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*Dedicated
to
Gurudev*

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The White Tiger: An Interface of Globalization and Postmodernism

Raj Kumar Sharma

The wave of globalization unleashed in the last two decades of the 20th century has overwhelmingly impacted almost all walks of life enforcing fresh definition and interpretation of subtleties of human existence. Globalization ushered in multi-culturalism, plurality, transnational migration, ensuring largely the convergence of all into one that necessitated new perspectives and yardsticks for evaluation of a work of art as well. 'The White Tiger' of Arvind Adiga that hogged the limelight of literary spectrum after it walked away with the most coveted Man Booker Prize in 2008, may be viewed as a novel that attempts to capture the receptacle emanating from globalization as a phenomenon. The novel sketches a subtle juxtaposition of the emergence of India as a land of opportunity under the umbrella of globalization and the domineering will of the deprived section of Indian panorama that resolves to capitalize on its booming fortunes. How the upshots of globalization brought about tremendous avenues of transforming fates in India and how this upcoming situation is matched by the fancies of young generation occupy the centre stage in the novel. This paper attempts to explore comprehensively all the shades of impact that globalization casts on this novel.

An Overview of Globalization

Globalization has been defined by Lechner (2009) as a process in which more and more people become connected in more different ways across larger distances. Ervin and Zachary (2008) consider globalization as a shrinking of the world in terms of space and time, since it increases the thickness of human interaction and the impact this interaction has, on the earth itself. These observations clearly indicate a paradigm shift in the existing socio-cultural, geo-political and economic set-up of the world. Such a massive, unprecedented transformation at global level driven primarily by economic and scientific considerations influenced each

and every segment of our society explicitly or implicitly. This global phenomenon made the technological advancement of the developed world easily accessible to all the developing and underdeveloped countries promoting mass migration of people from one corner of the world to another. The fruits of computer revolution were realized almost uniformly that largely ensured a level playing field for the talents from across the globe. These led to the emergence of cosmopolitan culture as an upshot of free-mixing of people belonging to diverse cultures. Ritzer (2009) has rightly remarked “Globalization has changed our current social conditions and contributed to the deteriorating of nationality and the creation of globality”. The entire phenomenon of globalization prepared a very fertile ground for new experiences literature wishes to paint through creative writers. It will be reasonable to establish that these new experiences may largely be accounted for providing a bigger canvas to postmodern canons. Globalization expanded the domain of postmodernism through the presentation of unprecedented situations and predicaments for the mankind of 21st century.

Postmodernism as a Literary Tool

A comprehensive look at the implications of globalization makes it amply clear that it engendered massive transformations at various levels in society. Globalization considerably expanded the range of uncertainty as it created situations where a pauper and marginalized protagonist like Balram could turn into a millionaire within a very short period of time. The entire globe became accessible for sharp minds to shape life. Postmodernism as a literary canon had got wider acceptance simply because of the serious limitations of modernism that found itself unable to accommodate in its frame socio-cultural, economic and geo-political situations that arose in decolonized world after 1960 onwards. Globalization further enriched and intensified the dynamism of human society creating space for discourses befitting postmodern conditions. As a critical theory, postmodernism has earned the distinction of providing immense space to accommodate all sorts of experiences human beings come across in life. With the advancement of civilization, there has been a considerable expansion of worldly wisdom coupled with technological prowess that has largely revolutionized the preceding conventions of our existence. The growing tools of fortune making have created alarming situations where the domain of possibility appears to be unimaginably

enlarged. The spectrum of modernism seems to have failed miserably enriching in due course the postmodern paradigm that is reasonably acknowledged as an all inclusive theory. It adequately enfolds the emerging heterogeneous global trends and provides sensible minds with a tool to interpret and understand the intricacies of human existence in cutting-edge technology driven world. Today's upcoming ultra-modern global village has brought forth innumerable diverse and unpredictable situations in life leading to the emergence of new concepts required to define such unprecedented predicaments of human society. The path covered by the destiny of Balram Halwai, the protagonist of the novel, that leads him from the dark alleys in a village in the state of penury and deprivation to the ownership of a flourishing company based in a modern city presents before us a condition that may have been unbelievable when viewed from the contexts and perspectives experienced in the past. It is the postmodernism that comes to our rescue as a critical construct that tangibly resolves the tangled layers of inter-personal relationships with a multitude of shades emanating from the bedrock of interactions taking place between human and material constituents of existential domain. Globalization offered a situation to Balram that he successfully encashed and changed his destiny.

Linda J. Nicholson accepts postmodernism as a period not only of changed ideals, metaphors and hopes but also as a period of changed structures of family, work relations, and class distinctions. Postmodernism is also viewed as a form of subjectivity, as understanding of the self as a subject, but not as an object to be possessed by those who are culturally dominant in society. In literary studies, the stance of postmodern critics and writers is characterized by a rejection of the values of eighteenth century Enlightenment thought, most particularly by a rejection of the notions of rationality and objectivity and of the understanding of the self as a rational, unitary entity. Postmodern thoughts emphasize a form of subjectivity that is multiple rather than singular and fluid rather than static. Subjectivity, as used by postmodern thinkers, refers to a subjective sense of self that includes agency, the capacity for action, as distinguished from the condition of an obliterated selfhood that results when an individual is objectified, made into an object to be possessed sexually, materially, or imaginatively by those who are culturally dominant. Moreover, postmodernism shows interest in mass culture encompassing political and economic factors which are vital aspects in the life of common men.

Andreas Huyssen considers that “the most significant trends within post-modernism have challenged modernism’s relentless hostility to mass culture”. Fredric Jameson reads this “as the demise of a resistant or adversarial position from which to speak to the dominant culture”. It advocates that postmodernism deals with the decentred or the “marginal” or the “ex-centrics,” whether it is race, or class or gender or sex as opposed to the homogeneity of modernism. Since women are treated as “ex-centrics” in patriarchy, and feminism which deals with marginality of women, thus relates it to postmodernism which deals with issues of marginality.

Further, postmodernism aims at contextualizing the specific culture aspects such as black, gays, lesbians and ethnic women and third world countries thus encompassing a vast and multiple responses to marginality and “ex-centricity.” Postmodernism also makes use of theories on different language systems propounded by scholars like Saussure, Derrida, Lacan and many others. The postmodernist art believes in the unrepresentability of the event which can never be recovered by any metanarrative. It believes that every text can accommodate as many readings as there are readers and all of them are legitimate or illegitimate. The heterogeneity of the meanings or the signified is an important principle of poststructuralism which has contributed to postmodernism. Language is seen as the most powerful institution structuring the subject.

Ihab Hassan, influenced by Nietzsche, Barthes, Rorty and William Jones, was the first one to link postmodernism and American deconstruction. Both confront and contest the lamentable contemporary situation in which cultural signification is controlled by the ruling class, overtly manipulating art to show their power and prestige. Hutcheon writes in *Politics of the Postmodernism*: “We live in a mass culture to which we do not simply submit. We take its images, its narratives, its formulation of desire, and measure them against our real experiences of a real world. At the same time we re-work and re-use them, in our conversation and gossip in our fantasies, in every aspect of our lives. And this re-use is an individual form of resistance”.

Psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan have reinforced the postmodern conviction that subject is a social construct, which is determined by language. Lacan analyses language as a process by which subject comes to be constituted. The demands made by society on the subject would result in the constitution of the unconscious. The unconscious is not open to analy-

sis but the subject which is relational to the social, is open to objective analysis, and it is ideology which determines the relationship between the subject and the society in order to produce intended meaning. Freud views that unconscious plays a crucial part running parallel to the conscious in the process of thinking and cognition and it is unconscious which sheds light on the inclination of the subject by explaining the disorders of individuals. Consciousness, unconsciousness and ego, all go into the making of the subject thus rendering it decentred. This view is further supported by Louis Althusser, the neo-Marxist, who sees ideology as the main-constituent of the subject, that is non-contradictory. Language itself is conditioned by ideology and the subject is determined by an ideologically-informed language, hence the subject can be inferred as being dependant on ideology. Adding to the context, Foucault theorizes that power relations with which the subject is shot through are important as ideology. His significant contribution lies in juxtaposing power with knowledge. Power comes into existence when one individual's action is controlled by the other and the precondition for the existence of a power relation is the presence of two acting subjects. These observations help us propose that postmodernism considers reality as an entity that is always mediated by a number of factors influencing the perceiver and the perceived. Language constructs both the subject and the object and there is no pre-social subject or object.

The description of postmodernist context cannot be completed without taking into account the remarks of Roland Barthes who declares the death of the author. He says that no text is deemed to be an expression of the author's consciousness in the purest form. Saussure's structural linguistics provides the principle of representation by saying that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Derrida introduces a great amount of instability to the relationship between the signifier and the signified by saying that signified is never fixed and is open to a number of meaning which resists any attempt of closure, thus giving the postmodern polemics of representation, legitimation to all forms of reading. An indepth reading of these observations of different theoreticians leads us to the point that postmodernism provides ample scope of exploration of human psychology in all ramifications that facilitates the understanding of life mirrored in literary texts, and *The White Tiger* stands as its glaring example that generates adequate contexts which manifest the impact of globalization and get conveniently fitted in postmodern frame.

The Interface of Globalization and Postmodernism

The novel starts with the flavour of globalization where Chinese premier is addressed by an Indian entrepreneur who has somehow picked up English language with the help of his employer's wife, an American lady. In this way, the opening page of the novel gives adequate inklings of the international character of modernized life style that transcends the geographical boundary in an unprecedented fashion. His master Ashok had his higher education in America where he fell in love with an American girl, married her and brought her to India. Globalization made higher education conveniently accessible in any country of the world as it was never before. Balram Halwai, the protagonist, belongs to a very poor, impoverished family that is settled in a remote village named Laxamgarh. This village represents a typical Indian village where the family of landlords governs the system. There is a sharp division between the ruler and the ruled in the village where majority of the resources are owned by a handful of the rulers. Balram is an intelligent boy who is admitted in the village school but fails to continue there as the family runs short of money and he is forced to work at a tea shop at a very early stage of life. While studying at the school, he is named as a rare white tiger by a school inspector who visits the school and finds him exceptional. Balram's father is a rickshaw puller who dies prematurely of tuberculosis caused by malnutrition. There was a deep impact of his father's death on Balram's mind who had lost him in a very pitiable condition marked by lack of money for treatment and poor facilities in government hospitals. He had already lost his mother in childhood. Adiga has beautifully projected the situations poor villagers encounter in daily life and how they survive at the mercy of landlords who do not desist from perpetrating one crime after another on them in every possible way. Balram happens to be a smart guy who tries to pick up information about politics from the people sitting at the tea stall. He observes the changing life of lesser mortals like himself from an ordinary people to the realm of politics. A bus conductor becomes an influential politician and transforms his destiny within a short period of time. He minutely observes how so-called socialists betray the innocent poor villagers during elections by making false promises and playing in the hands of the landlords. A sensitive mind of Balram reads all such trappings of modern life and keeps him alert who goes on looking for some better prospects. The fate takes him to an urban setting where coal industry flourishes and he gets a job of a chauffeur in the family of his landlord from the same village.

The second innings starts in Balram's life at this township named Dhanbad where he closely views the life style of his masters who were minting money in coal business through bribing authorities on regular basis. The American life style of Ashok's wife gives Balram an opportunity to know about the way of the western people and its impact on the newly emerging westernized Indian brand. There was another driver also serving in this family who was later on removed as his muslim identity was revealed that he had kept secret in order to get a job in a Hindu family. This gives Balram a chance to drive Honda City and take his master Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky to Laxmangarh for a village trip. Balram's grandmother wanted him to get married in the village but he had something else in his mind, the desire to attain something big in life as he was gradually getting acquainted to the lavish life style that his intelligence goaded him to acquire. He becomes ready to leave his village for good for the sake of betterment. Later on, Balram gets a chance to drive them to Delhi where the final turn appears in his life. Here, he takes the couple to big hotels and malls, and sometimes to the houses of politicians where Ashok was supposed to pay bribes to them for getting undue favour to flourish the family business in the coal city. One day, Pinky took up driving and trampled a child to death in dark hours while passing through a slum area and Balram was asked to confess to this killing. The case was settled out of the court through greasing the palms of the authorities. Balram stood as a witness to all these incriminating acts committed by his masters silently. Many a time he used to carry a big amount of money for bribing with Ashok. All these nasty acts used to force him to think to ensure his own future through fair or foul means. On one hand, he saw how money was spent like water to meet illegitimate claims of the authorities and on the other hand, each moment of his own life reminded him of his utter penury. He had to bear an additional load of a relative, a small boy, who was sent from his village to be taken care of by him. In the mean time, Ashok is deserted by Pinky who leaves for America silently without informing her husband. It makes Ashok frustrated who finds an outlet in his former girlfriend at Delhi, Ms Uma. Getting impatient gradually, Balram finally kills Ashok on way mercilessly by piercing a broken bottle in his head while they were carrying seven lacs of rupees. This much of money was a dream amount for Balram who somehow escapes with his dependent to Bangalore to shape the rest of his life. Fortune favours him and he becomes an eminent entrepreneur of this growing city with passage of time.

The novel communicates through the four shifts in the life of the protagonist who starts from a typical Indian village Laxmangarh as a helpless poor boy struggling for survival. The second journey takes place in Dhanbad where he gradually develops survival instinct and the maneuverability required to sustain in an urban setting. His third destination that is Delhi makes him mature enough to understand the nuances of an ultramodern form of life and the way it goes ahead wrapped fully in many nonsensical, illegal and immoral practices. His final destination turns out to be Bangalore that gives him strong foothold as a consequence of acquiring all sorts of maneuver needed to survive in a cosmopolitan culture. These four places in the life of Balram with their own characteristic features represent the phases of his psychological advancement. This movement from rusticity to urbanity, naivety to peevishness and agrarianism to industrialism provides ample scope to the novelist to prepare the canvass for effective portrayal of the upcoming transformations rapidly capturing Indian social fabric under the impact of globalization. The postmodernity rightly assimilates the newly emerging intensity of uncertainty and instability that characterize modern cosmopolitan life style where moving from poverty to exuberance appears to be a very common phenomenon. Today's world is a machine producing rich and poor people every now and then. Many Balrams are produced in modern system frequently and at the same time, many rich people are losing vast amount of wealth within a very short time. The rapid pace of globalization may rightly be attributed to it. This lays credence to the theories of postmodernity which considers the technological advancement as the reason for breeding disillusionment in society by inviting mass transformations at a very high speed.. It is equally true that modern theories of social and cultural life are being burst apart by new structures of time and space that are directly associated with the global development of information and communication technologies. Ashok's education at Delhi and New York, his marriage to an American, and the breaking of his relationship with her all on a sudden are the features of modern life realized and shaped largely through the broadening network of communication in a globalized setting. His relationship with Uma that grew immediately after he is deserted by his wife is also a result of fast communication system governing modern life.

