoo and Shruti in the opening number- "*Tarkibein*" ("Ideas"), but also emerges as a fertile ground for dreams of young entrepreneurs like Shruti. Additionally, the four-minute number with several shots showing DTC buses, University hostels, college classrooms, cultural competitions, college playgrounds, street plays, University elections, and so on, set the mood for a youth oriented drama. Some quintessential images related to Delhi such as eve teasing and response against it by an average Delhi girl, bargaining with rickshaw pullers, Delhi Metro, running after DTC buses, and so on set the city in the background. In addition to depicting

the dressing style of middle class youth (by dressing up Shruti in casual t- shirts with a pair of jeans and a scarf or simple salwar kameez and Bittoo in t-shirts or partially unbuttoned casual, checked-shirts), their eating habits (*bread pakodas and chai* with rusks), the director also introduces the slangs that are popular among the Delhi youth *(Bhukkad*: Riff raff, *Chippad*: Cheapster, *thulla*: policeman, *Binness*: Business, *Behenji:* aunty-like). This middle-class portrayal is significant as the film studies the business potential lying in this class which is aspiring for upward social mobility.

From the very beginning Shruti is shown to be aware of the consumerist culture behind weddings. She knows that Delhi-ites love to celebrate with pomp and show. She is clear headed and focused having a thumb rule of business: "*Jiske saaath vyapaar karo usse kabhi na pyaar karo*" ("love and business do not go hand in hand") (BBB). Shruti's business-mindedness is the result of the fast-paced metropolitan life. Sociologist Georg Simmel noted the importance of the emerging metropolis for changing life, culture, and subjectivity in the early twentieth century. His seminal essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903) focuses specifically on the effect of the city on subjectivity and elaborates on 'metropolitan rationality' that redefines human relationships in terms of exchange value and turns all action in the metropolis into "production for the market" (Simmel 33). The potentially alienating effect of the metropolis necessitates that the metropolitan character reacts with his head instead of his heart. The money economy and the domination of the intellect stand "in such close integration that no one is able to say whether it was the former that effected the latter or vice versa. What is certain is only that the form of life in the metropolis is the soil which nourishes this interaction most fruitfully" (Simmel 33). Shruti is confident of her metropolitan rationality and Bittoo, being a non-Delhi-ite is learning the ways of the city. His hostel room is filled with posters of body builders, a cut out of Shahrukh Khan's face, a broken mirror, unhinged wooden almirah, and so on, are reflection of his aimless and scattered existence. It is the Punjabi Delhi girl, Shruti, whose business sense ignites the idea of engaging into wedding planning business in the middle-class, small town Saharanpur boy. While his father ridicules his idea, "*Shaddi to naai karaye hain''* ("in Saharanpur, barbers plan wedding") (BBB), Bittoo's insistence that "in Delhi it's a big business" (BBB) reflects that in contrast to the small towns, consumerism is enveloping the city space rapidly as weddings have evolved from being a pure family-affair to a market affair which can be utilized by the young entrepreneurs gifted with creativity and a keen business sense.

The consumerist culture of western society is the result of the neoliberal projects of the 1980s when all "social processes" (e.g. education, health provision, democracy) were redefined as per "the paradigm of consumption" (Anderson 147). Modernization processes such as "marketization, the decline of traditional status systems and the rise of cultural and political pluralism" made private, market-based choice central to social life (147). Indian state also experienced economic liberalization from 1980s onwards:

> By the end of the 1970's, India had acquired a reputation as one of the most protected and heavily regulated economies in the world. Starting in the mid-1970s and then later on in the 1980s, a few tentative steps were taken to liberalize the regulatory regime. In 1991, more extensive reforms followed. Since then there have been further policy changes in diverse sectors all aimed at opening up the economy to greater private sector entrepreneurship as well as to foreign trade and investment. (Kotwal 01)

Dominant economic and cultural metamorphosis was observed with the beginning of twenty-first century. Due to global influences, Indian cities and particularly metropolitan cities like Delhi observed a paradigm shift in values. Social affairs such as weddings, reflected the effect of economic liberalization and rise of consumerism in all the aspects such as match making process, engagement ceremony, pre-wedding ceremonies, bridal wear, menu, venue, photography, decoration, reception and honeymoon destination. The Sidhwani wedding (at the end of the film) displays the consumerist culture to its fullest. It is an expensive (six crore is the budget) destination wedding at a palace in Jodhpur, with a performance by film stars like Shahrukh Khan and a European honeymoon destination. It is a Bollywood style "*saat din lambi party*" ("Seven days long party") (BBB). Such weddings illuminate the state of the cultural metamorphosis and present Delhi as an arena of high-budgeted pomp and show. They also reflect that consumerist culture is inscribed in a prescribed local space and is simultaneously affected by global trends. Menu of *Desi* and international cuisines, Cocktail parties and bachelor parties with themes ranging from traditional to western culture, shows the simultaneous effect of local and global influences in high-class South Delhi weddings.

In contrast to this full-blown image of consumerism is the traditional wedding style. A scene in the film in which Shruti and Bittoo try to convince their first client of Janakpuri to hire the couple as wedding planners, subtly talks

about the earlier style when weddings were a private affair, organized by the family members at the local street or community hall:

> Client: "*Par bete hamare yahan to maame chache milke kar lete hain Shaadi. Wedding planner ka hum karenge kya*?" ("But in our families traditionally uncles get together and organize the wedding. What will we do with a wedding planner?)
>
> Shruti: "*Aap ye batao, aap ne kitne paise kharchne hain Shaadi pe*?" ("How much money do you intend to spend on the wedding?")
>
> Client: "*2 lakh… zyada se zyada 2.5 lakh*" ("2 lacs or maximum 2.5 lacs")
>
> Shruti: "Vaise shaadi hogi kahan se?" ("By the way, where is the venue?")
>
> Client: "Kahan se matlab, jahan se saare mohalle ki shaadi hoti hai vahin se" ("Venue? The same one from where the rest of the colony gets married from.")

One of the prominent characteristic of consumerism in post-liberalization India is that it is rapidly spreading across all the sections of the society. Shruti and Bittoo succeed in their business by introducing the wedding planning business among the middle and lower middle classes of Delhi-ites. Their wedding planning journey begins from Janakpuri, a middle-class (refugee) Punjabi locality with interiors of the houses having polka dotted cups and life size pictures of Hindu Gods. Shruti understands the significance of first becoming the "*raja*" (BBB) of Janakpuri for becoming the "king" (BBB) of Sainik farms. By making themselves available to the middle strata of the society she wants to ensure that hiring professional planners, remains no longer the preserve of industrialists and stock market hotshots. Janakpuri thus becomes the arena of their first business project with minimal risk. The florist, caterer, DJ, beautician all belong to the middle class. The arrangement of the college band and local beauticians for the wedding reflects the utilization of the limited resources to the maximum level and this first wedding at Janakpuri with a constrained budget becomes a hit.

The kind of consumerist culture which West Delhi regions like Janakpuri reflect is quite different from South Delhi areas, which highlights that consumerist culture varies according to different regions (and social classes) of a city. There is a difference in consumer behaviour of Janakpuri and Sainik farms. While middle-class Janakpuri clients are shown to be casual about the services provided,

the high-class Sainik Farm clients are shown to be very particular about the details, be it the decoration with lilies or the 'Greek God style entry' of the groom, reflecting their interest in classical western style. These point towards a difference in consumer taste in various regions and among different social classes of the city. Thus, in place of the cocktail of bright colours and high decibel sounds of middle-class Janakpuri, high-class Sainik Farms of South Delhi are dominated by white tone (with white bungalows, white tents, white lights, and lilies) and classical sounds. Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction,* a mammoth ethnographic and sociological examination, unmasks the social bases of taste and argues that social class provides the basic evaluative frameworks for all cultural objects. "Our tastes are located by our education and social origin and are used to legitimize social differences and locate one's sense of place" (Song 113).

The difference in consumer taste not only reflects class differences but also deepens it. Urban consumption accelerates social inequalities. Commodities and services are more often purchased as "an expression and mark of style, prestige, luxury and power" (Puthusseri). Chanda Narang's client, Brigadier Brar's anger over the use of incarnations instead of real lilies for decoration is more related to his prestige than the wedding function itself. He bombards,

> Finance Minister, Health Minister, Commerce Minister…Do you know who all are coming to this wedding?" Consumption is thus not natural, it's social (BBB). Our needs are created by society. "Consumption is not just consumption but conspicuous consumption. We display what we buy conspicuously, in order to differentiate ourselves socially. And you can't buy just one object in order to enter a social level, you need to buy into an entire system of objects. (Powell 47)

The concept of wedding planning is even based on this logic. The wedding planners provide an entire system of services of certain quality according to the requirements of the clients. When Shruti and Bittoo plan the Sidhwani wedding they have to provide good quality services in all the fields, be it catering, decoration, reception of guest, wedding shopping, or the dance performances. They cannot compromise in any field as that can affect the social reputation of their clients. Even the display and consumption of objects takes place on the basis of cultural codes which "organize commodities into hierarchical systems of meaning based on price and prestige" (Powell 47). Shruti and Bittoo, like

other wedding planners, are aware of the nuances of this hierarchy and provide different packages such as silver, gold and platinum depending upon the social classes of their clients.