Poster argues that " The solid institutional routines that have characterized modern society for some 200 years are being shaken

by the earthquake of electronically mediated communication and recomposed into new routines whose outlines are as yet by no means clear". Ashok's frequent visits to the ATMs for withdrawing big amount of money and immediately bribing the authorities circulates an intense current of temptation in Balram who steadily witnesses the whole foul game from close quarters. All of these could be possible through electronic devices only. It would not be an overemphasis to establish that action based social theory, the typical of modernity, is no longer appropriate for understanding the predicaments of today's life style. These technologies are propelling us into new untrodden social terrains consequently, that is the hallmark of postmodernity wrapped in globalization. Politics has turned out to be a dirty game as it was never before which is also much affected by electronic advancement. The emergence of the downtrodden section in politics has not brought about the expected qualitative transformation as only a handful of people representing that section have grabbed power with the help of the traditional landlords who are still wielding much influence through their amassed wealth. Ashok's family exercises profound influence in political arena simply because it pumps money to politicians during elections and in lieu of that, takes undue favour to flourish in coal business. The relationship between the master and the servant is being redefined in this technology driven world. The unforeseen situations are instigating these lesser mortals to set their loyalty at stake. Balram constantly visits highly modernized, luxurious places that spark in him a desire to consume or relish such products. The conversations among these chauffeurs in Delhi amply hint at their latent desires to emulate the life style of their masters. Striking a balance between the commitment towards their masters and the rising temptations seems to be very challenging for these folks. Adiga's narrative has realistically captured this dilemmatic situation experienced by these chauffeurs. The description on page 174 is worth quoting.

" Every day, on the roads of Delhi, some chauffeur is driving an empty car with a black suitcase sitting on the backseat. Inside that suitcase is a million, two million rupees; more than chauffeur will see in his life time. If he took the money he could go to America, Australia, anywhere and start a new life. He could go inside the five-star hotels he has dreamed about all his life and only seen from the outside. He could take his family to Goa, to England. Yet he takes that black suitcase where his master wants. He puts it down where he is meant to, and never touches a rupee. Why?"

This observation gives ample hint of the fact that the mindset of the serving lot was bound to be at the tipping point where threshold stage was already in the making. What they visualized almost every day was only at some distance. The blockage of their mind was about to be opened up. The reference to the 'rooster coop' for this serving lot expresses the same idea. It is Balram who unleashed the trend of breaking the coop. Balram watched very closely what his master did and what the significance of money was for these rich people. Through such depictions of postmodern realities, Adiga has raised a serious moral question. Is it reasonable to justify what Balram did to Ashok? Is it justifiable that only rich people have right to play with the destiny of India as well as its poor citizens? The rich got their dreams fulfilled with the help of the poor serving lots who passed their generations and generations in servitude. The expression "The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy" clearly shows the role of the serving community in the eyes of Adiga. The expansion of Information Technology sector brought about comprehensive awareness among all the sections of society and the emergence of Balram as a rebellion proves the point. The art of maneuver that Balram masters in the company of his landlord helps him overcome the challenges an entrepreneur faces in metropolitan cities. It may be attributed to his success as an entrepreneur in Bangalore. This event-centric novel of Adiga makes a departure from the conventional style of creative writing where romance holds an important place. This novel sustains the interest of the readers without romantic spice in a true sense. The abrupt desertion of Ashok by his wife is one of the hallmarks of postmodern reality where love and marriages have stooped down to the level of debauchery and only means to satisfy carnal passions. The institution of marriage needs to be redefined in terms of the demands of the emerging consumer markets thriving in cosmopolitan cultures under the pervasive influence of globalization.

Thus, the transformation of Balram from a typical Indian villager to the position of an entrepreneur, the expansion of business opportunities cutting across geographical boundary, the weakening of emotional bond in relationships and the dominance of materialistic concerns are the core issues that the novelist capitalizes on to weave a pattern in the novel. Here, the components of globalization appear as major fertilizing agents that colour the imagination of the novelist. Moreover, these issues expand the canvas of postmodernism through inclusion of unforeseen and

unprecedented situations largely invited by globalization. The novel stands as an evidence of alliance between globalization and postmodernity.

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Mahasweta Devi's *Bayen*: A Voice against Damnation of Low-Caste Women

Santosh Kumar Sonker

Mahasweta Devi, a voice of the voiceless, has “strange ability to communicate with the silenced; her best speech is reserved for those to whom no one has spoken” (Devy 11). “The voice of the underdog, which hitherto remained ‘silenced’ came to be hard and it served to counteractive to the anti-accomodationist enterprise of the dominant community to consider the disruptive contingency posed by the subalterns as anti-national and anti-Indian”(Jamuna 144). She has disseminated boundless compassion to those unfortunate people who are denied basic human rights living on the periphery of fringes. Diwan Singh Bajeli addresses her as “a social activist” who “identified herself with the oppressed to capture the stark realism of the dehumanised world in which they are condemned to live” (*The Hindu N Pag.*). A. S. Dasan observes: “Her empirical approach to history, myth and legends is enriched by her lively innovative use of language, political irony with reference to contemporary contexts, folk symbolism giving rise to a new consciousness. . . .” (77).

Bayen is a play voicing against an ill traditions prevalent in India which reduces low caste women to Bayen, a socially cut off condition. Mahasweta Devi has observed: “Any strange thing or event can be attributed to the ‘witches’ and they can be killed with popular ‘approval’ . . . Majority of the victims are women and it is estimated that six hundred women are killed annually on this charge” (Venugopal 2 qtd by Sameer Ahmad Dar). Talking to Ganesh Devi Mahasweta Devi has stated: “This woman’s body is a curse! You will not know, because you are not political” (Qtd Devy 14). She has written in the Preface to *Shrestha Galpa*:

Literature should be read in its historical setting. One fails to evaluate a writer if the writer’s setting in time and history is not taken into account. To capture the continuities between past and present held together in the folk imagination, I bring legends, mythical figures and mythical happenings into contemporary setting, make ironic use of these, as I do with . . . the legend of Kalu Dom in my *Bayen*. (Qtd Introduction *Five Plays* xvi)

Revolving around tribal life, Mahasweta Devi's writings, always set in a particular area, focusing on geographic realities, like Tohar, Palami or Lohardaga. "The conflicts in her stories implicate local, ethnic, class, gender and language dissonances. 'Bayen' is no different as it addresses issues of gender inequality and societal exclusion fueled by illiteracy" (*The English Teacher* N Pag). Diwan Singh Bajeli states: "'Bayen' is about oppressive reality of a decadent system and its dehumanizing effect" (*The Hindu* N Pag). Vanashree opines: "Mahasweta Devi's play, *Bayen*, probes the subtle mechanism of accusation, torture and exclusion of women indicted of practicing witchcraft" (225). This practice of declaring a woman a Bayen serves as a tool to treat a low-caste as commodity. As power of village panchayat is in hands of male chauvinists from upper rungs of society, they intentionally exercise this evil tradition to harass women from bottom of social order. Generally women from upper order of society are not declared Bayen or Witch irrespective of their evil intentions but a woman from low strata falls prey to this strategy to her beautiful body, free living style, wealthy situations or some trivial reasons. The aim of the paper is to underscore how a woman from the socially defined low-caste is falsely accused of having evil eye and is reduced to the plight of Bayen.

The play connects to the myth of Harishchandra, a King who is known for his honesty, to emphasize the high heredity of Chandidasi and to demarcate her degraded position in the contemporary scenario. Chandidasi, descendent of Kalu Dome, is the protagonist of the play who is tortured to the state of damnation. Malinder, a Gangaputta, inherits the responsibility of lightening the logs and watching the fire burning due to his lineage as dome. As he learns writing and signing his name, he gets a government permanent job in the morgue with a handsome salary. The morgue proves to be very fortunate place for him because there only he meets Chandidasi. Chandidasi, the daughter of Patitpaban Gangadas, has the social responsibility of burying children and watch the graves. As Malinder proceeds in making love, Chandidasi boasts of her social with pride: "I'm at the top of the doms here. I danced with you, and you think you can talk cheap?" (*Five Plays* 105). Both of them fell in love with each other and are united in holy thread of marriage.

People are envious about their happy life and the way they live. Malinder is very happy in his family with a child and a beautiful wife, Chandidasi. He talks about bringing a yellow blouse and

red sari for her along with red shirt for the son but she requests him not to do so. She asks: "No, no, not for me. It only makes people envious and they cast an evil eye" (*FP* 107). Asserting his developments over the period, "Bastard, get envious as you can. I can take it all, I, Malinder Gangaputta" (*FP* 107). Though Chandidasi received love and care by her husband but she is much conscious of her subjugated social 'self'.

Marriage brings certain changes in her personal and professional life. After marriage she is blessed with motherhood which causes grief when she buries children. Unconditional support received from her husband encourages Chandidasi to express her pain before him: "It hurts to do the job these days, the job handed down to me by my ancestors, my hands rebel, and yet I have to go on doing it" (*FP* 107). First he avoids it but her insistence makes him to accept the situation and confess the truth. He feels irritated at the charge laid on his wife that she has an evil eye. He shouts at accusers: "They're doomed, these fools. Ignorant idiots . . ." (*FP* 108). She expresses to him what she suffers during her guard of the grave at night: "When I guard the graves through the night, my breasts with milk ache for my Bhagirath back home, all by himself" (*FP* 108). It is her motherhood which she takes defense of forsaking traditional job but Malinder does not extend favour and irritatingly he tells her to stop the job. It infers that Malinder, who promised her to give all sorts of happiness, is overpowered with masculinity at a stage and fails to understand agony of his wife. She finds herself alone. She takes her male baby as an alternative to express herself and speaks out her pain while she rocks cradle singing sweet song to make him asleep. Laying her child in bed she asks:

Bhagirath, your father hasn't two minutes to spare to listen to my woes. Won't you listen to all that hurts within me? Before you were born, I never knew I'd feel like this. Now it hurts so bad when I bury the little ones under the Banyan tree. . . . Men in general are so insensitive. Their children die. I bury them. And they say I have the evil eye—if I stare at a child, it's sure to die. (*FP* 106)

It unveils the conflict between the attitude of men and women. It explicates male chauvinism in the private and public spheres both. Her pain is not heard by her husband and she is maltreated by male dominated society which ignores her feelings and emotions as mother who feels pain while burying children.

Traditional jobs imposed on low castes are internalized by them so much that they cannot get over it. Past haunts them. History

keeps repeating. Chandidasi has no desire left for the family profession after she gets her baby and society treats her suspiciously but she finds herself vulnerable when she tries to give up the job. She reveals:

I can't get over the scare. Whenever I seem to have made up my mind that I won't go back to the job ever, I seem to hear my father's voice roaring like thunder, if you opt out, it'll be my beat again, is that what you desire? Would you like me back on the job guarding the graves from the predatory jackals? I can almost hear him chasing the jackals away, thundering all the while, Hoi! Hoi! Hoia!
(FP 108-09)

It historicizes patriarchal exploitation attached to the profession of Chandidasi. Memory of her father stands as an obstacle before her. It shows how patriarchy rules over the life of Chandidasi.

Main stream society does not leave any chance to malign image of low-caste women. The play realistically presents cunningness of upper-caste in exploiting a low-caste to torture a woman of his own low community. Chandidasi is held responsible for the death Pakhi's daughter, whom Chandidasi loved much before Bhagirath was born. Malinder's cousin, Pakhi accuses her of casting an evil eye on Tukni which resulted in small pox on the body of the baby and calls her a witch. She tells it to Malinder but what he takes it as ajokewhich reveals his patriarchal notion: "How can you be a witch? Those who bury children turn into bayens, when they are possessed, not witch" (FP 109). It flares her up and she starts dashing her head against the wall. Meanwhile the voice of Shashi, Pakhi's husband, changes the situation. He blames her for the death of his daughter whom Chandidasi talked to some days ago.

Gourdas try to add fuel to the new born flame in the mind of Shashi which receives protest from Chandidasi and Malinder. Both resist going for the burial which comes to them as a shock. Very diplomatically Gourdas targets the weak corner of Chandidasi and requests:

If you do not bury them, their souls remain hovering far from their destination. You're a progeny of the illustrious Kalu Dom . . . you are the destination, you embody the mother Ganga . . . denied your service, the dead child hangs forever over the mother. Have mercy on us, Mother, forgive us our transgressions. (FP 111)

Honest Chandidasi, in her effort to justify herself, swears upon the head of her own child that she has never wished any evil neither on Tukni nor on any child. Due to sheer obligation and reverence to her ancestors she takes pain to bury the child, to pull out the

thorn wood to cover the graves, to chase the jackals and to guard the graves consisting of their children but the heinous allegations charged on her have forced her to stop the service. If her ancestors get angry, she will request them to forgive her. Her decision communicates a resistance against male supremacy. She not only challenges outer space but also private space. She asks her husband to fight against injustice done to her and pleads with him to shift to the city failing which may cause disaster in the family. Threatening voice full with anger translates her conscious "self". She speaks angrily to her husband: "If you are a man, it's for you to avenge this injustice . . . Else . . . I'll jump before running train with Bhagirath in my arms. Don't dare forget, it's Chandidasi speaking" (FP 112). Assertion of 'self' defies the male ego and Shashi helplessly begs pardon to Chandidasi addressing her as 'Mother' and requests her to perform last rite for Tukni appreciating her lineage of Kalu Dom. More highlighting thing is that the person who blames her is not the other but a person of her own community. Overpowered with the sense of 'Mother' and subdued with the moral responsibility she promises to perform her traditional job for the last time.

Chandidasi's psyche is badly affected with the charge put on her because she is a mother and has loved the children much but her mother 'self' seems to lose its stand before the existing belief system. Between her sleep, dream and open eyes laden with sleep she exposes her agony and conflict running in mind:

There's nothing to be scared of, Tukni dear. I've loved you, little mother of mine, from before the time I had Bhagirath in my womb. It's me on guard, little mother. You needn't get scared. I've planted thorny bushes all round you, the jackals won't come at you, you can be sure. And there's the lantern burning. The jackals shy away from the light. They're all scared of me, every one of them. (FP 113)

Her 'self' meets a challenge. While dreaming she is threatened by her forefathers for not carrying out the traditional profession. She feels afraid of losing her husband and child forever. As her dram breaks off, she finds no one but herself alone guarding the grave of Tukni sitting under the banyan tree. Suddenly her motherhood prevails over her woman 'self' and she finds her breasts aching at bursting point with all the milk. She feels to go home and suck her child but she can go only after the stars reach the western sky. Her mother 'self' dominates her so much that she cannot help singing lullaby for Bhagirath which Gourdas misinterprets before Malinder and others to prove Chandidasi a bayen.

Before the mad mob, her assertion that she has come to the grave just because she has heard the “jackals tugging at the thorn-bushes, scratching at the grave” is of no avail (*FP* 114). Her pleading that she has a “suckling child” and “her breasts ooze milk all the time” is not heard and her request from Malinder to convince the mob in her favour does not come to help her. Malinder declares her bayen beating the drum. A mother is separated mercilessly from her child. Thus, personal space of a woman is intruded by the external forces which esteem no human value in low-caste women.

Assumptions attached to a bayen distinguish a bayen from a witch and do not permit anybody to kill bayen because if people kill a bayen, it will bring death to their children. Completely isolated a mother turned bayen, Chandidasi lives in a hovel beside railway track where Malinder leaves a hamper of food for her at door step and two sarees along with gamchha once in a year. The imposed image of bayen in Chandidasi gets a challenge when Bhagirath visits her place by railway track one evening returning from his school. First day he decides to see her shadow in water but later he confronts her and argues with her. She feels love for him and suggests him to go immediately and not to visit her place again but he does not pay heed what she says, rather puts a logic to contradict her statements. His claim to be very bold takes her back into past and she recollects: “The very words the Gangaputta had once spoken. His son says the same thing once again, ‘I have no fear’. He said it too. But then he panicked, I gave him a fright, he didn’t dare provoke his community” (*FP* 118). Motherhood in her even after so many years dominates and she suggests him to go home back as at this time no child move along the railway track. Defenseless at Bhagirath’s claim that she cries in the night due to fear, she promises not to cry but he would never come again to this place in the evening. She ponders over why the boy asks for a full saree but immediately she comes with reply that he must not be knowing about her full clean saree, good looks and her makeup. Memory of her past life enrages her and she remarks: “The Gangaputta’s to blame. Father of a son, a government servant, a permanent worker at the morgue, and you can’t keep an eye on your son! The boy comes here in the evenings, stands there. What if a snake bites him?” (*FP* 119). But she regrets at her thought about her own son and wishes long life for him.

Bhagirath dares to visit his mother due to his education. His fear vanishes when he faces his mother. His less literate father could not dare to oppose the belief which robs him of his family pleasure. Chandidasi is left to suffer damnation due to sheer blind

faith in existing illogical beliefs. She lives an inhuman life but humanity still persists in her. Evil she is not, but they are. Those like Gourdas and others who have rights to live a human life depriving Chandidasi of the same, pile up bamboo logs on railway track to bring disaster but she tries to stop it. She invokes her evil 'self' to avert disaster: "God, if I'm truly bayen, then all the creatures of the nether world should follow my orders" (FP 120). But she notices no alteration in the situation. Immediately, she holds lantern in her hand and stands before the mountain of the bamboo and shouts: "Stop the train, don't come any nearer. There's a mountain of bamboo poles here. The train'll jump the track, and it'll be disaster. Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!" (FP 121). Losing her life, she proves her human 'self'. The loss of her life only relieves her of imposed neglected 'self' of bayen and she receives appreciation for her human concern: "She's been brave. A brave woman. A brave deed. The Railways are sure to award her a medal, posthumous of course and a cash reward too" (FP 121). She receives love of her child but after death. Bhagirath proudly accepts her as mother before railway officers and declares: ". . . my mother, the late Chandidasi Gangadasi, Sir. Not a bayen. She was never a bayen, my mother" (FP 121).

Chandidasi has suffered a deprived inhuman life just because of a belief system which has imposed on her moral responsibility to carry out family profession on the one hand and has forced her to accept the state of a bayen. Mahasweta Devi delving deep into myth and relating it to the contemporary situation of the low-caste society sheds light on the importance of education and uselessness of the existing social beliefs which sometimes are used as tools to destroy life of a human being. From Dalit feminist point of view it can be said that the suffering which Chandidasi suffers is unique with the low-caste women; women of the upper caste are untouched with such experiences. Thus, the women of the low-caste have to go through multifarious subordination and deserve special attention of the scholars and writers. It proves what Kabir has said, "One who has not lived pain, cannot experience it".

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Trans-phobia and the Contemporary Mainstream Hindi Cinema

Kuhu Sharma Chanana

Indeed with the introduction of the “Rights of Transgender Persons Bill 2014” as initiated by Tiruchi Siva, there has been an assurance in terms of providing the equal rights and entitlements to transgenders and assigning the status of an equal citizen to them. This bill categorically and in very strong words talks about equality and non-discrimination, protection of the rights of the transgender children, rights to life and personal liberty, right to live in community, protection from abuse, violence and exploitation, rights to home and family and freedom of speech. It also lays emphasis on the constitution of The National Commission for Transgender Persons and special transgender rights courts. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016 was introduced in Lok Sabha on August 2, 2016 by the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Mr. Thaawarchand Gehlot. However the problem in this bill is that it has not given a very inclusive and fluid definition of a transgender person: “The Bill defines a transgender person as one who is (i) neither wholly female or male; (ii) a combination of female and male; or (iii) neither female nor male. Such a person’s gender does not match the gender assigned at birth, and includes trans-men and trans-women, persons with intersex variations and gender-queers” (<http://www.prsindia.org/uploads/media/Transgender/Bill%20Summary%20-Transgender%20Bill%202016.pdf>). There has been an outcry regarding the issue of self identification and the definition of transgender person which indeed is not as expansive as the trans-activists might like it to be as the cultural connotations and multiple convoluted trans identities that are all pervasive within the transgender communities do not find the space within the ambit of this definition.

But despite these counter arguments it is safe to assume that the Supreme court’s recent judgment, because of which transgenders are now recognized as third gender and they should be able to

assert their citizenship rights, is a path-breaking judgment in terms of transsexual revolution. But as Steven Sideman affirms that the citizenship right definitely provides state protection but as every right is fraught with responsibilities, it will be interesting to excavate as what will be the expectations of the state vis-a-vis transgenders' contribution towards the nation. But can this affirmative stance taken by the state mitigate the social and cultural stigma attached with hijras because in the cultural memory of people hijras are associated with criminality due to the imposition of The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (now abolished). This act was amended in 1897 and was subtitled as 'An Act for the Registration of Criminal Tribes and Eunuchs'. However despite its abolishment, the cultural and social implications of this act can be seen even in today's time as Mahesh Dattani asserts in *Seven Steps around the Fire*: "The two events in mainstream Hindu culture where their presence is acceptable—marriage and birth—ironically, are the very same privileges denied to them by man and nature. Not for them the seven rounds witnessed by the Fire God, eternally binding man and woman in matrimony, or the blessings of 'May you be the mother of a hundred sons'" (239-240). Significantly it is not a matter of great surprise that Manevendra Singh, the first open gay from a royal family who has fought incessantly for the rights of the queers, narrates how the queers in a royal family have been most derogatorily called hijras instead of gays or lesbians as being a hijra is considered the worst and the most marginalized identity even within the queer community. To quote his words: "Growing up in royal family has made me come across many royal members who have been lesbians and gays but termed as hijras by my own family members and I use to wonder as how can Maharaja (the ultimate symbol of 'ultra male') be a hijra" (in an unpublished interview given to me).

This paper attempts to build the linkages between the art and trans politics and how this mutually symbiotic relationship can be helpful in making important interventions in policy making. Apropos of the issue of the role of art in social activism, Revathi made a pertinent observation. The protests through writings against the unfair treatment meted out to gender queers have been an integral part of the queer activism and Revathi in her latest autobiography, *A Life in Trans Activism* has in fact clearly affirmed that after spending so many years in NGOs she has realized that art is a much more powerful vehicle for social change. To quote from the text: "Their reactions touched me. I feel humbled. De-

spite having worked for over a decade at Sangama, I felt that art has a powerful and far greater reach and appeal than NGO work. I developed a newfound respect for its role as an instrument of social change" (123). But unfortunately even within the queer academic and artistic explorations, hijras have not been much represented. Their position both as gender and sexual minority has made them stand at the lowest order of the already marginalized LGBTQI community.

I am trying to catalogue the issues of citizenship rights, the inclusion of trans-gender persons in politics, trans rape, transphobia and transfeminism through cinematic representations of trans-identities and for this purpose I have included movies, such as *Tammana*, *Dayarra* and *Darmiyyan*.

***Darmiyyan*: Exposing and Hiding of Sexual Dysphoria and Trans-Rape**

The story of *Darmiyyan* (1997) revolves around the ageing, out of work, alcoholic actress, Jeenat and her *hijra* son, Immi, to whom Jeenat falsely projects as her brother and not son. Immi's first moment of transgression comes in a clichéd manner when the young kids in a jocular fashion stands in row to urinate and the game happens to be as who can urinate to the maximum far end (again assertion of heteropatriarchal marker). In this game every one pees standing except Immi who sits and pees. To which his fellow play mates ask as why is he urinating like a girl and then they start shouting: "*Immi ki tau llul nahi hai*" (Immi does not have a penis). This moment of disclosure brings immense shame and embarrassment in the heart of Immi. However this age-old method of discerning a male from a female comes under heavy scrutiny by the trans-feminist critics like A. Finn Enke. She contends: "For most of my life time the DSM has used 'rejection of urination in a sitting position' or 'desire to urinate from a standing position' as one criterion towards the diagnosis of Childhood Gender Identity Disorder, but only when it occurs in children with vulvas; neither the desire nor the behavior are diagnostic when they occur in children with penises, because such children presumably *naturally* urinate standing up" (241). Thus on the one hand it is an age old method of exposure of trans-identity, but on the other it also gives a backhand support to the regressive notion of determining the gender on the basis of the position of urinating (whether standing or sitting) that has been heavily criticized by the critics like Enke as mentioned above.

Unlike Tikku in *Tamanna*, Immi's usefulness for the family structure comes in the form of taking care of her eccentric wayward mother and doing all possible things to retain the family structure. He is rendered throughout as a useless entity by others but he is the one who tries to bring work for her self-destructive mother. He also tries to work as a hijra to earn money much against his own wishes. Despite all his immense efforts to be economically viable, he is never recognized as an able-bodied useful citizen or family member. The movie also brings to light the issue of trans rape. Till very recent times hijras were not considered legitimate citizens as third gender was not the accepted category and their legal position was quite dubious. When Immi got raped, there is no effort by him to lodge a police complaint because he knows the outcome. The issue of the trans-rape has always been swept under the carpet. It is imperative here to quote the infamous case of Kokila, 21 year old hijra from Bangalore who has been sexually harassed at a police station. The 'trans panic' has always been the justification for inflicting such brutality. According to Sangma report, "The Police also burned her nipples and *chapdi* (vaginal portion of hijras) with a burning coir rope. One policeman of the rank of SI (Sub-inspector of Police) positioned his rifle on her *chapdi* and threatened to shoot her. He also tried pushing the rifle butt and *lathi* into the *chapdi* and saying: 'Do you have a vagina, can this go inside' while other policemen were laughing. This is to humiliate a transsexual woman by insisting that she is not a woman as she was not born with a vagina" (<http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/Conway/TS/PUCL/PUCL520Report.html>). Thus because a trans-woman or man is not a full woman or man, they are seen as a source of ludicrousness and therefore the atrocities committed on their bodies are viewed not as acts of violence but a result of trans-panic. No stringent action has been taken against the violators of the transbody and the rape scenes in the movies like *Bol* and *Darmiyaan* fully bear witness to it. Thus the much invisibilised issue of trans rape has been effectively addressed in these movie.

Trans-Feminism in *Tamanna* (1997) and *Daayraa* (1996)

An interesting aspect of these movies is that the term trans-feminism is re-defined here in a very different context. Critics like Emi Koyama defines trans feminism as a "a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond" (<http://eminism.org/readings/pdf-rdg/tfmanifesto.pdf>). It adds a unique tangent to feminism as

well where it is closely linked with the straight allies. Thus in its purview not only trans women are absorbed but also FTMs(female to male) have been included. Also this variety of trans-feminism bridges the gap between feminism and lesbianism as they have a prolonged history of scuffle specially in the Indian context which has been documented by Maya Sharma in *Loving Women*. The Indian feminists for long have resisted the inclusion of lesbians in the core feminist manifesto citing the reasons that the more pressing concerns like the issues of poverty among women and access to resources need to be catalogued and sexual preference of a woman for a woman was certainly not a priority. Secondly the so-called mainstream feminists were scared that it could fragment the movement as many straight feminist did not like to be associated with the queer politics. Maya Sharma affirms: "The stand that lesbian issues and lesbians themselves not be made publicly visible within the women's movement has been based on the following arguments: it is for the greater good of the movement; the presence of the lesbians (since they are unacceptable publicly) will fragment whatever collectivity has been established over the years, fewer women will associate with the movement, fewer groups will participate, and mainstream and state support will be seriously compromised"(25).