In a consumerist culture, the consumer occupies the centre stage. Shruti and Bittoo pay particular attention towards the vibrant lifestyle of their first high class client-Sonia and Pankaj (During their graduation days, the would-be groom had organized successful college fests and the bride to-be used to be a lead vocalist of her college band). They (Shruti and Bittoo) know that by blending their kitsch Janakpuri style with the high class, (supplanted with other influential factors such as technology, Bollywood and social media) they can achieve success, as Sonia and Pankaj with their current high tension and fast paced jobs want a planner who can provide a vibrant style in contrast to their monotonous and busy lifestyle. The groom's father also comments, "Both of them wear black suits and attend board meetings all day long. But when it comes to their wedding they want a kitsch one. You two are kitsch". Eventually, the Janakpuri taste triumphs over the Sainik farms. The triumph of one type of consumer culture over the other reflects the competition between classes. The graph of Shruti and Bittoo's growth is dependent on this cultural class struggle and the film proves how the spatial boundaries can become permeable and how cultures can evolve while mixing. The consumerist class struggle can form or alter the texture of different city spaces. Emphasizing on the power of class struggle for production of spaces, Lefebvre states:

> as for the class struggle, its role in the production of space is a cardinal one in that this production is performed solely by classes, fractions of classes and groups representative of classes. Today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space… Only the class struggle has the capacity to differentiate…. (55)

The consumerist class struggle is based on the logic of collective identity. Instead of creating a self-identity, consumption majorly provides a collective identity. We mark ourselves as members of a tribe by using a distinctive sense of style. According to Dick Hebdige, we develop subcultures which function within the larger framework of society rather than opposed to it. Members of subcultures use the group's "style" to make a comment on the society around them while simultaneously taking part in society (441-450). Advertising and media play a crucial role in accelerating consumerism. "Advertising offers the image of the transformed self; and consumption offers the means of effecting that

transformation" (Todd 49). The repetition of advertising messages creates and reinforces cultural beliefs and values. Marketers use symbols to convey desired product images. So, when Chanda Narang advertises her themes of classic, royal and Maharaja weddings, she is already inscribing symbols into the minds of her high-class clients and dividing them into western and traditional cultural groups. In Bittoo and Shruti's case their signature style, "Janakpuri chaap" (BBB) couple dance performances act as a symbol of their Punjabi, Bollywood style.

Towards the end of the film Bittoo and Shruti resolve their emotional conflict. Though their metropolitan rationality initially helped them in utilizing the consumerist culture of the city and made them perfect business partners, it is the acknowledgement of love from both the sides which breaks Shruti's golden rule of Business ("love and business do not go hand in hand") and liberates them. Finally, consumerism emerges as an inevitable condition of metropolitan cities like Delhi. The film itself portrays and promotes consumerism. It becomes a vehicle of presenting wedding planning as a norm for the consumerist society of Delhi. While many thinkers welcome consumerism ''trusting in the market's potential to eliminate inefficiencies, produce wealth, extend human freedom, open new possibilities, and unleash the potential of human creativity'' (Song 109), there are others who worry about the potentially corrosive effects of the market— its potential to widen social and economic differences, corrupt various social values, exploits vulnerable natural resources and "expose the disenfranchised to greater exploitation and manipulation" (109). But consumerism is not only an economic system; it is the way our postmodern society functions. It not only places us in the society but also provides the means by which to change social circumstances. Shruti and Bittoo's story finally provides measures of surviving in an unavoidable consumerist world.

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Beyond the Anthropocentric and Mythopoeic: Representation of Animals in Post-90s Indian Poetry in English

Gurleen Kaur

> We only hate what we don't understand. (Jo Knowles 74)
>
> Of all the beings that are, presumably the most difficult to think about are living creatures, because on the one hand they are in a certain way most closely related to us, and on the other are at the same time separated from our ek-sistent essence by an abyss. (Heidegger "Letter on Humanism" 89)
>
> Whether approached with the tools of rationality or those of imagination […] the lives of animals as currently configured generally resist meaningful cultural visitation on any significant scale. The search is therefore on, in the arts and the humanities, to identify new means of seeing, showing, and knowing the animals. (Una Chaughuri "(De)facing the Animals: Zooësis and Performance" 10)

Animals find themselves caged in zoos, homes, and even the ever-contracting wild spaces. Yet intriguingly, the violence against animals on many fronts can actually be the result of an acute shortage of efforts to understand the animals themselves. The lack of comprehensive descriptions of animals creates blank spaces, which the human mind tends to fill with anthropocentric discourses (Latour *Reassembling the Social* 146).[1] Since the differences perceived in non-human animals are not respectfully acknowledged, these animals are flung down the power structure, bundled as muted resources meant for exploitation. Automatically 'other-ed', animals suffer the same fate as all those who are rendered unprivileged and are hence subjugated.[2] So, it is vital to uncover and acknowledge the remarkable efforts, if any, being made in bringing forth descriptions that create space for utmost reality of all beings and celebrate differences in a non-hierarchical manner.

The animals freely occupy natural spaces in the post-90s Indian poetry in English. The neon, the infrared – the distinct night vision of the animal world comes alive in poetry and reveals other paths that biological life has taken. Like oracles of old or trans-mediums these poets take up the task of making the

animals come alive on paper and seem anything but humble. All stamped demarcations of *a priori* identity and discourses of being are erased or retraced to revise and qualify their status. In a mosaic network formed by all the poems, the real animals might be found gazing back. Outside the poetic canvas, animals are indistinguishably other-ed in light of the humanist modes of judgment.

It is true that animals do not speak, reason, think, plan, and reminisce like humans. Yet the standards by which the animals' differences of being, push them into an unprivileged position that seem to be utterly illogical and biased in an anthropocentric way. With the absence of similar intellectual traits, we must not deduce an utter vacuum. We again risk being presumptuous. John Muckelbauer in "Domesticating Animal Theory" stresses on the "attempt to take the animal seriously" while delineating what an animal rhetoric could be:

> […] What could an *animal rhetoric* look like? What I am thinking of here is neither a "rhetoric of animals" (analyzing how people talk or write about animals) nor simply an analysis of how animals persuade or identify or use some protosymbol systems (which would tend to position animals at some early stage of evolutionary development). Instead this *animal rhetoric* could be simply a diagnosis of forces and effects, responses and reactions- one that doesn't presume to know what a 'species' is in advance (or the 'human' or 'rhetoric'). (Muckelbauer 99)

A descriptive animal rhetoric freely delineates animals which are neither homogenous among themselves nor empty anthropocentric chambers vacated of human capacities. The post-90s Indian poetry in English celebrates and acknowledges the meaningful and zoocentrically resourceful differences that animals bring to the world.

The description of animals as beings with an agency different from our own must necessarily invite experimental speculation in addition to flat (non-hierarchical) yet rhizomatic (branching) detailing.[3] The dangers of the supramental sentiment of "Not only…but also" must be acknowledged while reliable detailing is appreciated.[4] The subjective stance of the poems situated necessarily in language poses a danger of humanist speculation, yet the multilayered descriptionoffered by these poems is a step beyond our foundationalist discourses on animals. Though the persona throughout these poems remains that of the human observer and speculator, these poems mark the descriptive stance where the observer has finally decided to pay closer attention to the real animals.

Identity must always be "an effect rather than a cause" (Love 379). Such a realization calls for a tabula rasa state of being to differentiate the essence of a being from the a priori appropriations of its pre-identification. Kimberly W. Benston states in "Experimenting at the Threshold: Sacrifice, Anthropomorphism, and the Aims of (Critical) Animal Studies":

> [R]ecent work on the philosophical import of human/animal relations has argued the need to view "the question of the animal" and "the question of the human" as reciprocal conundrums, recognizing that further insight into material, historical, and ethical features of these questions can no longer bracket metaphysical concerns; rather it must place them at the heart of animal studies' analytic and pragmatic agenda. (550)

Further, the "metaphysical concerns" never exist separately from the "material, historical and ethical features" provided that there is an ontological vision myopically at work. The static acceptance of the preordained must be microscopically challenged as Benston goes on to point to the critical animal studies' recognition of the need "to historicize and to radicalize 'the human' and 'the animal' as diacritical figurations that, far from being granted to research as stable or prefabricated beings, must be continuously reimagined and reconstituted." (Benston 551) The very quality of 'animality' calls for an ontological tracing. Yet contrary to this, animals find themselves nailed on the crucifix of popular representation in a human centric world. Before stating the effectiveness and descriptive powers of these poems in bringing forth the real animals, it is imperative to transmogrify ourselves into myopic ants[5] and observe the specific instances of description at work in studying the poems themselves. The trajectory that we must follow as we enter the post-90s Indian poetic scene is also "not just from philosophy to poetry but also from one kind of poetry to another" (Chaudhuri 10).