Thus this more inclusive form of trans-feminism not only bridges the gap between feminism and queer identities but also widens the constituencies of feminism. It adds various tangents to it. Hence it is a mutually beneficial trajectory for both feminists and transgenders as it not only mitigates the phobic gaze of feminists towards other queer identities like the much neglected lesbians but also helps in forming the bridge between trans identities and lesbians as lesbians still hold much privileged position as compared to the trans identities within queer activism. Thus at one level the trans-feminism works as a catalyst for colluding feminism and lesbianism and at another it also helps the coalition politics of transgenders and lesbians. So this step-sisterly treatment meted out to both transgenders (within queer culture) and lesbians(within feminism) gets mitigated somewhat through this kind of coalition politics. Interestingly the whole idea of 'femininity' also comes under scrutiny when viewed through the lens of trans-feminism because unlike women 'femininity' in transsexuals is hugely punished as has been documented by Diana Courvant in "Thinking of Privilege". This kind of misogyny has been referred by Julia Serano as 'transmisogyny' in *Whipping Girl, A Trans-*

sexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity. Maya Sharma also talks about the phobic feminist gaze towards queers. Globally there are feminist activists like Mary Daly, Janice Raymond and Shelia Jeffreys who speak about the depletion of energy and resources through transfeminism. It is significant to note here as how the Michigan Womyn's festival became a tangible site for this kind of biases when the festival excluded a transsexual woman, Nancy Burkholder and maintained that it was exclusively for 'womyn-born-womyn' only. This kind of stand has been vociferously rejected by feminists like Dworkin in her book, *Woman Hating*. In this light when Tamanna sees Tikku in a female attire and gets disgusted by the exposure of his hijra identity, it creates that typical transmisogynist site and lays bare the dangers of not collating feminism with transgender activism. The moment she discovers that he is a hijra, there has been such hatred and phobia in her gaze that even before she could utter a single word the reverse transpanic strikes Tikku and he starts running away from her and hides himself in a dark garage and comes out only after a lot of cajoling. The moment he comes out in his hijra attire she asks him about his identity. To which her uncle Salim Chacha replies that he is her father. She retorts back vehemently saying that he cannot be his father and rather she feels nauseated at the thought that this man has ever touched her and fed her. However unable to bear Tikku's insult Salim loses his patience and tells her that Tikku has picked her up from a dustbin where she has been thrown by her patriarch father. And as the story progresses Tamanna realises as how Tikku has been instrumental in saving her from the onslaught of patriarchy and together they collate to annihilate the vicious foundations of patriarchy. This scene is followed by a very symbolic scene of worshipping of *Kali mata*. In this sense to view *Tamanna* only as a simplistic narrative of hijra empowerment is a monolithic way of understanding this movie as it at a deeper level lays bare the issues of transmisogyny, friction between feminism and transfeminism and the power of colluding feminism with transfeminism. Transmisogyny is at times initiated by women as well and that is the saddest aspect of this whole issue. Describing the penetrative and insidious effects of transmisogyny and cataloguing it not as an exclusive trans issue but as a feminist issue quoting Julia Serano, A. Finn. Enke affirms that transmisogyny "provides greater nuance to the misogyny that judges all expressions of femininity as artificial, frivolous, manipulative, and less valuable. Trans-misogyny, more specifically,

de-legitimizes trans-people who are on the trans-female/feminine spectrum of gender identity and expression. In feminist and many queer contexts ranging from all female conferences to privileged institutions such as the Association for Women in Psychology, trans women are shunned as 'doubly artificial, because we are trans and because we are feminine'. Serano suggests that all femme and femininely identified and feminist people need to develop alliances around the value and power of femininity even while challenging the compulsory femininity that confronts virtually all people assigned female at birth. Transmisogyny is an essential element of misogyny in general; by the same token, transmisogyny is not specially a 'trans' issue but, more broadly, a feminist issue. Rather than being outsiders, people on trans-feminine spectra are inherent and necessary to the 'community' invoked in the name feminist" (www.temple.edu/tempees/chapters-1800/2173-Ch1.pdf).

Another bias faced by the transfeminists within the feminist circles is that MTFs (male turned into female) are considered to be privileged on account of their initial socialization as males and those who are FTM(female to male) are considered traitors on account of appropriating male privileges. However this assumption is fraught with serious misreading of the situation of a gender variant who is always at a disadvantageous position as compared to someone who has a clear-cut gender identity. Apropos of this Emi Koyama contends: "What is happening here is that we often confuse the oppression we have experienced for being gender-deviant with the absence of the male privilege. Instead of claiming that we have never been benefited from male supremacy, we need to assert that our experiences represent a dynamic interaction between a male privilege and the disadvantage of being a trans. Any person who has a gender identity and/ or inclination towards a gender expression that match the sex attributed to her or him has a privilege of being non-trans. This privilege like other privileges is invisible to those who possess it. And like all other privileges, those who lack the privilege intuitively know how severely they suffer due to its absence. A trans-woman may have limited access to male privilege depending on how early she transitioned and how fully she lives as a woman, but at the same time she experiences vast emotional, social and financial disadvantages for being a trans. The suggestion that trans women are inherently more privileged than other women is as ignorant as claiming that gay male couples are more privileged than hetero-

sexual couples because both partners have male privilege” (<http://eminism.org/readings/pdf-rdg/tfmanifesto.pdf>). In this light it is pertinent to note that despite the initial transmisogyny shown by the heroine ultimately both Tamanna and hijra Tikku form an alliance to fight against patriarchy. Whereas despite all claims of progressiveness by the Western world in the movie, *The Crying Game* both the trans-woman and another woman Judy are pitted against each other. Both the trans-woman and woman hate each other to the core and in fact Judy tries to kill Dil and Dil also tries to shoot Judy. This is in fact a victory of patriarchy against feminism and trans-liberation. As opposed to this, the progressive and affirmative stance taken by the maker of *Tamanna* is quite obvious and remarkable.

Also *Tamanna* is an extremely progressive movie because it annihilates the notion that hijras are useless as reproductive bodies. The Indian society valorizes reproduction to the extent that in the *Arthashastra*, as Giti Thadani referred in *Sakhiyani*, it has been stated that “Even within the heterosexual arrangement, if a man does not have sex with his wife after menstruation, this is seen as killing the fetus or developing embryo” (57). And anybody who is assumed to be worthless as a reproductive tool has been vociferously denounced. Thus when hijra Tikku takes the role of a parent and the biological father is deemed useless as he throws away the child, there is a definitive paradigm shift vis-a-vis parenting and the trans-body. Tamanna, who has been initially shown as a mouthpiece of societal prejudices, questions Tikku’s authenticity as a father. To quote from the film:

Tamanna: Who is he Salim Chacha?

Salim Chacha: He is your Abbu (father).

Tamanna: He can not be my Abbu (father). How can he be my father? I can not be his daughter? Salim Chacha everyone is lying. He just cannot be my father.

She further denounces his role as a father by saying: “I feel nauseated that this man has ever touched me. I feel disgusted that he has ever touched me. My father...my father cannot be like him. This man !this man! This man is a hijra. To this Salim Chacha slaps her and Tikku starts crying. After that Salim asks rhetoric questions and vehemently chides. He asks Tikku: You are scared of her? She can never repay your debts.

Then he turns to Tamanna and asks: Oh you are disgusted! Really disgusted. Lower ! your eyes immediately. Why do you not have boils in your tongue while calling him a hijra? No real father

can do what he has done for you. Your so-called real parents have left you in a dustbin. He has picked you up. We all have told him to give you away to a police station and orphanage but no, he has kept you close to his heart so that you can sleep. He lived barefooted and hungry so that he can feed you Tamanna. He has kept on dancing as a hijra so that Tamanna can be sent to an English school. If he is a hijra then shame on all of us who claimed to be a so-called real man.

Interestingly it also raises the issue of alternative family structure. At the very start of the movie, Tikku has been shown as a dutiful son to an ailing and half-insane actress. Though he has been shown as an illegitimate son, yet he proved his legitimacy as a hijra son by looking after his mother incessantly. Thus it indubitably problematises the issue of the illegitimacy or legitimacy of hijras as normative sons. He also refused to demean his half brother who usurped his share of paternal property which Tikku only wanted in order to get Tamanna married. This also exhibits him as a self-sacrificing family man and reconstitutes a hijra's position in a family structure as a positive force instead of a negative one. This movie effectively portrays a hijra's acceptance not only in a normative family but also the kind of alteration his/her existence can bring in that family fold. Interesting to note that this movie was made in the year 1990 when the popular culture unlike today was still not ablaze with the mainstreaming of hijra identity in heteropatriarchal household structures. Even today the news of a transgender person performing the last rituals of his/her father gets widely circulated and got published in the newspapers like Hindustan Times (<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/gujrat-transgender-woman-performs-last-rites-of-father/story-yIMCBNktbjGI97jry9ILKK.html>). On 21.6.2016 a 55 year old transgender woman, Puja performed the last rites of her 100 year old father in Gujrat's Panchmahals district and it went viral. As it appears to be one of the rare occasions when there is an acceptance of a trans identity in a family fold at a major event like death. In this light Tikku's acts of performing death rituals of his mother, nurturing Tamanna as a father when her own biological father left her and forgiving his own brother for usurping his share in the family property, indubitably make *Tamanna* a movie way ahead of its times in terms of mainstreaming of a hijra and exhibiting him/her as a positive force in a normative family. It coevals with the central concern of the film and that is the demystification of the phallic superiority.

Also *Tamanna* shows the issues of internalized transphobia effectively. When Tikku makes it a point to stay away from hijras and refuses to wear female clothes and spurns them, one of the hijras tells him that he is shunning them but when it comes to saving Tamanna from the clutches of the oppressive world, they will be the ones who would be helping him. And their words prove prophetic because later on it is the same group of hijras that helps Salim in saving Tamanna from the goons sent by her patriarchal father. Later Tikku has been shown participating in a hijra dance clad in *saris* and a certain kind of acceptance of his hijra identity and mitigation of internalized transphobia takes place.

Tamanna is also significant for its implicit mixing of trans-feminism with queer activism. The bond of male friendship between Tikku and Salim bordering onto subtle romance at the backdrop of co-parenting presents an overlap between a gender and sexual deviant. The queer dynamics of this movie and the disruption of the coding of 'masculine' and 'feminine' have been demonstrated by Ruth Vanita in her essay, "Social Deviant, Disabled Victim or Normative Human Beings?: Love Rewrites the Plot in *Dosti* and *Tamanna*". To quote her words: "Throughout the film, Salim functions as the sensible counterpart of the overemotional Tikoo. The implicit masculine-feminine coding here, the bearded, silent and gruff Salim supporting the long-haired, dramatic, often hysterical Tikoo is clearer... Tikoo's emotion, which initially marks him as 'not-man', or non-male, also ultimately marks him as the true 'man', and this is accomplished by rewriting 'man' not as 'masculine' but as 'human' (*Gandhi's Tiger and Sita's Smile: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Culture* 185-86). Also commenting on the use of parenting as a device to make the latent homoerotic tension present between the two men acceptable to the larger heterosexual world Ruth contends: "The parenting device in *Tamanna* thus works as a safety device, deflecting possible anxiety about the homosexual implications of the two men's relationship ... Salim and Tikoo are not shown sharing a house or a bed (though we have always seen them together and Tikoo says he often sleeps at Salim's house) nor do they sing songs about their love for each other. Their relationship is played out through co-parenting; their conflicts and bonding arise from the parenting experience. It constitutes the intensity of their relationship and establishes their love as normative and them as ideal men. In this, too, it is typical of many, perhaps most Indian male-female marriages, where co-parenting is the glue that bonds couples" (Ibid. 187).

Since the mainstream Hindi cinema is largely consumed by the heterogenous audience, the outcome of these hijra or trans movies is highly porous. As Gopinath talks about the destabilizing potential of the spectator strategies. The all encompassing fluidity of the transgender studies can be seen from its intersection with the various other branches of knowledge such as musicology, digital media, performing arts, medicine, sports, law, etc. There is such intricate interlocking of these areas of investigations with the transgender studies that these overlaps find manifestations even in the artistic signatures. Due to the hegemonic restrain trans identities have not been much explored even by the queer artists or people working on the queer art, specially in India. Commenting on the connection of art with emancipatory politics, Groys affirms that both try to seek recognition at the public arena: "Art and politics are initially connected in one fundamental respect: both are realms in which a struggle for recognition is being waged....[T]his struggle for recognition surpasses the usual struggle for the distribution of material goods, which in modernity is generally regulated by market forces. What is at stake here is not merely that a certain desire be satisfied but that it also be recognised as socially legitimate....Both forms of struggle are intrinsically bound up with each other, and both have as their aim a situation in which all people with their various interests, as indeed also all forms and artistic procedures, will finally be granted equal rights" (14). It indubitably legitimizes somewhat the role of art in transgender politics at a fundamental level. Thus in the light of the above discussion it is safe to assume that through the cinematic representation of trans lives, I have tried to create some slippages in the arena of coalition politics between transgenders and feminists, citizenship rights, hijra parenthood, trans-misogyny, transphobia and trans-rape which can enhance our knowledge of trans lives. And this knowledge can give impetus to the more holistic policy formation for the empowerment of transgender persons.

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The Sense of 'Home' in Diasporic Literature and Covid-19

Gauri Shankar Jha

Let me begin with a line of a very old song by Sehgal: *Ek Bangla Bane Nyara*. Here, the word *Bangla* is the imagination of a 'home', rather a sweet home, and most interestingly: my home. This is significant and most noticeable. The words like I or my are the most obnoxious words as per the tenets of true literature, for the simple reason that it makes the text subjective, and the subjectivity is not allowed in a text; a text should be objective in totality whether the text is in the guise of a human resource or anything else. However, the classical tenets have become obsolete today, and we are heading towards a new dawn with "all my."

Coming to the talk of the day, surprisingly, 'Home' has become very relevant in the present context of Covid-19, for all of us. 'Home' has been variously defined and redefined as per our convenience. It happens with all of us and it has been with all of us right from the inception of the humanity. Moreover, we should not be surprised of the fact that it is true for all living beings. There is a deep and strong relatedness between a man and his home; home signifies all his kith and kin: his family members, and his own people constituting his community / society. Whenever a man has to undergo the process of migration, he is not at ease. Migration is, basically, a painful process whether voluntary or involuntary; it is deeply associated with the unsaid suffering; be it in the name of search for livelihood or identity, or recognition, or anything else; it creates a deep scare in our heart of hearts and continues for all the days to come. Surrounded by all strange, one has to compromise with all odds; precisely, in search of 'something better'. In the alien land, the migrant has everything strange, that is, culture, language, life style, behaviour and thought; but the migrant has to cope with, to compromise and say 'yes' to all their (that of the host) wishes; all of a sudden, he becomes a 'non-entity' – the 'other', all, in a search 'for a better alternative'; and, when the circumstances are compelling like Covid-19, the man is

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helpless with the unanswerable question: 'What to do?' He is left with no option, but to go back to his 'home' and begin a fresh life with love and compassion and, definitely, without economic security. My attempt, in this paper, is to examine the notion of 'Home' in the diasporic literature, being redefined, during the pandemic Covid-19.