Over the ages, animals have either suffered at the hands of anthropocentric discourses or been limited as symbolic deities entangled in humanist metaphysics. In a country like India where the anthropological reality is greatly influenced by religious and mythical practices, the question of animal representation gains immense significance. In Indian (especially Hindu) mythology, animals are ubiquitous in terms of their symbolic and mythopoeic values and functions. Monkeys become the mythical representations of Hanuman. Elephants remind one of Ganesha, the Hindu deity donning the head of an elephant. Snakes are

worshipped as Shiva's pets. Bulls, tigers, and rats are considered holy as symbolic vehicles for gods and goddesses. Indian representation of animals has been deeply tangled midst such metaphysical trappings. Yet, the contemporary Indian poetry, mediated by a deep understanding of modernism and postmodernism, reverses the mythopoeic deification and humanist anthropomorphism of animals, unleashing their wilderness of being. Poets like Sujata Bhatt in poems like "Understanding the Ramayana", "What Happened to the Elephant", "The First Meeting", and "In the End"; Tabish Khair in "Snakes, Outside the First Book of Moses"; Rukhmini Bhaya Nair in "Gomata"; et cetera, aid animals to break free of their conventional associations. These poems summon us to journey into the wilderness and domestic spaces to discover monkeys that serve as slaves enacting Ramayana, monkeys that are not like Hanuman, the commonplace elephant's carcass left behind by Shiva at the murder site ("Who is the true elephant?"), the real Cobra that refuses to be moved by offerings of milk or "bulging pipes", the heterogeneous species of snakes that escape Hindu deification, and real cows that are found chewing the garbage on Indian streets.

The fabrications of the human mind create organisms that retain mythical presence in our imaginative art forms and forms of belief. Chattarji states, "We lent them our best traits/ and expected them to teach us something/ in return" (61). Here something much more complex is at work. Delineating the inside logic behind anthropomorphizing tendencies of humans, Benston talks about "the idealism of anthropomorphization through which the ambiguities of animality (is it mere existence or a secret repository of meaning shaping capacities) would be dissolved into the certainties of human identity" (552). Hence, if linguistically, psychologically, and culturally, animals get described in the ways of humans then what we witness taking shape is the biased form of our own perception. In "Alphabestiary", a bestiary by H. Masud Taj, an oral poet and Bruce Myers, one finds almost all the components of a traditional bestiary. But unlike traditional bestiaries, which provide "the religious and moral lessons which the animal's [supposed] behavior can teach" (Collins 2), this bestiary keeps the animals at the center and makes human beings realize the significance of acknowledging differences for new ethical and logical insights. Yet the lessons are not arrived at throughthe animals. The sight we behold becomes the living lesson. The animals come alphabetically and like alphabets are to language, we realize, animals are to our world and our co-dependent existence.

Taj strays outside the realm of real animals that have a corporeal presence on our planet to include the mythical beings like dragons into the bestiary. In

bringing these mythical animals alive, Taj touches the sensitive yet potent regions of human mind. The myth of dragons has prevailed in Western as well as Eastern traditions. As forces of enlightenment or destruction, the mythical dragons roam the literary and artistic skies of the human mind. As the descriptive lens focuses and zooms in, the myth gives way to the myth maker. With keen self-reflexivity, the poet succeeds in informing the human race of the deeper psychological stakes and insecurities that lie under a human mind's myth making tendencies. Yet it takes a mythical dragon to make the declaration. In Taj's "Dragon", the mythical beast refuses to be a myth for it is the infelicitous reality of human life. The myth is the mighty dragon slayer, a spectral manifestation of humanity's insecurity regarding its worth and strength, "To cope with dragon-reality/ You conjure a white mythology/ Of dragon-slayers" (Taj 44). By conquering the gigantic, abysmal yet imaginary beast, humanity fulfills its self-proclaimed prophecy of ruling the world. Our outward projections echo our inward status. The poem reveals how the mind enjoys mythically slaying self-created problems by conjuring "a white mythology of dragon-slayers" (Taj 44). No amount of myths can change the problems of human condition until a self-cognizance is arrived at. By considering the dragon-reality a myth, humanity ends up snuffed in a helical hell where real problems are "Doomed to an unforgiving unforgetting" and "grow larger with time" (Taj 44).

Often the mythopoeic tendencies translate badly for the real animals. Humans tend to misuse the powers of animals for their amusement. Yet inherently, animals unmask human frailties and insecurities, hence emerging out stronger and nobler. The newt as delineated by Taj in the poem "Newt" renders all human acts of mutilation impotent in the face of its regenerative capacity:

> My creation destroys
> Your destruction.
> You turn believer,
> Believe that I am forever. (Taj 64)

The newts strive towards a stubborn completeness that suffers no amputation. The newt does not crave for immortality like humans rather feels and strives to be forever complete. As victims of human mythology, newts suffer a lot as humans follow the misconstrued lore. As humans misuse their own sense of strength against the seemingly meek, they betray their own sense of insecurity and weakness. As Bruce Meyer writes: "What newts tell us is that even in

frailty, and in retreat from the overpowering presence of man, nature remains courageous and still finds a way to fight back" (Meyer 65).

Cats who "answer to no one" emit an obvious willfulness that cannot be tamed (Meyer 43). This attribute makes them recurring subjects of various poetical compositions. Though cats, especially kittens, are known to be playful, the negative connotations associated with cats stem mainly from the human inability to fully know them and hence to tame them. As Meyer writes, "Folklore tells us that to look into cat's eyes is to gaze into an eternal dark mystery that functions not according to the rules of the world, but to the call of its own nature" (43). The unknown and the "inexplicable" presences of some animals "haunt us without speaking to us" (43). Hence, the cats find themselves associated with black magic. Yet their utility in killing rodents makes them harmless domestic animals for humans to keep. Further, by trimming out projected utility and belief systems which remain limited to anthropocentric interests, we reach the core of what makes a cat a cat. Taj brings forward attributes that bring forth their own specific standards. The cats' night vision power depicted in another one of Taj's *Alphabestiary* poems called "Cat" brings alive the "dreadful gleam" of their eyes, rendering the night world into a map of highlighted prey traces and "darkness defined by the coordinates/ Of other cats' eyes", and evoking a feeling of vulnerability in the human mind (Taj 42). The optical radius shifts into the eyes of the cat transforming the nature of sight into what is experienced by a nocturnal cat. The night sky becomes "the cat's night sky" (42). The poet reasserts that we are traversing unfamiliar terrains. The physiological overturning of vision is description enough for the human mind to acknowledge the difference of a cat's being as well as question the mind's tendency to homogenize the world into humanist semantic islands. As new standards are raised, humans come across as beings that lack night vision and are handicapped in other ways. It is strange that though animals' lack of intelligence is reasserted in making all hierarchical classifications and justifying humanist possessions of animals, nobody ponders over the multiple ways in which *Homo sapiens* are rendered vulnerable and juvenile in a wild space.

In Sujata Bhatt's "Understanding the Ramayana" we are made to realize how myth and imaginative fascination overtake our take on reality which is muted most of the time. The monkeys used as slaved puppets are so effective in entertaining from behind an industry of entertainment that makes all injustice

seem make-believe, natural, and worth it. The poem descriptively pricks this desensitized lull.

> So absorbed were we
> […] we didn't pay much attention
> to the chains around the delicate
> monkey feet- preventing them
> from jumping very far. (123, 86-96)

The monkeys are so articulate in their gestures that it is well into the middle of the poem one realizes that *The Ramayana* is being performed by monkeys: "So it didn't matter / that none of them could speak" (122). In an act of semantic breakdown of static meanings, the poet senses that the monkeys inhabit very humane characteristics among them, "Monkeys more humane/ than anyone" (123).

Sujata Bhatt's brilliant poem "What Happened to the Elephant?" speaks about the neglected animal of the other side of the mythical story, the narrative of which went unrecorded. The child is curious as to what happened to the elephant that had to give its head for Ganesh. Ironically, some Gods and demi-gods are born out of the deaths of the innocent. Looking through the eyes of children, a just perspective emerges.

> What happened to the elephant,
> the one whose head Shiva stole
> to bring his son Ganesh
> back to life? (116, 1-4)

To the tabula rasa mind of a child unaffected by the ideological and emotive presuppositions of the world, Shiva and Ganesh are as important as the elephant- no more and no less. The power play is challenged in the child's curious yet lucidly elemental mind. Ethically, the saving of one life at the cost of another seems to be a bad bargain. Strikingly, the complex philosophical question of identity is raised by the child, making this a positive case of descriptive way of thought, "Who is the true elephant?" (116). For the poet, the contents of the postcard of Ganesh grow as the logical speculation of the mind to include the "rotting carcass/ of a beheaded elephant/ lying crumpled up/ on its side" (117). There is pathos in the depiction of the mute sorrow of the elephants "with their slow swaying sadness […]" (117). The child wishes to "believe the fantasy" and also refuses "to accept Shiva's carelessness/ and searches for a solution/ without death" (116).

Animals usually find themselves, either actively or passively, marginalized or turned into holy symbols with either mythical or debasing appendages. In the poem "The First Meeting" by Sujata Bhatt, the King Cobra does not wish to be worshipped or enslaved. All efforts to understand their nature add up to either scientific recording or else romanticization. The effort to understand their relative nature must be highly situational and subjective. Poetry comes closest to decoding the animal DNA. The human poet remains self-aware and self-reflexive and hence we come closer to the landscape and the animals roaming in it, brushing close to humans. In the literary and the real world animals are expected to behave according to fantastical mythology conceived inside the human mind. As the King Cobra says in "The First Meeting", "as if their bulging pipes could move us" (21). Academic appendages in theory too are born out of this tendency to wrap ideological and essentializing meanings around everything through an almost involuntarily compulsive and unnatural instinct. Nothing is self-explanatory inside the human world. Human mind inevitably feels the need to weave a discourse around everything and in doing so ends up creating a false discourse that asserts its pseudo-self-proclaiming worth. Moreover losing the ontological vision capable of seeing the nature of things, beings and situations as they are is an immense loss in itself.

When animals are situated in religious and mythical contexts – spun by the wild human imagination out of the fear of the unknown, they lose their fluid identity. In Bhatt's "Only the Blackest Stones", there is religious awe one feels brought forth by animals frozen into meaning. A very mysterious aura reigns in the poem. The awe-inspiring snakes frozen into sculptures create an atmosphere of silence that no one but the pure hearted children can feel free to slice into as Mythologizing freezes and cryoanesthetizes living animals into fetishized beings. Yet these poems brilliantly melt away the myth to reveal the (real) animals. In the poem "In the End" by Bhatt we witness the last resort when the snakes on Medusa's head are talked to directly. "But who has ever bothered/ to listen to their story?" (528). Here we find Medusa's snakes not as unreal myths but as animals, "as they are" within their natural element.

The poem "Snakes, Outside the First Book of Moses" in Tabish Khair's *Where Parallel Lines Meet* (2000) brings out a demarcation between the mythical, religious, and bookish cultural connotations that are assigned to all things and beings on this planet. The Book of Moses becomes something very distant in which snakes are seen as mythical anti-beings which are masquerading in the real time world. They do not seek recognition on the basis of myths, or

allegories. They want to be implicitly respected for who they are. The snake must not be killed because it is a snake. If it is killed, it must be killed for a reason. It must earn its death. The Indian connotation of snake is not the biblical connotation of snake. The hooded cobra would get a bowl of milk from the chanting housewives. This becomes anthropologically connected with a way of life. Snakes are not free of myth but their heterogeneous presence and anthropological interaction with humans cannot go unrecorded. The snakes are heterogeneous. They are poisonous and non-poisonous snakes. The specificity of situation too plays out its role. In a situation where a poisonous snake has entered your home and is threateningly located near a child, defensive violence becomes justifiable. The threat involved brings to activation the right to kill the snake. The predetermining religious and cultural connotations are swept aside. The snake has in its specificity of nature and location been acknowledged, recognized and killed. These are the real snakes outside books. These are the snakes outside the first book of Moses, and hence are outside all connotations that are pinned down on them. The Snake with a capital 'S' is questioned and its subverted identity is broken down to a more honest description. This act is descriptive in coming closer to reality rather than passing right through it.

The "Viper" by Masud Taj depicts the consuming nature of the viper in a blood chilling manner which is surprisingly no different from our consumerist way of life. The human flesh offers itself in the form of "earthly delights/ A gourmet's paradise,/ Las Vagas of fast-food joints" (82). Our response to the poem depicts our double standards as humans, in the sense that we are so naturalized to the violence we commit and so shocked at another animals' moderate way of life. The human body becomes "[f]resh food with a perishable heart/ Pulsating to keep my cadaver fresh" (82). The consumerist society's deadly nature stands out in the viper's detailed description of its nightly meal. In this scenario, sheer description shreds the complacent human righteousness that has turned numb to all questioning and rethinking. In a 360 degree overturning, the viper states, "I believe in a consumer society./ For I am the consumer/ You, the consumed." (82) It is easy to support a consumer society when one is not being consumed. Our own consumerist way of life is nothing but "an orgy of choices" (82).

Of all the poems in the unit "Animulae" in Rukhmini Bhaya Nair's *Ayodhya Cantos: Poems*, "Gomata" stands out as the masterful archetype. This poem on cow becomes "another poem" for the cow itself is a living poem, "O cow against the yellow calendula/ you do not need another poem" (79). The physical

shapes and contours of the body descriptively becomes the living expression of its emotional verbiage,

> so why would you need a poem, cow?
> you are the soul of any lyric
> you are a poem
> yourself, swayambhu (79, 13-16).

The cow carries along its mythological associations:"[…] it was with you in the Gita and when you ambled withYajnavalkya/ all through the Brihadaranyaka, making legend/ and it is with you now." (80) Today the cow can be seen walking amid the traffic like a "grandmother" or a "great matriarch" wearing "black patent high-heeled pumps" (80). And yet the old associations remain. Gopala, the man leading the cow still sings his poems: "his poems still lilt through the boulders of your mind/ agonize in its leafy groves, whispering/ nothing has changed" (81). The archetypes evolve yet their strong essence stays on through generations. The poetic description is at its best in one of the brilliant stanzas in the poem. The poet explores the nexus between the realistic, mythical, emotive and subjective. The biological situation of the cow is at loggerheads with its religious significance. Yet it survives the paradox. The stanza brilliantly records the same:

> though you march with the herd, you are alone
> though you are sacred, you are not beloved
> thrusting your nose into city garbage
> unembarrassed, a fly-blown beggar
> driven from the dusty villages
> how do you stand it, cow? (81, 46-51)

The muted nature of animals turns them into palimpsests for the fulfillment of human mind's mythopoeic tendencies. In such myth making, the real animals find themselves neglected and fetishized. Many of the myths being arbitrary and lacking ontological truths, land as heavy weights on the animals as the human mind loses its sense of distinction between the real and the unreal. Hence, though cows might be worshipped, we can still find them straying and "thrusting" their "nose into city garbage" (81). Newts suffer mutilation while monkeys are turned into performers in the country that worships the monkey-God Hanuman. Mythologically, salamanders are supposed to survive fire because fire is their deriving element. All animals are given to their connotations which determine in the form of sheer lore their existence and conditions of survival. In

Aimee Nezhukumatathil's "Thanksgiving" one finds how even physicists, engineers, philosophers, poets and harpists far from realizing the meaning of "Thanksgiving" would rather wish to find out the truth of the statement that "A cricket won't burn if it is thrown into the fire" (39). The man who grew quiet with concern, the man the poet would marry was "The kind of guy who would've fished the cricket out of the flame" (39). In Nezhukumatathil's "Four Amulets for a Frightened Farmer", eels and snakes have to die to cater to humans' baseless superstitions. The eel's head contains a stone and snakes have nails concealed under their tails. Both become detached objects of consumption. In religion too, animals play their part in terms of mythical symbolism.

Animals are our biological doppelgängers here on earth. Animals appear and reappear in the human mind. Early Homo-sapiens made sketches of animals on their cave walls. Animals have been painted, written about, dramatized and sung about. Without indulging in humanist epistemological methods, the ways and forms in which animals appear reveal a lot about us and our relation with them. Thinking about animals necessarily evokes the unconscious. An objective and relativistic description of animals requires a charting of our unconscious terrains and mythopoeic tendencies. Rather, beyond what humanist tendencies would have us believe, one must seek the cosmic unity in all beings that stand, at the same time, firmly by their peculiar natures.