The present scenario of India, especially, after the declaration of the lockdown by the Central Authority, divulges the underlying equations of migration, and that too, during the Covid-19. With its widespread impact on the social fabric and economic design, it has shattered the man completely, within and without. The catastrophic narrative is inevitable and irreparable. The mass exodus, not only within the country (let us call it 'internal migration'), but migrants from abroad (let us call it that of the NRIs) connote the meaning and importance of 'home', and the earnest desire of a man to be in his home - in his own home, at any cost - with his kith and kin, within the paternal walls: be it a thatched dilapidated house, a roofless shelter or a better one. We have numerous instances of the ways people resolved to proceed towards their homes: on foot, by bicycle, by auto rickshaw, by man driven rickshaw, by truck, or by any vehicle available at the time - all without food and water. Many of them lost their life on the way; some met some horrible accidents; some were stopped in the middle by the State Govt., some were forced to go back, and so and so on; the story is endless and the plight is unregistrable. God knows; how these people were destined to suffer. The process continues. The Govt. fails to cope with the situation: only words of assurance and almost nothing in practise.

It is here that the term 'home' seeks redefinition. However, the question is: how should we define it? It teases all of us, and teases vehemently. Can we call it a run for life, a call for home, or an urge for meeting our own people or is it out of fear psychosis? Whatever may be the explanation: the crux of the matter is that this migrant mass finds itself under threat: threat of social and economic security. Nevertheless, all in vain! None proves to be ready to lend a hand. None, of course, none. Moreover, if there is someone, how long can one sustain the financial burden?

History and literature are replete with such convulsions: call it an unexpected and unprecedented natural calamity or a time of *Mahapralaya*. For a proper diagnosis of such complicity, we shall have to make a close survey of Diasporas literature; I would like to dwell on Indian diasporic literature. In the realm of 'world literature', we can notice, very easily, the search for 'home' or 'roots'

in plenty (critics prefer to call it nostalgia), especially, after the two Big Wars, and, in India during the Partition. Literature is the best documentation of all such upheavals and it can help us to infer the exact status. We have different team of writers in every zone, for instance, Indo-Fijian writers, Indo-Caribbean writers, Indo-Singaporean writers, Indo-African writers, and those of U.S., Britain, and Canada. Let us try to calculate how this mass is evaluated. It is pertinent to quote Vijay Mishra here, as he maintains in his book, *The Literature of Indian Diaspora*:

“All diasporas are unhappy, but every Diaspora is unhappy in its own way ... Diasporas are both celebrated (day late/ post modernity) and maligned (by early modernity)—Diasporas are fluid ideal formations ... (1)

So, diasporas are identified as problematic entity and the root cause of all the complicity lies in their basic nostalgic nature: the anxiety for their roots, the question of belongingness, the thought of their identity, the confrontation with strange culture – all leading to their idea of ‘Home’. Truly speaking, there has been a major paradigm shift in the recent years, reconstituting the narrative in a different design. Here, economy is not the pivotal factor operating at most of the levels, in the Indian context, for the simple reason that the mass exodus includes not only the labourers / workers, but the affluent class accompanying this population flow from abroad.

‘Home’ is an all-inclusive word; it covers the elements of peace and prosperity (though in a different sense), at the same time, it also ensures security – both social and economic. As we know, whenever a man finds any sort of threat on the equation of security, he becomes restless: and then begins the search for a better berth and better shelter; naturally, the first option is – ‘back to home’, which carries the possibility of being deprived of economic safety. Today, man is out to be in his home despite all prevalent odds. ‘Home’ has been defined by Susheila Nasta in her book *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* as below:

“For the notion of ‘Home’ with all the political, ideological and symbolic baggage that it still implies, was on which formed an integral part of the naturalized rhetoric ... the seductive power of ‘home’ both as a force of authority over and as a continuing domestic metaphor ... figures most forcefully.” (1)

In a diasporic space, we grow with new identities and subjectivities with new alliances. Diasporic desire is, essentially, for the lost homeland, nothing more, and nothing less. A host of critics believe that a Diaspora entity carries his home wherever he

goes: as the Hindi dictum goes: *Jahan baitthe wahin Kailash* (Heaven is the place where one resides); however, it has been falsified by now. Indian Diaspora, during European colonialism, is a crucial phase of migration. It was by the first quarter of the nineteenth century that the demand for labour force accentuated, and in opposition to the slavery, the eventual abolition of slavery also intensified : three distinct patterns evolved : 'indentured' labour immigration; Kangani' and 'maisty' labourer emigration, and 'passage' for 'free' emigration. Indian Diaspora, in the in the post colonial period is also significant phase in which three distinct patterns can be identified: the emigration of Anglo-Indian to Australia and England, the emigration of professionals and semi professionals to the industrially advanced countries (like USA, England and Canada), and the emigration of skilled and unskilled labourers to the West Asia. William Saffron, in his book, *Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of the Homeland and Return* opines:

"They (the immigrants) continue to relate personally or vicariously, to the homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by existence of such a relationship." (84)

The immigrant population work as social laboratories for the study and testing of certain key social processes like the formation of ethnic identity, shaping of ethnic realities, the reconstruction of institutions and the life worlds, etc. ; it also provides unique avenues for understanding the dynamics of culture.

In a close survey of Indian diasporic fiction, we find the writers trying to relocate themselves afresh, for which they have to undergo penance such as readjustment, adaptations, participation and fulfilment amidst dilemmas and self-imposed *ghettoisation*. Let us discuss a few writers and their works. Our first target is V. S. Naipaul. The central theme of the writings of V. S. Naipaul is that of root or home, keeping aside his travelogues. *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958) and *Miguel Street* (1959) deal with the rootlessness of Trinidadian society which resort to adoption, compromise, submission, etc., for sheer survival. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is concerned with homelessness. Obviously, Naipaul's principal apprehension is 'root', that is, 'hope', which appears and reappears in different forms. Naipaul, is almost in abnormal obsession with the idea of India but remains completely disenchanting when he visits India, his homeland, and in his outburst, in his works, *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, etc. However, his novels focus on the theme of 'home'

and its different dimensions. Similar thing happens with Salman Rushdie's egocentric Salim Sinai in 1981 and Professor Malik in 2001, as the 'wounded self', 'energetic fury', 'listening strings of puppet' and 'helpless nonviolent'.

Bharti Mukherjee can be bracketed under the same category, though she considers herself an American and claims to have overthrown "the smothering tyranny of nostalgia and surmounted the temptation of *ghattoization*" (Mukherjee, 1992, 35); the cultural references and the intertexts that she uses in her writings defies her own statement. Most of the time, she uses the theme of 'outsiders / insiders', 'otherness', Indian customs, patriarchal tradition, etc. Her 'Tara' of *The Tiger's Daughter* is a typical product of Indian society, a victim of Indianness who fails to cope with the American cultural milieu, suffers from a sense of insecurity and instability, and, finally, finds herself nowhere. She is very much like Naipaul's Mr. Biswas, and O'Neill's Mr. Yank. 'Dimple' the central character of her another novel '**Wife**' reveals the tragic fate of an Indian wife. Her obsession is 'Americanization' and so she prefers to obliterate her past roots and finally disillusioned to kill her husband as an act of self-assertion. Let us not misinterpret the moves of Dimple as East / West encounter; on the contrary, it acquaints us with the tragic end as consequence of an artificial adoption by denying the 'root'. This is a psycho – analytical approach of expatriate writing. Bharati Mukherjee's repeated creative exercise in her homeland confirms her anxiety for 'home'.

The ambivalence of diasporic literature lies in the fact that it provides a platform of reconciliation with resistance; it serves as a breeding ground of multiculturalism, at the same time, it also permeates in the catastrophic encounter and confrontation. In Bharati Mukherjee, we may notice a process of gradual hybridisation and transformation in characterization. Uma Parmeswaran defines it very cautiously:

" ... the first is one of nostalgia for the homeland ... the second is a phase of adjusting ... the third phase is involvement in cultural issues ... the fourth is participating in the larger world of politics and national issues." (ALB, Vol I, No. 2, p.165)

That is why, her work bears involvement with reality, a sense of wonder and fear, and acute nostalgia, as in *The Door I Shut Behind Me*, and *Trishanku and Other Writings*. The pull of the past is so strong that throughout her works, it recurs and she laments:

“When we leave our country we shut many doors behind ourselves though we are not aware of it at the time — — —and yet— — there are many doors ahead of us.” (Parmeswaran, 1998,105)

She cannot abandon her past and her diasporic consciousness carries its history, philosophy and vision. She prefers to stick to the legend and typical Indian characters, such as Sita, Meera, Savitri, Rama, Laxman, etc., Indian culture remains with her in the foreign climate. She cannot compromise with the present, as Sharad says in *Sons Must Die and Other Plays*:

“It upsets me profoundly in a crowd. All those alien faces staring ... as though, I should not be there.” (Parmeswaran, 1998, 82)

All the time, they are in search of ‘our people, our country’. Here lies the concern for the past and the present, for root and rootlessness, for native land and new land, for preoccupation and the third space, for singular culture and multicultural and the trend continues endlessly.

Meena Alexander is another name who deserves to be mentioned in this regard. Like other diasporic writers, she is aware of the displacement, the homelessness, the fragmentation of identity, the dislocation, the origin, the race, the culture and the nationality. Her prose works vindicate her stand. The novel, titled *Manhattan Music*, introduces us with characters like Sandhya, Draupadi, Rashid and Jaya who are situated in different stages of exile; Sandhya is in voluntary exile who compiles to the social dictates of accompanying her husband to her homeland; Draupadi inherits the complex from her parents; Rashid battles constantly with his memories of home; and Jaya, a permanent nomad, for whom, home or motherland is a meaningless entity. Though in exile, Sandhya never recovers from the ongoing of her motherland; the repercussions of Indian politics influences her sketches. The strange new land is horrifying and disturbing and her life becomes terrible nightmare and insecure. On the other hand, in the novel *Nonpally Road*, Mira, the protagonist, is disenchanted in her motherland because it does not help her translate her Romantic philosophy. She remains trapped in the ideology of socialism, nationalism, colonial discomfort and postcolonial achievements. In *Fault Lines*, an autobiographical work, she declares:

“ I always felt that what I really was being left out as an Indian woman, I felt that I had to go back to India”. (25)

She further says:

“ I carry that world around with me ... writing poems that are rooted in this soil and this landscape. It is by doing this that I can reconstitute what is critical for me and nourish myself.” (23)

Finally, she finds herself: “a woman with nowhere to lay her head”. (32) Precisely, Meena Alexander’s work revolves around the theme of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’. In the collection of stories, titled *Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa Lahiri, talks of native consciousness, imposed life style, human despair, psychic dilemma and emotional frigidity. The most important story is “The Blessed House” that becomes a center of compromises, sacrifices and adjustments, necessary for a sweet home. Precisely, these stories are an attempt to negotiate the two cultures followed by an urgency of ‘home’.

In *Tales from Ferozsha Baag*, Rohinton Mistry dwells on the plight of Parsi Indians tormented by the sense of ‘otherness’. The protagonist of the two stories “Swimming Lessons” and “Squatter” shuttles between Bombay and Toronto feeling the trauma of an ‘outsider’. All characters of the stories are haunted by the sense of root and belongingness.

Accordingly, the key factor of the entire bulk of diasporic writing is the predominant feeling of ‘otherness’, ‘outsider’, and ‘a citizen of nowhere’ as Said calls it - ‘totally cut off, isolated hopelessly, separated from your place of origin’. This state is termed as ‘haunted by some sense of loss’ by Salman Rushdie in his book *Imagery Homelands*. He further calls it the Diaspora as ‘wounded creatures with fractured perceptions’. Suleri terms it as ‘a free floating metaphor for cultural embattlement’. The agony of home haunts Naipaul as he pronounces in *A Bend in the River*, “Home was hardly a place I could turn to. Home is something in my head. It was something I had lost.” Perhaps for his whole life, V. S. Naipaul was desperate to get a home, which he could not.

Let me close my arguments with a mighty affirmation that ‘home’ is the predominant element in major diasporic writing. The term ‘home’ is an all-inclusive word, which signifies security, peace and prosperity. In the present scenario of our country, we have witnessed the pandemic Covid-19 as a leveller which compels the poor labourers/ workers as well as the affluent class from abroad, equally, anxious to reach home. We are free to define and redefine it but the basic design of ‘home’ remains the same for all of us. Once we are away from our home we become the ‘other’, the ‘outsider’, the ‘marginalised’ the ‘subaltern’, etc. as defined by the native – all leading to various complicacies such as cultural conflict, hybridity, clash of identities, ethnicity, maladjustment, etc.. Let us pray to be in ‘home’ – home of our own- all of us – safe

and sound, happy and healthy – this is what Covid -19 has taught us – motivating the urgency of ‘home’ for all.

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Sintanshu Yashaschandra's *Drought*: A Deconstructive Study through Multiple Lens

Madhvi Lata

The present manuscript, a result of an Assignment of an Elective Paper ' *Indian Literature in Translation*' in MA Final Semester, is a deconstructive study of a poem prescribed in the course titled ' *Drought*' by a Gujarati author — Sintanshu Yashaschandra. To begin the unit, I assigned it to my (small group of 2019-20 batch, consisting 8 students only) most perceptive students in the class to organize a discussion in the form of assignment presentation. I gave them no instruction except that they had to come up with what they could get out of the poem. I was amazed by the students' depth of understanding of the poem. Later, after listening to their cogitating argument I arrived at the conclusion to publish a paper wherein I can incorporate some of their inputs to it. Derrida's own description of deconstructive reading has the same purport. A deconstructive reading:

"...must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of language that he uses...(It) attempts to make the not-seen accessible to sight." (*Of Grammatology*, pp. 158 and 163)

J.A. Cuddon asserts that in deconstruction:

A text can be read as saying something quite different from what it appears to be saying...it may be read as carrying a plurality of significance or as saying many different things which are fundamentally at variance with, contradictory to and subversive of what may be seen by criticism as a single 'stable' meaning.