Over the years one feels the need for the problematization of the literary metaphoric anthropomorphism of animals and refurbishing their portrayal which till now has been "as the repressed Other of the subject, identity, logos […]" (Wolfe x). Animals cannot stay bound into metaphoric packs. These sealed stale packs need to be opened and rendered complex to suit the changing sensibilities and the atmosphere of enhanced consciousness of these sensibilities. The humanists traversing the world find themselves dancing with the hollow specters of animals while the real animals, though abound, almost stay invisible to the eye. The diverse operational ways animals find themselves sauntering on must be explored. Sometimes, what may or may not emerge within the human fold emerges in a mirror like projection and escape from identity and responsibility, as in the tendency to pack animals into bundles and render them stereotypical. "Those creatures live in our imagination as much as they live with us on this tiny blue planet." (Taj, Meyer 14). But imagination involves the human mind and mind becomes the site for ideological constructions through the creation of myth and culture. Animals share this planet with humans. In literature and other art forms, animals stand personified. Further, often an animal

almost becomes the alter-ego of the human. In an essentialized way, the animal-human binary between nature and culture is created.

Cosmic systems, weather, and animals are obstinately out of human control and yet have an automatic instinctual accuracy with an involuntary inclination to maintain the natural balance. It is this accuracy that demands trust in all its organic perfection. Hence, imagery becomes descriptively important and animals become the carriers of thought that need not be dissected beyond the animal in all its organic completion. In facing the animal, in looking into the eyes of Taj's Xolo, we face our fundamental nature beyond all beliefs and disbeliefs. All our cultural constructs dissolve away in its eyes. But thinking outside the humanist interpretative tendencies, we actually take steps toward making flexible the searching vision which cannot forever have humans at the center. By considering animals as vessels rather than beings in their own right a lot of violence is done to the very attributes that we would otherwise find profitable in decoding ourselves. Derrida stresses on the realness of his cat in "The Animal That Therefore I am", "[T]he cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, a little cat. It isn't the figure of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse myths and religions, literatures and fables" (374).

Our mind comes in the way and projects itself distorting the animals into anthropomorphic prototypes. A "good" description frees the animals from being carriers of human consciousness and experience and arranges for a complex and interesting descriptive interactive session among them (Latour*Reassembling the Social* 146). Here the animal and the human enter the scene through behavioral and action based viewpoints, "I do, therefore/ Unmindfully, I am" (Taj 36). As animals enter the scene enhancing our self-reflexivity, a complete overhauling can be expected where humans see themselves in a new light. The humanist central throne is shaken as a reassessment of self takes place in the human mind. The humanist pluralism stretches to take on a universal pluralism with the revelation that all identities, including ours, remain in a constructing and deconstructing flux. Animals do not bring the off-tracking abstract ideologies with them, helping us in understanding their interaction in a better way. This is especially effective in cases where the subject cannot linguistically assert itself and is blissfully free of the linguistic baggage. The subject in such cases can assert itself only through its being, its body and its actions. Everything else is projection of the linguistically strong party blundering through the linguistic traps of the mind.

Animals retain a great significance as embodiments of a certain natural completeness. We can never perfect nature for nature is already perfect and animals are doing what they have to, following behavioral instincts. Poetry can only record and utilize these perfections to point to the unsaid of the already created. Here, the poet is the "humble analyst and observer" (Love 381). Reification and ideological preconception come natural to language. To escape that, an objective observation of animal and human nature through a record of actions, behaviors and situations becomes the most effective way to record the unsaid nuances. To think clearly we must start afresh. The dehumanizing tendency of the descriptive turn is especially helpful in another way. To understand our true nature we need to step out of our solipsist castles. The surplus of subjective response is significant as far as descriptive accuracy goes. Stepping beyond the specificity of 'self' and 'now' becomes the breeding ground for the preconceived abstractions that cloud over the objective thought process. As the observant attitude is placed beyond the margins, the other and the center merge on an equalized platform. Subjectivity, once acknowledged and located, is objective in situating the subject. Looking at animals as an act is at the centre of the post-90s Indian poetry. Description here refers to the un-assumed analytical product of observant thought. In a cross and trans-cultural cross-section, it is polysemic and multidimensional. In a rational rethinking from the scratch: observing the here and now, it opens up life in all its organicity. Unexpectedly we find that our "aspirations toward something more: a nuanced understanding" actually finds fulfillment. What we arrive at, is the "unillusioned view" through "accurate reportage" which requires a certain reorganization of the mind (Ravinthiran 359). Poetic description is not irresponsible. It may be "an unlikely fusion of the subjective and the objective, difficult to validate" but it is also a creative yet "a responsible accounting of the world" (Ravinthiran 359).

End Notes

1) A good description, according to Bruno Latour, is a description which requires no explanations for it is complete in itself and self-revelatory in stating ontological truths (a quality one can find in all great works of literature). In that sense, a good description comes as a corrective tool for those unnecessarily misled by suspicion and those convoluted by presumptions put forth by inorganic and manufactured discourses. All descriptive attempts mark the turn to the real and the unassuming yet critical depiction of the real. We must not at any cost assume pseudocyesistic depth following the "hermeneutics of suspicion" and must move from

"metaphysics to ontology" (Love Close 382, 377). Heather Love borrows the terminology given by Silvan Tomkins and states: "strong theory can organize vast amounts of territory and tell big truths, it misses the descriptive richness of weak theory. Weak theory stays local, gives up on hypervigilance for attentiveness; instead of powerful reductions, it prefers acts of noticing, being affected, taking joy, and making whole" (Love Truth and Consequences 238). Further, anthropocentricism (humanocentricism/ human supremacy) is the belief that humans are the center of everything. The term finds usage to pinpoint the belief that *Homo sapiens* are the most superior species on the planet and exceed other beings in terms of value or moral status.

2) 'Othering' is a marginalizing process in which the mainstream identifies and separates those who are different from the mainstream by reasserting the power discourse.

3) Deleuze and Guattari use the term "rhizomatic" to describe a non-hierarchical mode of representation that allows for multiplicity and diversity.

4) "P: See? That's the inevitable trap: 'Not only. . . but also'. Either you extend the argument to everything, but then it becomes useless— 'interpretation' becomes another synonym for 'objectivity'—or else you limit it to one aspect of reality, the human, and then you are stuck—since objectivity is always on the other side of the fence. And it makes no difference if the other side is considered richer or poorer; it's out of reach anyway" (Latour *Reassembling* 145).

5) "[…] someone pointed out to me that the acronym A.N.T. was perfectly fit for a blind, myopic, workaholic, trail-sniffing, and collective traveler. An ant writing for other ants, this fits my project very well!" (Latour *Reassembling* 9).

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Chaos and Literary Aesthetics: Stitching the Indian Myth

Mahim Sharma

"Where chaos begins, classical science stops."

- James Gleick, *Chaos* (Gleick, 3)

In and around 1960s, troubled were those who extended arguments upon arrangements of voluptuous assumptions. Sipping his coffee, Edward Lorenz saw on his computer, a Royal McBee, a dry mid-day being simulated. A meteorologist as he was, he had offered a major portion of his room to this machine in exchange of information that marked his eminent reputation at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "Outside his window Lorenz could watch real weather, the early morning fog creeping . . . . Fogs and clouds never arose in the model running on his computer" (Gleick, 11).

There was a gap. There always had been and many, across various fields realised, there always shall be. "Discourse is invoked by Foucault as a term for an exhaustive representation; that, therefore, leaves no gaps or silences" (Frances, 2). Every discourse arose from an agenda. It could be of power, or of knowledge, or both, but the voices that were made silences or noises, were not a matter of chance. Chance is innocent. It was the persistent attempt of selectiveness. From the choice of words to the choice of vision, it was a procedure of omission and preference. The intent behind outruns the action and the selection. Not considered dire, such 'innocent' assumptions and selections lead people into the realm of being interpellated with the stagnant yet strong belief that it was them who writ and were writing a narrative of their own choice. But their presence was passive.

> Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.292-293)

They were noises; irrelevant dust on the shining armour of natural reasoning. Every field favoured those problems that have solutions, and that too on conditions given in a lab devoid of all forces that act upon the empirical existence of all

those who will be applying that in their own lives. “Theorists operate in a pristine place free of noise, of vibration, of dirt. The experimenter develops an intimacy with matter as sculptor does with clay, battling it, shaping it, and engaging it” (Gleick, 125). This gap, a meek silent terrain of voicelessness, did trouble people like Lorenz but it intrigued those more who picked a pen to write, or rather rewrite, reality. It was not a better reality, they claimed, but a narrative that never relished the brisk air of acknowledgement, let alone applause.

Truth can be true, but every Truth aligns itself in a hierarchical order of agenda. “Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.110). In an age of doubt the right questions mattered more than the right answers, for one leaves and the other leads. In the later half of the twentieth century, minds were troubled with the improper interaction with and answering of noises, the others, the silences or the disturbances in all perfect systems of an equilibrium world. “Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.292-293). Something was not fitting. Assumptions were taken as a threat to growth. They looked back at factors that were rounded off, facts that were compiled in the name of precision and result. “Lorenz felt a jolt: something was philosophically out of joint” (Gleick, 17). So, they decided to ask again.

Henri Poincare was one of the first to question the assumptions about stability in nature. On paper, and even on computer, population estimations were being grinded to the precise decimal number while rabbits in one odd year outgrew their estimated number on the digital screen, while on the other hand foxes, predicted to die of hunger in a huge number, were seen embracing a growth to such an extent that they spread to the nearing terrain as well. “Rabbits do not always act the same way or produce at the same rate, nor do foxes, for the weather and living conditions of each season vary, as do the kind and amount of nutrients in their diets” (Slethaug, xx). Insignificant events and occurrences led to the fallout of significant, extensive and expensive estimations after months and months of observations and calculations. Noises were giving soreness to the voice, and people were starting to hear gibberish with adherence.

These triggered minds could see the smoke rise as a column from a cigarette and break into wild swirls, they’d watch the flag snap back and forth in the wind, in the behaviour of the weather, of an airplane in flight, cars clustering on

an expressway. They could feel expression in gibberish, flow in the pattern of abrupt narratives, and flaw in the epical metanarrative. A few years back the city council of Monza, Italy, barred owners from keeping goldfish in curved goldfish bowls. It was justified by saying that it was indeed cruel to keep a fish in a bowl with curved sides, because, gazing out, the fish would have a distorted view of reality. But how do we know we have the true, undistorted picture of reality? Is there not a chance where we ourselves also be inside some big goldfish bowl and have our vision distorted by an enormous lens? The goldfish's picture of reality is definitely different from ours, but can we be sure it is less real? (Stephen Hawking, *The Grand Design*, 54). But, to know a vision without being shown can occur prominently after closing the eyes to what we saw, as Kuhn says, to accept the future, one must renounce much of the past. (Gleick, 39)

Chaos theory did not grow as a remedy of what wrong had been done in the sciences. "I don't write a book so that it will be the final word; I write a book so that other books are possible, not necessarily written by me" (Michel Foucault, Interview)**.** It was not an oppositional force coming to jolt and free the systems from stringency and an eternal sense of determinism. Chaos poses problems that defy accepted ways of working in science. The Greeks suggested it as a paradoxical state in which irregular motion may lead to pattern, and disorder and order are linked. The understanding developed in the contemporary times and it became more than a closure to order. It became a celebration of disorder within the order, and of order within disorder. The small particles, the bleak noises and dissipation in an orderly system may have been rounded up but they cause disruptions of a huge magnitude. "The sensitive dependence on initial conditions means that similar phenomenon or systems will never be wholly identical and that the results of those small initial changes may be radically different" (Slethaug, xxiii).

Science started relishing, as mentioned before, the questioning of given principles around the 1960s. Realisation dawned around this time that quite simple mathematical equations could model systems every bit as violent as a waterfall. The theory embraced the dynamics of an inclusive approach towards the pattern on the leaves, to the pattern of rivers, the paths of lightning, the shape of clouds, or the fluctuations in population and markets. "Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons" (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.292-293). Scientists who started

working rebelliously against the orthodoxy of the eminent 'given' found themselves under scrutiny, surveillance and seclusion, like they were crazy, ungrateful devotees willing to put mundane questions to the sublime. But they took it gracefully. "I am not crazy, my reality is just different than yours" (Cheshire-cat, *Alice in Wonderland,* 59).

Other than physicists, meteorologists, and more troubled scientists, minds from other fields started questioning as well. Physiologists found a surprising order in the chaos that develops in the human heart, the prime cause of sudden, unexplained death. The rise and fall of gypsy moth populations were explored by ecologists. Economists tried a new kind of analysis on old stock price data. After James Gleick penned his marvel *Chaos* in 1987, literary minds, always baffled by jargons in physics, finally read words that were not accentuating a distinction between sciences and human sciences. They took a deep breath. Even literature had to be revisited. "Simple, deterministic systems could breed complexity" (Gleick, 307).

Harriet Hawkins in *Strange Attractors* has explored the works of early figures such as Shakespeare and Milton under the light of the concepts and metaphors of chaos theory. In *The Arrow of Chaos: Romanticism and Postmodernism*, Ira Livingston explored the mentioned domains with chaos theory. N. Katherine Hayles wrote *The Cosmic Web, Chaos Bound,* and *Chaos and Order* to traverse the interface between modern literature, literary theory, and twentieth-century physics. American, Canadian, African and British literature, all were timidly succumbing to, as Gramsci calls them, organic intellectuals. "The intellectual was rejected and persecuted at the precise moment when the facts became incontrovertible, when it was forbidden to say that the emperor had no clothes" Michel Foucault (Frances, 2). Fear was giving way to dare.

"Do I dare/ Disturb the universe?"

-T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock".

The earliest works of literature in India were orally transmitted. Rig veda, a collection of sacred hymns, dates back 1500-1200 BCE. Then there were Sanskrit epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. By the ninth and tenth century literature in Telugu and Kannada also flourished, followed later by literature in Marathi, Odia and Bengali. On the platter of the world, Indian literature is mature enough to be quantified and qualified as an important component of world literature. It,

worthily, deserves a revisit through the lens of chaos theory. The only initiation is not that of correspondence with the thought of barging Indian literature into the realm of all literatures of the world that have been approached by the chaos theory, but with the affirmation of diversity within and around all forms, genres, regionality and nationality of Literature. All boundaries collapse.

The Dry-Tree Silhouette

"The water walks barefoot in the wet streets"

- Pablo Neruda, "White Bee".

Scaling is an act of determinism. What humans cannot scale, they cannot estimate, anticipate or appreciate. The concrete understanding of a phenomenon is based upon the scales that themselves are accepted, assumed and given. Nature defies humans that mere privilege. Imagine a photograph of a mountain. The human eye fails to assert and allot a specific scale as to how big the mountain actually is. But if the photograph had, for example, a temple, then the human eye takes it as a referent for scaling the size of the mountain using the height of the temple as a base unit.

Nature is similar at different sizes. A small mountain is similar to a tall mountain. Air travellers lose all perspective on how far away a cloud is. Without cues such as haziness, a cloud twenty feet away can be indistinguishable from two thousand feet away. This is because nature is unlike a linear system where all the blocks can be broken down and put back again without having any loss or gain. In nature, in nonlinearity, in chaos, and in literature, all blocks do not add up because in them what all base particles do, when they come together is unpredictable. "Implicitly, the mission of many twentieth-century scientists had been to break their universe down to the simplest atoms that will obey scientific rules" (Gleick, 14). But it is one thing what one atom does, and what all of them do. When together, they hardly go straight. Art that satisfies lacks scale. Dharamvir Bharati had no referent of moral scaling while reading *Mahabharata*. *Andha Yug* was written in 1954, around the time when Indians had questioned, intrigued and inverted the authority of the British raj on the reality of their land. They were looking for more.

Alok Bhalla defended his decision to translate *Andha Yug* by calling it a service of practical reason, and "given the present condition of the country, in the aid of political sanity too" (Bharati, 1). Bhalla emphasized on the relief that Dharamvir Bharati brought to the character of Krishna by making him a more

humane figure "with whom the self can always conduct a dialogue" (Bharati, 3). Bharati's entire struggle was to bring the epic to the empirical realm. The development of the epic was made a straight pipeline of linear perspective but there was branching that never made it on the page. The biggest quantum leap was that of the aesthetic. The branching was, if not less, similarly aesthetic than the straight bark of the tree. Gert Eilenberger, a German physicist, asked,

> Why is that the silhouette of a storm-bent leafless tree against an evening sky in winter is perceived as beautiful, but the corresponding silhouette of any multi-purpose university building is not, in spite of all efforts of the architect? . . . our feeling for beauty is inspired by the harmonious arrangement of order and disorder as it occurs in natural objects-in clouds, trees, mountain ranges, or snow crystals. (Gleick, 117)

Even the intent of fiddling with an epic as huge, pious and mature as the *Mahabharata* was a reason enough to exile an ungrateful soul. They had no place for someone who was not obliged by what shape such literature had taken over the years. Dharmvir Bharati was after form. For him, each stroke that is taken on a white canvas is an act of violence. Each drop of colour that marks it fixity on the dimensions of the canvas is an end to the entirety of innumerable possibilities that could have sprouted from the exact same place. Branching of possibilities is an expansion of horizon. If a painter knows the violence being committed, only then is he/she a great artist. But an insistence on the finality and exclusivity of their stroke is a step towards precision. Where there is no dialogue, there is decadence. An age of an enlightenment, honour, valour and *dharma* becomes the blind age, *Andha Yug*.

The blindness was towards the futility of war that even the foot soldiers were more willing to contemplate than the people who were debating dharma itself. They had not violated any honour because they did not have any. "The ordinary foot-soldiers of the Kaurava army are cynical about those who control the affairs of state. They are more concerned about their immediate physical survival than about questions of law or virtue" (Bharati, 8). These small dissipations in the singularity of a bark made the entire narrative more chaotic where earlier it was statically moral and simply a confrontation of black with white. The piousness perforated, such branching was aesthetically more vibrant because it was more encompassing.