An eminent Gujarati poet, experimental dramatist, insightful literary theorist, and a recipient of the Sahitya Akademy Award (for '*Jatayu*'), Sintanshu Yashaschandra Mehta (born 1941), is regarded with high esteem among contemporary Indian literary figures as a pathfinder modernist poet of '*Ajanabahuudgar*' (far reaching expression encompassing wider horizon). The present poem

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Drought, translated from *Gujarati* into English by *Saleem Peeradina, Jayant Parekh, Rasik Shah, and Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh*, is a surrealist poem wherein the poet unexpectedly juxtaposes variant images together because of which the meaning of it left non-sequitur (non-conclusive). Surrealism is considered Sinto's signature style. The poem aims to represent Gujarati Literature and Culture in English and its accessibility to mass readership beyond region. A look at the poem:

For nearly a month
the tortoise has been lying there,
stony as an adam's apple.
Terraces, like the tongues of flaming caves,
lie empty at noon.
From the gaping doors,
black tar drips like thick saliva.
Mother told us
that after the tortoises
there would be fish in the well,
that we should watch it intently
with the torch—
you can't let the well dry up in this
terrible famine.
for who knows,
the wall of this mysterious cave
might open up,
and in the halo of this light
fish, crocodile, hippopotamus
and, what mother didn't know,
even sea horses
might come flying from the wall
into the baffled eye of the torch.
Who knows who inscribed
a sea horse on this cave wall?
It has been there for year, decdes,
centuries,
flying in the water.
And in this terrible drought,
as the well goes on opening deeper
and deeper downwards,
the horses on the ghostly cave walls
begin to neigh bucketfuls,
and the sprightly cheetahs...
Now you experience such a bottomless fear

when you are thirsty,
while tying the master -knot to let
the rope down,
that you recall the story Sadevant
Savalinga,
in which the bewitching knot of
night
suddenly undoes itself;and as you
haul wet rope over slippery pulley
bucketfuls of blind, upturned,
twitching, gentle bats
come tumbling out of this dark,
obscure,
hollow, phantom cave.
In this unforeseen time of drought
blank sky and fever hot directionless space
slip away into the unfound routes
of terraces.
In the deep recesses of the cave,
in this desolate noon,
the cheetahs and fish who have
slept
for centuries might come awake in
the wall.
The throat is parched and the
mouth is burning with fever.
But one has lost the nerve to lower
another bucket into the well.
As tired hands let the rope slip
the bucket falls to the bottom.
And when the cat -hook is lowered
to retrieve it,
the sprightly cheetahs hiss out in a
pack.
You feel ashamed to turn the torch
on them, and yet—

should you or shouldn't you pull
 up the cat-hook?
 You wonder if in this unexpected
 season of drought
 these iron cats of drag-hooks have
 given birth
 to golden kittens in these dark hal-
 lows,
 in the secret well of doubt.
 Though the mud-plaster is cracked
 and is peeling off in the dryness,
 and the well is an awful place to
 inhabit,
 what would you do if worms and
 insects
 crawled out of the cracks?
 Under the hot curved metal faucet,
 water trickles into the bucket,
 but it dries up after a few drops.
 Who will daub and restore
 this constantly cracking mud
 walls?
 And yet—
 What is thirst?
 As if dragged from the throat at
 night,
 it lay crumpled, a late-morning
 bedsheet,
 on dust -coated brows;
 thirst pushed itself into the nostrils;
 raw thirst sat on parched lips,
 this high thirst passed through,

forcing itself deep into the gullet,
 then gushed out from the navel.
 The water in the well must be ex-
 hausted by now
 from creating mirages of tortoises
 and fish,
 followed by whales and other
 ghosts.
 And yet it is not.
 I remember mother saying
 that if this well went dry—
 no, she really said that,
 these are no folk tales about sea
 horses and cheetahs—
 if this well went dry,
 perhaps within a month in this ter-
 rible drought,
 the inside, the wall, the bottom
 will overflow with innumerable
 ants
 and a wellful of ants will swell and
 spill over.
 A million ants from the founda-
 tions of this house
 will cover the rooms and yawning
 like tongues,
 and on slippery pulleys with long
 ropes hanging
 everywhere,
 ants and ants and ants, ants and
 ants
 and ants, ants, ants, and nothing
 but ants.

The paper attempts to deconstruct the poem from Psychological, Environmental and Eco/ Feminist perspectives. Conventionally, the poem infuses enriched Gujarati socio-cultural elements by depicting traditional *well* with several animals painted inside to gauge the level of water from time to time. It also has stairs to go into it for cleaning. So much so that it brings about the folkloric song of two lovers—*SadevantSavalinga*, which was later adapted into a play and a movie.

Eco/Feminist Perspective

The poem can be construed through the lens of eco feminism. It showcases how *Mother Nature/ Earth* can wreak havoc if hu-

mans don't put restraint to irrational actions. As a modern poet, Sitanshu draws a parallel between *water* (which sustains life) and the *feminine principle* (which generates life) and suggests that human being through hegemonic exploitation of the feminine entities has led to the onset of the *drought* "...and in this terrible drought, as the well goes on deeper and deeper downwards" (a symbolic projection of the suppression of the Mother Earth), which if not checked, as the "mother" warns, would disturb the function of the society and would turn it into a mere nothingness (symbolized by the ants). It imparts pertinent message that we must have harmonious relationship with our nature else the repercussion will be highly unthinkable as described in the poem that drought, a natural calamity, has struck humans making them baffled. The poem also, implicitly, explores the patriarchal exploitation of women in the marital space. Loveless ness in conjugal life is symbolized by love story of Sadevant and Savalinga; the poet ironically refers to a woman's dreams of love in a blissful conjugal union which "*suddenly undoes itself*" in the "*bewitching of knot of night*" (symbolic of marriage). Through the terrifying morbid images of "*dark, obscure, hollow, phantom cave*", the poet symbolizes the stifling boundaries of the marital ties for woman. The thirst, through the sensuous imagery of a "*crumpled, late-morning bedsheet*", becomes symbolic of the burning sensual desires of woman which is unquenched as man cares only for himself. It discloses the repressed and animal instincts of the husband find expression through his libidinal urges (symbolized by the *neighing horses* and the *sprightly cheetahs* which dwell deep inside the dark well). In the poem, as the rope carrying water is pulled up, to one's despair, it yields bucketful of bats instead of water, similarly, the conjugal union devoid of love and driven solely by lustful carnal instincts of the husband fail to offer happiness and contentment to the woman, leaving her emotionally bereaved (symbolized by the "*parched throat*" and "*the mouth is burning with fever*"). The expressions "*blank sky*" and "*fever-hot directionless space*" illustrate the subdued and hollow existence of woman bound in a loveless marriage in the patriarchal society.

Psychological Perspectives

Psychologically the *well* image, used in the poem right from start to end, has greater significance as it symbolizes human psyche wherein several instincts in the form of ferocious animals, as depicted in the poem, tortoise, fish, cheetah, hippopotamus, reside and lay dormant. *Drought* may mean slipping control over un-

conscious mind and allow the basest evil/ beastly vices come out to disturb the balance of mind as drought disharmonizes the accord of nature. The unconscious mind is referred as '*mysterious cave*' where it is implied that if proper mechanism, to keep it in control, is not taken care of man will arrive at absolute insanity as quoted in the poem *in these dark- hallows, in the secret well of doubt. Though the mud-plaster is cracked and is peeling off in the dryness.* It also lays emphasis on proper meditation and spiritual rejuvenation. In lack of which one fails to restore inner peace and energy.

But one has lost the nerve to lower
another bucket into the well.

As tired hands let the rope slip
the bucket falls to the bottom.

Herein the *bucket* and *bottom* imagery are self – explanatory, emblematic of mind and dark recess of unconscious self. On account of losing control of inner peace one gets pushed to the bottom of darkness. *The halo of this light* (the spiritual mind) would be baffling and incomprehensible to all human beings who lack foresight; they would let it overcome the individual self as said in the poem:

fish, crocodile, hippopotamus
and, what mother didn't know, even sea horses
might come flying from the wall
into the baffled eye of the torch

The drought cannot only bring out the basest element of human beings but may cause them commit unthinkable crimes; humans live by following the path of '*torch light*' which may be seen as 'knowledge' and social conformity' and if their vices take upper hand the world will suffer horrible consequences. The poet spews the truth of life and cautions us against our brutality towards nature. Water being the second basic need after air needs to be saved. Man needs to reflect cogitatively to take all necessary steps in order to save the earth to be scarce of water. It implicitly suggests to have control over instincts; in case of failing of control over 'Indriyan' humans will face gruesome repercussion as 'drought'. Poised mind resides in healthy body and both are in consonance with each other. If mind goes unbalanced body too would fail to go along. Likewise, our nature entails us to live in harmony with it because if we fail it, we will also not be spared by it.

perhaps within a month in this terrible drought,
the inside, the wall, the bottom
will overflow with innumerable ants
and a wellful of ants will swell and spill over.

As the stated lines above are pertinently indicative of cautioning humans to take preventive measures and self-introspect in order to achieve the perfect cordial and inner peace of mind by evolving spiritually; to save the bottom of unconscious, dark recess of mind one should go into deeper contemplation else the 'ants', which are symbol of bad omens, will *swell* and *spill* all over human consciousness and affect it to the core of existence of individual self.

Conclusion

The poet assumes the role of a robust social realist making aware human being about unforeseen unpleasant future consequences through the use of morbid and terrifying imagery of drought. He also paints a picture of the dilapidated well subsuming all most everything in it which is largely determined by human actions. Good actions will reap positivity of mind and soul and bad will deserve unbalanced, negative results in the form of natural calamity: famine, drought, pandemic etc. Parallel to the picturisation of the barren and desolate modern society through the symbolism of scarcity of water in T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land*

"Here is no water but only rock... / If there were only water amongst the rock...
A spring/ A pool among the rock/ If there were the sound of water only..."

Yashaschandra in 'Drought' similarly connotes the sterility, dreariness and disillusionment of the modern human society, suffering from a "parched throat" and "the mouth burning with fever". The imagery of "stony tortoise", "flaming caves", "bottomless fear", "empty terraces", and "dripping black tar" may symbolize the stillness, dreariness, apprehensions, hollowness and the spiritual darkness of the modern society, respectively. The depiction of the well in a dried and dilapidated state with its mud-plaster cracking and peeling off seems to be reflective of the disintegrating condition of the society with its falling apart moral values, incapable of providing people cohesive support and strength. Also, the well manifests as a symbol of chain to bridge the gap between human society and natural world. However, the drying up of the well is reflective of the *seclusion, loneliness, mistrust* and the *severing of human ties* in the modern society. The poet calls the well "an awful place to inhabit" symbolizing the uninhabitability of the modern world, and through the repellent image of "worms and insects

crawled out of its cracks", he seems to equate the meaningless and insignificant existence of modern man to that of worms and insects residing in the well. It is also interesting to note that the mother in the poem, who used to caution the narrator and other people about the unforeseen calamity of drought, is implied to be the Nature mother. It cautions us beforehand about any unpleasant thing that might be in the offing for whole humanity. It cares for humans as its own offspring which is why to take care of them is considered to be its responsibility.

I remember mother saying
 that if this well went dry—
 no, she really said that,
 these are no folk tales about sea horses and cheetahs—
 if this well went dry,
 perhaps within a month in this terrible drought,
 the inside, the wall, the bottom
 will overflow with innumerable ants

The poem is an outstanding depiction of juxtaposition of several images overlapping each other resulting into labyrinth of expositions. The poet has remarkably, by using his signature style 'Surrealism', has brought out the realism of modern world. It connotes a string of exegesis that readers may come up with after giving closer look at the poem.

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Revisiting the Colonial Past: British Romanticism, Class Consciousness and Epidemics

Ashish Priya

Introduction

Romanticism is one of the most influential literary movements in the history of English Literature. It has been traditionally seen as a socio-political and literary movement that took England by the storm during the period from 1789 to 1832, i.e. about the time the French Revolution (including its aftermath) was making its impact felt in the entire Europe. The Romantic Movement in England was directly influenced by the French Revolution at the political level. Wordsworth, especially, was enamoured with the famous motto of the Revolution – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. It essentially sought to establish democratic ideals in a set up that was monarchical and essentially elitist. The writings of Rousseau, Voltaire and Thomas Paine have been regarded as the ideological plank from which the Romantic Movement in literature got propelled. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge are justifiably considered the inaugurators of the Romantic tradition in English literature. Their joint effort, *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798 is the first major work which reflects the political ideals of Romanticism. It is well known that poets like William Cowper and Thomas Gray wrote highly imaginative poetry, some of which can be said to be stylistically and formally superior to that of Wordsworth. As such it is not easy to ascribe common features of romanticism as an aesthetic ideology.

“An orientation in aesthetic theory is not an idea, or even a premise, but a habitual direction of reference; and to find that the romantic critics usually looked to the poet when they talked about the nature of poetry does not justify the assumption that they had any specific body of doctrine in common. Because of their hospitalities to ideas from many sources, romantic critics in fact exhibit greater diversity in philosophical presuppositions, descriptive vocabulary, dialectical motifs and critical judgments than the writers of any earlier period.” [Abrams,100]

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However, certain features like subjectivity, high imagination, essential oneness of human beings and Nature, image of the poet as a social outcaste, urge for a socio-political change and the idea of the poet being the agent of that change, an interest in the aestheticism of the middle ages etc. can be cited as the features of Romantic poetry. The rustic life, the lower class people are the subjects of the new kind of poetry that Wordsworth, his friends and followers intend to write. Their voice is the voice of what Emerson would call the 'Over-Soul'. Romanticism favoured the idea of 'the noble savage' whose innocence is imperiled by the advance of civilization. Due to the imaginative nature of Romantic poetry and its interest in what does not exist over what exists, many critics of the past have regarded the Romantics as escapists. But this notion is anomalous. The variety of definitions of Romanticism makes it difficult to repudiate each and every claim that is made against the alleged 'social apathy' of some of the younger poets like Keats. M.H. Abrams believes that due to the diversity of the features of Romanticism, it is left to the convenience of the literary historian to choose a definition for it. However, he too, regards Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads as the manifesto of Romanticism.

"The Romantic movement in England is largely a convenient fiction of the historian, but one document, Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads of 1800, written to justify on universal grounds an 'experiment' in poetic language does have something of the aspect of a romantic manifesto." [Abrams,100]

Wordsworth and Coleridge, when they had published Lyrical Ballads, did not call themselves 'Romantic' poets. The term was discussed by the German litterateur Karl Friedreich Von Schlegel and was applied to the poets who did not conform to the classical poetics. So the British Romanticism, in this sense, was influenced by the German thought.

The political undertone of Wordsworth's writings is apparent in the following lines taken from the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802 edition) :

"The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to chuse incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents

and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated....”

It would appear that British Romanticism is being narrowed down, being reduced to only one genre- namely poetry, when we discuss Wordsworth’s *Preface*. But poetry was the art-form that was genuinely regarded as literature then. Drama was no longer a popular an art form in the nineteenth century while the novel was considered too crude to be regarded as ‘Literature’ then. Poetry exercised a massive influence on the British psyche during the first half of the nineteenth century and it was not until the heyday of Victorian era that the novel achieved ‘respectability’. The Romantic period is especially significant with respect to the way in which we understand literature today. Terry Eagleton observes:

“It was, in fact, only with what we now call the ‘Romantic Period’ that our own definitions of literature began to develop. The modern sense of the word ‘literature’ only really gets under way in the nineteenth century, Literature in this sense of the word is a historically recent phenomenon: it was invented sometime around the turn of the eighteenth century, and would have been thought extremely strange by Chaucer or even Pope. What happened first was a narrowing of the category of literature to so-called ‘creative’ or ‘imaginative’ work. The final decades of the eighteenth century witness a new division and demarcation of discourses, a radical reorganizing of what we might call the ‘discursive formation of the English society.’ [Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*,16]

Poetry becomes a vehicle for bringing about social change in the Romantic period. The poet becomes a revolutionary, alternating between his role as a visionary or a Prophet - the ‘unacknowledged legislator of mankind’ and his role as the social-political activist.

“Literature has become a whole alternative ideology, and the imagination itself, as with Blake and Shelley, becomes a political force. Its task is to transform society in the name of those energies and values which art embodies. Most of the major Romantic poets were themselves political activists, perceiving continuity rather

than conflict between their literary and social commitments.”
[Eagleton, 17]

In his role as the poet-activist, the British Romantic poet expressed the fears and suspicion of the contemporary society and shaped its attitude towards the stark realities of the time

Colonialism and Class in Nineteenth Century Britain

The nineteenth century was a time when Colonialism and imperialism had become the order of the day. Here it would be pertinent to understand the significance of both the terms.

“Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another. One of the difficulties in defining colonialism is that it is hard to distinguish it from imperialism. Frequently the two concepts are treated as synonyms. Like colonialism, imperialism also involves political and economic control over a dependent territory. The etymology of the two terms, however, provides some clues about how they differ. The term colony comes from the Latin word *colonus*, meaning farmer. This root reminds us that the practice of colonialism usually involved the transfer of population to a new territory, where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political allegiance to their country of origin. Imperialism, on the other hand, comes from the Latin term *imperium*, meaning to command. Thus, the term imperialism draws attention to the way that one country exercises power over another, whether through settlement, sovereignty, or indirect mechanisms of control.” [Kohn & Reddy, 2017]

The premise of Colonialism as well as Imperialism was exploitation of a conquered people for the benefit of the conquerors. It involved the (in)famous theory of ‘drain of wealth’. But it was not only the wealth that the colonizing powers were interested in. They crippled the social system of the colonized people and caused unprecedented tragedy in the lives of millions of people. This was most painfully felt in the 19th Century, the period which also saw the emergence and culmination of Romanticism in Britain.

“This division between the rest and the west was made fairly absolute in the 19th century by the expansion of the European empires, as a result of which nine-tenths of the entire land surface of the globe was controlled by European, or European-derived, powers. Colonial and imperial rule was legitimized by anthropological theories which increasingly portrayed the peoples of the colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves (despite having done so perfectly well for millennia) and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their

own best interests (today they are deemed to require 'development'). The basis of such anthropological theories was the concept of race. In simple terms, the west-non-west relation was thought of in terms of whites versus the non-white races." [Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2]

Colonialism and Imperialism were linked to the 'noble mission of civilizing the lesser races' and spreading the word of Christianity'. The exploitative economic interests of Great Britain were being served through various intermediaries like religious missionaries and trading companies (like East India Company) in the first half of the nineteenth century. The British state was not yet involved directly in the colonial exploitation. Modern European colonialism, of which the British variety was a dominant enterprise, started with mercantilism and evolved organically into state sponsored blood-sucking machinery. This was possible because colonialism became synonymous with the national identity of the colonizing country.

"Interestingly, as British explorers went on their moral crusades in India, Africa and even the far flung colonies of Australia and New Zealand, and Britain's imperial empire was becoming inextricably linked to British identity..." [Sarkar, *Postcolonial Literatures*, 35-36]

It was through the common pursuit of wealth in the colonies that the British nationalism reinforced itself. It levelled the class differences among the people. The common hope of acquiring wealth from the colonized nations acted as an incentive for the rich and poor alike in Britain. However, it was the lower middle class and the middle class that formed the frontline force for the colonial expedition while the elite 'captains' led from the back.

The Common 'Class' Factor between Romanticism and Colonialism

The Non-Whites and the natives were at the receiving end of gross injustice. They were the ones who felt the pangs of Colonialism most bitterly. But it was also the other way round. The colonizers too, had to face unprecedented hurdles on their mission and very often they did fall prey to adverse climate, disease (epidemics) and hostile natives. The Imperialists and Colonists were morally wrong, but they were enterprising people nonetheless looking for opportunities in a foreign land. Very often they showed courage and bravery, but had to succumb to the pressures

of being in an unfriendly environment. This led to situations where the morale of the foot-soldiers of Colonialism and Imperialism was let down. It was detrimental to their masters' interests. Needless to say, there was a class difference between the elite masters and the foot-soldiers. To maintain the order of things, the discourse of Christian missionary spirit was created to enthuse the frontline Colonizers about a purpose they could relate readily to. The idea of the spreading the word of God to uncivilized people and the 'White Man's Burden' was primarily directed to the middle and lower-middle class people of the Colonizing Nations who constituted the workforce of this initiative. The native population of the colonized countries was only the secondary target.

The press was acting as the medium of dissemination of the idea of class interests which aligned with the political interests of the time.

"The most influential recent criticism on the historical publics for Romantic writing has emphasized the role of the periodical press in the formation of audiences on the basis of preexisting class affiliations and political interests. From our vantage point today, this account has an immediate plausibility: accustomed as we are to thinking about the public as a collection of special interest groups..." [Franta, *Romanticism and the Rise of Mass Public*, 78]

In the Romantic poems, the aspirations of the suppressed millions were being expressed. It may ostensibly appear a bit far-fetched to hold that the private feelings or experiences of the poet were actually common to the middle or lower middle class. But when Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and their ilk bring down poetry from the elite bastion of courtly life and manners and make it a medium of expression of 'common' man, articulating the joys and sorrows common to an entire class of people like farmers, factory workers etc., their class consciousness cannot be missed. Andrew Franta observes that a Romantic poet was not a private individual but a 'typical' man

"Writing verse is a social act because the writer, as 'a man belonging to a certain class,' is inscribed in a network of social relations, and the private individual is replaced by the 'particular but typical' man." [Franta, 80]

This leads him to conclude further that : "The poet as hero gives way to the poet as class hero." [Franta, 80]

The Romantic poets were smitten with the idea of primitivism and the image of the 'noble savage'. Exotic and relatively 'unex-

plored' cultures also became the objects of reverence for the Romantics.

"The peasants and the child became symbols of such a state of purity as the personalities that took joy in simple things without rationalizing about them and as minds that still possessed a sense of wonder. Likewise, other cultures – specifically, non-European and Oriental (Asiatic) – became symbols for a pure, wonderful primitivism." [Nayar, *A Short History of English Literature*, 187]

Hence, while the Colonial enterprise of Britain would attract the Romantic poets with the idea of connecting to the unknown humanity, spreading the word of brotherhood and would appeal to their idealism, the idea of ensuing flow of wealth and luxuries from the endeavour would obviously not be lost on the people in power.

Colonialism and Epidemics

The beginning of modern period of colonialism can be traced back to the fifteenth century and it was the order of the day by the nineteenth century. It was a time when the colonists encountered epidemics and diseases in the new lands they set out to conquer. Alan Bewell observes :

"...colonial experience was profoundly structured by disease, both as metaphor and as reality. For different peoples at different times, it was an age of epidemiological crisis." [Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, 2]

The European colonists were travelling the world. The geographies of the new nations they were out to explore and settle in were completely different from the ones they were familiar with. Especially in the tropical countries, the colonizers were vulnerable to epidemics against which they had no immunity. In places like India, West Indies and Africa, the British colonizers were facing certain diseases which were unknown in their homeland and they acquired those for the first time during their expedition. Not only this, the long sea voyages took a heavy toll on their life and health. But all this was seen as a part and parcel of the colonial enterprise. The front-line colonists were generally from the lower middle class and the middle class. Their lives did not matter much to the upper class policy makers.

"This meant that many families in England had lost their family members in the colonies. In terms of writing, this was the period

when the first treatises on tropical diseases began to get published and circulated in England. Other countries were also mapped in terms of their medical geography (the incidence of specific diseases in certain geographical areas). In fact, Bewell shows how every single Romantic writer from Wordsworth to Austen, had at least one family member in the colonies, had a colonial connection, and were often familiar with tropical diseases. The Romantic poets were actually reacting to the 'epidemiological costs of colonization'. [Nayar, 232]

Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* is about a long sea-voyage in which the crew faces terrible circumstances of disease and death. Among other things, the sub-text of the poem reveals the vulnerability of the sailors to forces beyond their control. Coleridge shows them as 'Supernatural' interventions whereas in reality this was the 'impersonal' force of 'materialism' which led to such ventures. Coleridge also wrote a tract on Cholera, the tropical disease. Bewell considers Wordsworth too, as tacitly referring to the 'depopulation' narrative :

"Wordsworth does not portray the destruction of English rural life in such sweeping terms, yet both "The Ruined Cottage" and "The Brothers" are poems about depopulation, which deal with the collapse of families as expressive of a larger historical condition." [Bewell, 62]

In fact, Wordsworth was a victim of the loss of a kin due to Colonial expedition. He lost his younger brother, John Wordsworth at sea when he was returning from India.

"In 1805, John Wordsworth, a captain employed by the East India Company and younger brother of the poet William Wordsworth, died along with 2/3 of his crew on board the Earl of Abergavenny only 1 1/2 miles off the shoreline of Weymouth in shallow waters. John was anxious to sail from Portsmouth, for he had invested a large sum of his own money in this trip, intending to make a fortune for himself and his family, including his brother William." [JaneAustensworld.wordpress.com]

Wordsworth wrote in his *Elegiac Stanzas*, "In Memory of My Brother, John Wordsworth" :

Sea – Ship – drowned – Shipwreck – so it came,
The meek, the brave, the good, was gone:
He who had been our living John
Was nothing but a name.

Mary Shelley, in her work *The Last Man* shows the situation of a pandemic in which she points towards the degeneration of the

British Empire. P.B. Shelley and Byron were men of affairs and were actively involved with the revolutionary spirit of the time. John Keats stands as an isolated figure among the Romantics. But it is his life that was punctuated more by sickness than any other Romantic poet. The impact of disease on Romantic poetry has been such that it has often been associated with sickness. Christensen invokes Plato to prove that the preoccupation with sickness, which in the case of Romantic poets was colonialism induced phenomenon, enabled them to think ingeniously

“Plato retired to his cave to be wise[,] sickness is often the moral cave, with its quiet, its darkness, and its solitude, to the soul’. Human beings should even consider their earthly condition to be more fundamentally that of the patient than that of the healthy subject: in illness ‘we learn to think, with one of the most august of our moralists, that “earth is a hospital, not an inn – a place to die, not to live in.” Our existence becomes a great preparation for death’.”[Christensen, 3]

Conclusion

It must be said that Class, Colonialism and Romanticism in the context of England are intricately interwoven. They have been affected by one another and in turn impacted one another. It would be wrong to see Romanticism as an isolated phenomenon in history. In fact, it is probably the most politically and historically aware literary movement to have been in vogue in England. Romantic poetry in particular, is among other things, an expression of the fear and anxiety of sickness which was brought to Britain by the Colonial enterprise for which the elite class of Britain can be held directly responsible. The middle and the lower middle class were in course of time, also implicated in the foul game of gain of immoral wealth from the oppressed colonies. The romantic poets - sensitive and imaginative, often seen as representatives of the middle and lower middle class, gave expression to their anxieties in creative ways. The shortness of life, longing for love, individualism and the urge to change the fate are the themes reflected in the Romantic poetry which can be associated with the ‘fact’ of sickness and ill-health in their actual surroundings.

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The Act of Reading: From Text to Hypertextuality

Amina Hussain

The text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture. (Barthes, *The Death of the Author*)

The modern writer according to Roland Barthes is merely a "Scriptor" disavowing any "single theological meaning, exists in contemporaneity without any precedence or transcendence. Roland Barthes in his seminal essay *The Death of the Author*, by questioning the authority and the authorial influence, pronounces the ominous death of the author but also lays foundation for the rise or birth of the reader. This shift in the literary theory from structuralism to post structuralism is also occasioned by Derrida's theory of deconstruction and Bakhtin's "heteroglossia" undermining the centrist assumption in recognizing the instability of language and heterogeneity of narratives. Barthes maintains, "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God); instead, he understands text in terms of "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (128). The process of reading has also undergone a big change following the reader response criticism where theorist like Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser study text with the readers in the center. For Robert Jauss, all readers have a "horizon of expectations" with which the reading begins and makes the process of reading rather a collective venture than an autonomous or an individual experience. Since the reader approaches the text full of knowledge and experience gathered from various other interconnected texts, Stanley Fish calls him the "informed reader". Thus for Hans-Robert Jauss "a literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period". The text becomes a performing art wherein each reader textually performs the text. Wolfgang Iser expanded the performativity of the reader in de-

fining the role of reader for filling the 'gaps' or the unwritten text in the dynamic process of reading in creating what Stanley Fish calls an "interpretive communities".

The paper will rework the post modern and post structuralism theories in tracing the act and the process of reading as it slowly but surely moves from the printed word on the book to the typed one on the screen embodying "variety of writings" in what Wolfgang Iser describes as a "virtual dimension" of the reading process. The phenomenological and the psychological process of reading undermine the static linearity and unitary movement and spatial fixity of the printed text. Enter Hypertext, the novel by product of the digitization of text with the ever-increasing surge of Internet and technological advancement. Paragraphs, words and sentences from the printed text liberate itself from the chained context of imposed meanings into fragmented links, nodes and codes challenging the mystery and the aura surrounding the printed texts.