Imagine a person riding a bike on an empty road. The path of travel

becomes a straight line where the torque hardly changes for any reason and the journey is smoother because of less braking (dissipations) and stopping (collisions). This is true even when the reaction and properties of one atom or molecule are observed in isolation. On the road to literature, one is never alone, no matter how much he tries to be. Riding a bike on a crowded street is like writing a poem in itself where your path is highly dependent not on the capability of one's mind but on the chances that are jumbled to you through the probabilities of the constant dissipations of each rider, driver, pedestrian and even pet or potholes. Chaos is like "walking through a maze whose walls rearrange themselves with each step you take" (Gleick, 24).

If the trajectory of each day of that person is traced in black on a white sheet of paper, the small dissipations will be gentle touches of aesthetic vibrancies for the destination each time would be the same. Even in that chaotic trajectory there is bound to be a set pattern, if not in scaling then in dynamics, like the trajectory around the corner of the street or a lane where potholes make the rider take almost a similar path that he or she took the previous day and will take the next day, or avoiding collision even on the scaled path where obstacles are not static but jumbled each day. Limiting only one, scaled path as the only route for one destination is making a closed ended, isolated and unobliging assertion of rounding off all those small dissipations that are empirically existent. The same happened with epics, and the same happened with *Mahabharata* as observed by Bharati himself when he says,

> Since I have shared its sufferings, how can the truth I discovered be mine alone? A time comes when the superficial distinction between the 'self' and the 'others' is erased. They are no longer separate. This is the 'whole' truth. I have 'personally' discovered it- but its dignity lies in its being widely shared once again. (Bharati, 17)

A glimpse of this entirety is what made Bharati enter in dialogue with the straight line righteousness of dharma itself. No more rounding off in the name of precision. Edward Lorenz learnt it the hard way. He wanted to examine one sequence at length so he took a shortcut. He decided to start midway and gave his computer the initial conditions that he had noted in an earlier printout. He came after having a coffee and saw something that changed his study forever. The new run should have copied the old one to its exact range but what he saw huge divergence between the old and the new run. Divergence that was so huge that there was hardly any resemblance. But then suddenly "he realised the truth"

(Gleick, 16). The problem was in the numbers that he had typed. In the computer's memory, six decimal places were stored: .506127. On the printout, to save space, just three appeared: .506. "Small errors proved catastrophic" (Gleick, 17). Vyasa saw linearity of a narrative and the reception of the text was entirety. Bharati emphasises this aspect when he makes Dhritarashtra realise, "Today, I realised that there is a truth that lies beyond the boundaries of my selfhood. I realised that only today" (Bharati, 35).

It is often believed that one of the oldest criteria of beauty is symmetry. But, nature seems to follow a geometry of the irregular, the jagged, and the kinky. As Mandelbrot puts it, "Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones" (Kumar, 58). This irregularity arises from randomness. Randomness is not new, it was never new. It always existed. The guards were always there standing outside the palace of those who were involved in the 'dharam yudh'. Lorenz, in his model, saw more than randomness, he saw "order *masquerading* as randomness". It was not confrontation of order, like Ashwathama says, "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Bharati, 55). It was a celebration. Life does not go linearly. At each instance there is a chance of a bifurcation. Each of the branches that form from the breach of a linear trajectory due to a random dissipation are also a truth in themselves and not a breach into the sanctity of the linear bark. "What man does at each moment becomes his future for ages and ages", says the Mendicant, further depleting the authenticity of the essence of life preceding existence (Bharati, 58).

Yuyutsu was one of the few in the entire cast of *Mahabharata* who tried to see the bifurcation early on. He is dejected by his family for not supporting them. He wishes, for acceptance, that it would have been better if he would have turned a blind eye to Duryodhana's wiles. The helplessness of those who questioned the affirmation of authenticity were in a habit of being exiled and shunned. Vidura says, "Whenever someone turns away from well-worn traditions and seeks to find his own path the ignorant, the cowardly, the simple-minded always treat him with contempt" (Bharati, 73) when he feels the pain of Yuyutsu, who says, in lament, "It would have been better if I had accepted the untruth" (Bharati, 75). The fear of being unaccepted was the most favoured and flavoured reasons why epics were hardly revisited. Thomas S. Kuhn mustered up courage and pushed a sharp needle, around 1962, into the traditional view of science. He readily emphasised a contrast between the bulk of what scientists do, working on legitimate, well-understood problems within their disciplines and "the exceptional, unorthodox work that creates revolutions" (Gleick, 36).

Envisage how phenomena like discontinuity, bursts of noise, and such, had no place in the geometry of the world for two thousand years. “The shapes of classical geometry are lines and planes, circles and spheres, triangles and cones” (Gleick, 94). They were a powerful abstraction of reality but, as already stated, Mandelbrot asserted how clouds are not spheres and mountains are not cones. The new geometry, he says, is rough, not rounded, scabrous, and not smooth. Epics are essentially a faith that they are a straight line like a thunderbolt, but the reality is the the lightning bolt lead it differently than going straight.

The age of doubt is always insightful. The age of determinism is blind. People fearing to doubt is the decadence of any tree of civilization, because the branching of trees is what exposes the leaves to the most of sunlight, proper distribution of weight and maximum utilization of spherical space. If the bark shoots straight up, there shall be no room for the flower to bloom and the fruit to hang. And even if the fruits bloom and ripen, in a perfect narrative, they never leave the bough. “Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs/Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,/Unchanging” (Wallace Stevens, “The Sunday Morning”).Writers were tempted to enquire the impeccable perfection of paradise itself. Bharati scripts Vidura who is fearful when he says, “but is a sin to doubt and I do not want to sin” (Bharati, 92).

Andha Yug extends how Bharati radicalised the idea of a void of noises that were rounded off to make the surface smooth. The writers of epics held, along with a pen, a sandpaper in their hands to scrub away patches of itching surface. The heroes could not be touched. Blemishes were made upon those characters who were created to solve specific purposes in the narratives. If one has to deliberate on the honesty of character A, throw in a character B who is caught cheating in the sub-plot somewhere on the street. Sanjay saw the rampage of Ashwathama who had no other meaning to his life than the downfall of the Pandavas. He earnestly reported it to Gandhari, “It was horrible sight! He was cruel. He was dreadful” (Bharati, 100). It is the reply of Gandhari that made the age blind in itself, like the willing curtaining of cloth on her eyes, when she says, “But he was heroic” (Bharati, 100)

While ‘The Green Apple’ is the dynamical potential of a system that opposes equilibrium modeling, ‘The Dry Tree Silhouette’ is bifurcation and branching. The determinism of the path falls into randomness. The distribution of a river into tributaries is not an instance of disintegration but a channelisation. Bringing *dharma* to the realm of those who died in maximum numbers in the war that

was held in its name, Bharati channelised the possibilities of meaning and interpretation of the word that, like Euclid's Geometry, was not branched for more than two thousand years.

"Instead of such entropic dormancy and inertia, the writer needs to raise questions, 'ambiguities, contradictions, whispers, hints', in order to alter a system and combat threat of totalization" (Slethaug, 52). The systems that quantify the essence of totality inevitably become stagnant. Derrida was one of the first to say that since art is a means of "imposing order upon experience" (Slethaug, xv), it tends to erase all the flux and nonlinearity. It was the purpose of art then, to reinscribe it through narration. "Behind the throne I won stretches a long and unbroken tradition of blindness and stupidity" (Bharati, 129), Yudhishthira says. Bharati scripted realisation in the victory of Yudhisthira as futile quest for a smoothened understanding of existence. Yudhisthira contemplates, "And what is victory then? Is that not also a long and slow act of suicide? (Bharati, 143). The line making distinct the difference between victory and different was in itself not a straight line but a combustions of zigzag streaks that has a flavour of both, order and disorder, and a truer sense of beauty arises through a blend of these two.

Sitting somewhere at a crossroad milestone, D'Arcy Thompson must have thought about dynamic systems like these. It was his ardent belief that systems hold inherent in themselves dynamics that cherish. He thought of life to be "always in motion" (Gleick, 202), which always responds to rhythms, "the deep seated rhythms of growth" (202). Forerunner to his thought must have been Plato who spent a major segment of his life dwelling upon the form that incarnated itself in shape, like the idea in itself to be the destiny of all incarnations of shapes that derive their existence from the chaotic sea of disorder, randomness, systems that breed, beyond determinism, a sense of occult instability. The shape might readily be straight, or like a cone, who Euclid caricatured it to be, but behind them must lie "ghostly forms serving as invisible templates. Forms in motion" (Gleick, 202). Any attempt for a collision of two or more distinct, non-hegemonic shapes with adherence to the form was, more than a scratch on the canvas, a stitch.

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Debriefing Social Conditioning and Subjugation: A Review of Sanjukta Dasgupta's *Lakshmi Unbound*

Saptarshi Mallick

The technique of writing poetry comes with 'creation' which is the primacy of knowledge (Fraser 24) and Sanjukta Dasgupta's fifth collection of poems, *Lakshmi Unbound*, dedicated to Ivaana (Ubuntu), her five-month old granddaughter (Dasgupta, *Lakshmi Unbound* 5) authenticates her formidable creativity and apt awareness as a 'progressive writer' (Hasan xiii), to address several burning issues inherent within the fathomless depths of the society, continuing to compartmentalize and coerce women as 'the second sex'. As writing is an activism for a writer to express her/ his political standpoint, ideology, worldview, dreams, visions and ideas through a harmonious fusion with imagination (Dasgupta, "Surviving In My World"), *Lakshmi Unbound* not only decodes and interrogates various stereotypes and social conditioning women are subjected to in their lives, but also reverberates the resonant spirit of liberty and cosmopolitanism essential for imagination, inventiveness, creativity and individuality; as poetry is the other tongue that shadows the languages of humanity beyond the gendered considerations (Fraser 24).

That the poems in this collection resonates the spirit of disenthralment is well evidenced through the title of the book which echoes Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" where he observed that it would have been unfeasible for him to placate the oppressor with the champion of humankind (Dasgupta, *Lakshmi Unbound* 6). In spite of following the Romantic tradition, Dasgupta's individual talent juxtaposes liberty and self-determination through her poetic aura in the context of sexual politics. Inspired by "Shakespeare's Sister" and the female 'Muse of Creativity' Dasgupta has voiced her ideology, worldview through her delicately woven poetic fabric in order to unfasten the spaces of the antediluvian mind towards women's liberation after ages of oppression, infernal brutishness and interrogates the stereotypes which a girl child is intricately associated with since her birth. The poems addressing the issues of gender sensitization like, "Lakshmi Unbound", "Mrinal's First Letter", "Chandalika", "Chitrangada", "Festival of Lights", "Girl Child", "I killed her My Lord", "Rape", "Sindoor", "Talaq", "Fear" and "Perspective", draws our attention to the poet's consciousness towards abominable incidents of the society and expresses her anger against the atrocities women are subjected to. The opening poem, "Lakshmi Unbound" epigraphed with Woolf and Tagore, critiques the patriarchal coercion as well as signifies the 'silence' unvoiced in the unfathomable hearts of women, and aims to break it for a dynamic, poignant and adventurous existence of

women in the society (Dasgupta, *Breaking the Silence* iv). This interrogation through other poems, specifically characterized with a note of fierce confrontation against the patriarchal politics are authenticated through expressions like, "I don't want to be Lakshmi/ I am *Alakshmi*/ Trap me if you can" (Dasgupta, *Lakshmi Unbound* 13), "As she scripted her resignation letter" (16), "For the sun also did rise for her" (19), "nor yet/ The object of common pity to be brushed aside" (21), "Smiling, sure and undefeated" (38), "I stabbed him, stabbed, stabbed, stabbed" (40), "dare to desire/ His severed head at her feet" (43), "a sign of slavery" (44), "spit out with confidence" and "Then she disconnected the line" (69, 71). In these excerpts of the poems there is vindication which is a necessity to recognize women as human beings and treat them with respect and dignity, Dasgupta seems to echo Tagore's observation where he says, "when male creatures indulge in their fighting propensity to kill one another Nature connives at it, because comparatively speaking, females are needful to her purpose, while males are barely necessary" (Tagore, *Personality* 154).

This demands the essential realisation among all, that women are human beings and need not be stigmatized as "lakshmi" or "alaskshmi", rather be respected and honoured as individuals. The poet's vehement anger as noticed here shakes the reader through the use of conspicuous images like "His head lay on the floor/ Eyes wide open/ In stark disbelief" as women continue to be assaulted at home and in the world (Dasgupta, *Lakshmi Unbound* 43). An important feature of Dasgupta's poetry is that she has enterprisingly endeavoured with Tagore's characters like Mrinal, Chandalika, Chitrangada and Gora, authenticating her love for the Bard and she reinstates the power (feminine) inherent in Tagore's characters (women). Poems like "Refugees", "Second Coming", "A New Dawn", "Festive Season", "Festival of Lights", "Let's Go", "Staircase", "Ode to Silence", "Ode to Sound", "Hope", "Poet's Song", "Poem Within" reflect the poet's perspectives towards life and philosophy. These poems explore the portals beyond the accessible frontiers to trace the tranquil communication bereft of self-blazoning (7) which "become penitent whimpers/ The discerning radiant rays/ Of a thousand suns/ Scorch and illuminate in one fell sweep/ Of a lighting strike" (34). These visionary poems address issues, like the gruesome effects of partition, racism, unfulfilling pledges continuing to "droop and drop" our hearts with "silent tear drops" (56). The treatment of political issues in "A Tale of a Sleeping Village", the aftermath of partition corroborated by "Ishwar and Allah", "to divide further" (28), the importance of a "discovery, recovery and a healing beyond human words" (32) affects and enable us to decipher the poet's creative efficiency to convey the message of togetherness to her readers in a systematic style and intelligible manner. "Silence"

like "Sound" conveyed through a creative vein is equally affecting and creates discordance in a sensitive heart as sound and silence bridge life and oblivion (56-58). The ideology of free existence without any kind of inhibitions has been intelligently nurtured by Dasgupta in "Bovine Experts", like "A New Dawn" where she as one of "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (Shelley 46) expresses her views critiquing the authoritarian interference, upon one's basic rights, justified in the name of religion which has been socially constructed, imposed to ever coerce human beings.

As a panacea to the pervading crisis, the poet, like Virginia Woolf and Rabindranath Tagore seem to hark the "The Eleventh Muse" through her song for the birth of an "androgynous creative spirit" (49) guiding to a euphonic existence where "women will have what has so long been denied them – leisure, and money and a room to themselves" (Woolf, "Women and Fiction" 73) in order to liberate the Eastern "Lakshmi" and the Western "Angel of the House" (Woolf, *The Death of the Moth* 238), empowering them to be the liberator, zealous spokeswomen and emissaries of social metamorphosis and creative participation in this world by being "the Renaissance seeker of wisdom" as "she had to reach out and pluck/ The fruit that would take her/ Beyond this Paradise, from/ This eternal spring-like summer/ Of her comfort zone, to challenge/ The horizon" (Fraser, *Letters to My Mother* 65).

As we peruse this book of poems, we explore that besides addressing the burning issues and philosophies of life, there are some poems which in a Dantesque manner solace the affected heart of the reader. The poet, after evoking the sins committed by society (patriarchy) upon innocent lives, tends to forgive and forget the mistakes and looks forward to a progressive life of a harmonious co-existence where there would be no repetition of such barbarism and conditioning upon life. Poems like, "Hope", "Poet's Song", "Poem Within", "Laughter", "Translation" not only bear a positive note but they also enshrine the overtones of togetherness and cosmopolitanism which is the call for the day. The poet hopes the future to be a "triumphant turning point" (Dasgupta, *Lakshmi Unbound* 59) with humanity journeying towards a new era reaping the progress derived from the spirit of internationalism through a harmonious assimilation of cultures signifying the ideologies of 'now' and 'then' (60, 61) and in this cumulative journey poetry "like a speck of sparkling diamond" (63) will enlighten and continue to exist in all hearts as long as words survive guiding humanity towards a "carefree impulse" (75) of a fearless existence. An existence where all differences merge to be a global phenomenon, as echoed by the poet in the concluding poem "Translation", symbolizing an integration of the historical and ideological context and content for inscribing a distinct magnitude towards a sublimated graceful orientation (Dasgupta, *Swades* 15). "Translation"

characterizes the energizing spirit of humanism, collaboration and cooperation as, "on the surface of our being we have the ever-changing phases of the individual self, but in the depth there dwells the Eternal Spirit of human unity beyond our direct knowledge" (Tagore, *The Religion of Man* 5). Therefore both the role of woman and man are necessary in a civilization to progress lest it loses balance and welcomes the forces of destruction, a series of catastrophes for an one-sided civilization (Tagore, *Personality* 157).

The poet has been successful in creating an accessible dialogue of socio-cultural questions in her *Lakshmi Unbound*, where through simple words bearing powerful expressions she has created an aura of self-determination guided by her vision, ardent conviction and foresight. At par, the cover of the book is a signifier of the pervading spirit of manumission which the poems embody and endorse i.e. "Be brave at heart, stand erect, don't keep on cringing" (Dasgupta, *Swades* 64).

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