What is Hypertext

Hypertext can be described as an electronic text, which is facilitated by the surge in the information technology and serve as a mode of publication. Nayyirah Waheed, Rupi Kaur, Cleo Wade and Nikita Gill are few of the famous new generation poets, popularly called as instapoets# who publish online with a huge fan following and success. Theodor Nelson explains the term "hypertext" which he coined as "nonsequential writing-text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways." This evolution of hypertext can be traced in the Post structuralism as it confirms Roland Barthes's "ideal text" which is a "galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" without any beginning, it opens up through "several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one". Similarly Foucault in the *Archeology of Knowledge* describes text as "network of references". Wolfgang Iser in *The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach* points out to the two poles of reading namely the artistic pole and the aesthetic poles. The artistic pole is the creation of text by the author and aesthetic refers to the realization of the same text by its readers. According to Iser, it is the convergence of the text and the readers that bring any literary work to life or *konkretisation*. Iser brings out the hypertextual nature of reading

as it unfurls the “inherently dynamic character of the literary work”. By foregrounding the significance of the “, unwritten text”, Iser attempts to make reading even more creative and active process where the imagination of the reader is animated in the unspoken dialogue or other twist and turns which can turn a trivial scene into a more “enduring forms of life” making the reading process dynamic as with a life of its own which Iser calls “virtual dimension of the text”. This virtual dimension of the text enables the faculties of the readers to recreate a world as presented in the text and thus it is the “coming together of text and imagination.”

Hypertext and Reading

Hypertext radically changes the experience of reading. The reader is no longer a passive recipient of knowledge but an active collaborator in its transmission and implantation. Thus hypertext dissolves the difference between the reader and the writer. The ease and convenience of navigating the interconnections almost instantaneously radically changes the act of reading. Reading is activated as it also occasions simultaneous writings. Roland Barthes laments in *S/Z*:

our literature is divorced with a pitiless divorce which the literary institutions maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. The reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness—he is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a referendum (*S/Z* 4).

Contrastingly, the hypertext reader uses technology that “link information together, create paths through a corpus of related material, annotate existing texts, and create notes that point readers to either bibliographic data or the body of referenced texts”. The interactive hypertextual reading deconstruct the text into series of texts arranged non-sequentially thereby challenging the rigid structure of meaning and ascending the numerous possibilities of making meaning however transitional. T.S Eliot is a perfect example of a modern hypertext poet. The Greek Latin, Christian and historical links embedded in his poetry are an exemplum of how hypertext reads. Eliot orients his readers with the context in his poetry reiterating the consequences and responsibilities of tradition but he does so with an authorial control, jux-

taping, hypertext contextualize the text not as the author intends but as the reader perceives.

Hypertext and Intertextuality

Julia Kristeva was the first to coin the term “intertextuality” to suggest that meaning of a text is not transferred from writer to reader but is mediated through “codes” or conventions of various texts from writers to reader. Thus as Barthes reflected, meaning does not reside in the text but in the complex interconnections of the diverse text recalled in the process of reading. *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys uses Charlotte Bronte’s *Jain Eyre* to indicate the pervasive racism and colonization of the Victorian era and also to challenge the canonised literature. Intertextuality becomes a potent tools to develop new literature in the post colonial literature. Also in the same vein, Aime Cesaire’s play *A Tempest* not only parodies Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* but used a valourised and canonised play to change the discourse on power and rule. Caliban, the deformed native of the island is made captive by Prospero through his magical powers and is forced to work against his will. Cesaire uses the Caliban figure as a native anti-colonial resistance hero. Shakespearan villanous Caliban becomes Cesaire’s symbol of struggle for independence. The metatext of Cesiare’s play is the subtext of Shakespearan text. The meaning is invented in the comparative analysis which then becomes a resounding critique of the colonial literature. Intertextuality thus begs for the reformulation of the canonised literature. Hypertextuality through its unique medium resists the hierarchy of literature as it works to demystify the text by bringing forth its multiple intertextual constituents. The reader is no longer held in awe as he/she probes further through a convenient platfrom that helps her to develop her own meaning amidst opposing and contrasting meanings of the text. Without the fanciful wrappings of the rhetoric and assumed meaning, the diverse layers of the text are gently peeled by the readers threadbare. Hypetextuality allows for such depeeling to occur rather easily for the reader that in reading bone text the reader is exposed many others. By not following the logic and order that the text provides and supposes, the reader’s flexibility in following or pursuing the relevant links attached drastically alters the psychological process of reading. Wolfgang Iser in his phenomenological understading of reading reflects its inherent intertextual characteristics as “the activity of reading can be characterized as a sort of kaleidoscope of perspectives,

preintentions, recollections. Every sentence contains a preview of the next and forms a kind of “viewfinder” for what has been read” (284). By shifting the focus from author/text/tradition to text/discourse/culture, Intertextual reading has opened up the free interplay of diverse perspectives challenging the binaries and fixities. Hypertextuality allows the reader to create his/her own reading path by following the hyperlinks, as Iser pointed out reading leads to the “virtual dimensions” or the reading paths and since each reader reads differently or create his own unique reading path, hypertextuality in affect leads to the “inexhaustibility” of the literary text pointing towards its infinite interplay of meaning.

Hypertext and Polyphony

Mikhail Bakhtin concept of Polyphony although taken from music refers to the multiplicity of voices. In his analysis of Dostoevsky’s work, Bakhtin highlighted multiple and diverse voices uncontaminated by the authorial voice. The existence of the multiple and sometimes contrasting perspectives with their own validity and autonomy is unique to the novels as multiple realities coexist with each other. The subjective and the relative nature of the truth is striking as it diminishes the concept of one grand or universal truth. The novel as a genre changes the role of the author, as the author is not the sole custodian of the truth with the transcendental consciousness. Bakhtin explains this with the centripetal force of language “*that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world*” (270 Discourse in the Novel). For Bakhtin, language is not just “abstract grammatical categories” but as ideological force, it works towards “sociopolitical and cultural centralization”. The centripetal forces of unitary language are at any given point also faces the centrifugal forces of decentralization and disunification. Bakhtin postulates this with an example that at the time when poetry was official serving higher national and sociological order, there also emerged the literature of, ‘folk’ and ‘festive’ languages such as carnivalesque This parodic heteroglossia, of fabliaux belonging to low class was consciously and ideologically opposed to the unitary language of poetry and this is what Bakhtin described as ‘heteroglossia’ that had been dialogized”. Thus dialogism is not just different viewpoints but is the amalgamation of opposing, completely divergent, often incompatible voices unmerged in single narrative. The dialogic nature of novels is also inherent to the language resists any authorial monopoly of the text. Hypertext works on the Bakhtinian

model of polyphony, dialogism and heteroglossia as facilitates reader's own path of imagination. By not prioritizing any one perspective, hypertexts objectively create pathways and networks in proliferating meanings. As a decentering force, hypertexts ideologically and consciously empower the centripetal and centrifugal forces within the text in keeping up with its dialogic temper. Lyotard defined post modernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" which is manifested in hypertext through its unique digital pathways.

Dispersal and Decentering

Hypertexts are created with electronic blocks and links that essentially promote multi linear reading paths. The interwoven nature or a web of text is based on the hypertextual concept of network not just as the gathering of lexias but also as electronic system with computers and wires like LAN (Local Area Network) or WAN (Wide Area Network). Without a top or bottom, network then is an antithesis of hierarchy or linearity. On the contrary it suggests the plurality of connection and interdependence. George P. Landow in *Hypertext* states thus "The evidence of hypertext, in other words, historicizes many of our most commonplace assumptions, thereby forcing them to descend from the ethereality of abstraction and appear as corollaries (to a particular technology rooted in specific times and place" (45).

Hypertextuality with its linkages radically changes relationship between readers writers and the text, it forces them into a new writing space. Hypertext allows the commentary, annotation and other notes of any given text to exist as an independent texts or reading units. It allows readers to edit or make changes to the body of text and thus empowers the readers by being authors of the same text. This dichotomy of readers and authors at the same time not only change the dynamics of the text but also revolutionizes the traditional concepts of readers and authors. It questions the exclusivity and the uniqueness associated with the authors. Furthermore, hypertexts create fragmentation and dispersal of texts as the sanctity of print linearity is pushed into multi linearity model. Responding to Bakhtin's centralized and homogenizing force of unitary language, hypertexts with its numerous links and blocks deconstruct the notion of a fixed unitary text. The parts of the text in relation to the entire text with an unlimited reader control with variant forms of reading not only displaces the center but also resist any formulation of a centrist homogenized dis-

course. The links created by hypertexts exist as independent reading units or lexias assume a life of their own as they defy the linear progression of the textual material. It blurs the boundaries between the main text and the subtext or the annotations. The hierarchical tyranny of authorial text is atomized into multiple independent texts. The fluid character of the hypertext become more visible when compared with the print book. The printed book has a spatial fixity while its electronic and hypertextual version can be changed anytime with modifications in its content or graphics, as it is never final. The electronic text can assume different colour, shape and size along with various ways of making readers notes and comments in the main text. It cannot be imagined as a fixed text in the mind of a reader like a printed book. As George Landow notes:

it disperses "the" text into other texts. As an individual lexia loses its physical and intellectual separation from others when linked electronically to them, it finds itself dispersed into them. The necessary contextuality and intertextuality produced by situating individual reading units within a network of easily navigable pathways weaves texts, including those by different authors and those in nonverbal media, tightly together. One effect (of this process is to weaken and perhaps destroy any sense of textual uniqueness.

Thus Hypertext opens the text to infinite possibilities. In its unique openness it embodies the Derridean text in which blur "all those boundaries that form the running border of what used to be called a text, of what we once thought this word could identify, i.e., the supposed end and beginning of a work, the unity of (a corpus, the title, the margins, the signatures, the referential realm outside the frame, and so forth". The hypertextual linking where the reader can annotate and link the text into network of texts not only drastically transform the role of readers and authors but also push the individual text into limitless reading units. By bringing what is outside the text to inside reach, hypertext changes the spatial and temporal relationship of one text with the other. For example, the hypertextual version of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* will lead one to all its annotations and allusions along with the criticism, creating a unique reading path where all that exist outside *The Wasteland* as a mere reference becomes an independent unit in mapping the text. The primacy given to the marginal by the hypertext linkages betrays hypertextuality's inherent nature of the dissolution of centrality. In denying any discourse, the authority of centrality, hypertextuality in essence fundamentally al-

ters our relationship with the text and the reading process. The instability of the hypertext advocating non-linear readings in deconstructing the text into innumerable fragmented yet independent texts. The shifting and evanescent nature of centrality in the hypertextuality echoes the postmodern notion of mini narratives and multiple truths. In conclusion hypertextuality simulates what Barthes imagined for his readerly text”

By refusing to assign to the text (and to the world as text) a “secret:’ that is, an ultimate meaning, liberates an activity which we might call counter-theological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to arrest meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law.

The democratic and the transnational attribute of the hypertext promotes dialogue, participation, cooperation and collaboration. The reader controlled texts have great potential for academic empowerment and freedom as its planned and organised use can lead instructors to rethink the goals and methods of education. It allows for student faculty collaboration as students too can be part of the text by contributing some valuable link or connection. Hypertext enables decanonisation with its “connectivity, virtual presence, and shifting of the balance between writer and reader” which can inspire radical changes in teaching, learning, and the organization of both activities inevitably have the potential to affect the related notions of canon and curriculum. George P. Landow explains this as:

In particular, because hypertext corpora are inevitably open-ended, they are inevitably incomplete. They(resist closure, which is one way of stating that they never die; and they also resist appearing to be authoritative: they can provide information beyond a student’s or teacher’s wildest expectations, yes, but they can never make that body of information appear to be the last and final word (171 Landow)

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Language, Semiotics and Advertisements: Manufacturing Myths in Consumer Culture

Saba Anish & Dwijen Sharma

The concept of representation as connecting meaning and language to culture can be studied from three different perspectives. The first one is reflective, where the role of language is to reflect the already existing meaning of people, objects and events. The second is intentional where the writer or the speaker tries to project his or her personally intended meaning. The third, however, is the constructionist approach of representation whereby meaning is constructed with the aid of language. The constructionist approach rests on two important models – the semiotic approach influenced by the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, and the discursive approach, associated with the French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault.

In his book, *Representations* (2013), Stuart Hall observes: “Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer* to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events” (Hall 3). According to Stuart Hall, there are two processes or rather two systems of representation. The first system of representation has to do with a set of concepts or mental representations of objects, people or events. These mental concepts lend meaning to the world around us. This leads to the fact that meaning is dependent on the “system of concepts and mental images formed in our thoughts” (Hall 3). This process has been named by Hall a ‘system of representation’, for the word system “consists not of individual concepts, but of different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them” (Hall 3). Meaning is, to a large extent, dependant on “the relationship between things in the world— people, objects and events,

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real or fictional—and conceptual system, which can operate as the mental representations of them” (Hall 4). Now communication, in a sense, is possible as we largely share the same conceptual maps while interpreting the world almost alike. Dependent on the parameters of shared conceptual maps coupled with similar interpretations, we construct a social order of shared meanings. For the construction of meaning, a shared conceptual map must be backed by an access to a shared language. Language, in the process, becomes the subsequent system of representation on the whole process of meaning making. The shared conceptual maps need to be translated into common language, to establish a correlation between concepts and ideas with the aid of tools of language like written words, spoken sounds or visual images. In other words, these tools of language that produce meaning are called signs. Thus signs representing the concepts and the conceptual relations lend credibility to the meaning system of any culture. The processing of meaning in culture is thus dependent on two related systems of representation: the first makes the world meaningful by constructing a set of correspondences between people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc. thereby establishing conceptual maps; the second is based on establishing a correspondence between conceptual maps and a set of signs or the tools of language. The production of meaning in any language is dependent on the relation between things, concepts and signs. And “the process which links these three elements together is what we call ‘representation’” (Hall 5).

The production of meaning, however, is neither fixed in the object, person or thing, nor in the word itself. It is we who fix the meaning which in due course of time seem to be natural and inevitable. Meaning is thus not only created by the system of representation but also fixed by the code. Meaning thus develops a correlation between the conceptual system and the language system. It is code that fixes the relationships between concepts and signs. They are the stabilizers of meaning which makes communication possible within different languages and cultures. Although the relationship between the conceptual systems and linguistic systems are arbitrarily fixed by codes, yet intelligible hearing and speaking is facilitated by codes, thereby establishing translatability between conceptual maps and linguistic maps enabling meaning to pass from speaker to hearer. This translatability in effective communication is the outcome of social and cultural conventions. In this context Stuart Hall observes:

This is what children learn, and how they become not simply biological individuals but cultural subjects. They learn the systems and conventions of representation, the codes of their language and culture, which equip them with cultural 'know-how', enabling them to function as culturally competent subjects. Not because such knowledge is imprinted in the genes, but because they learn its conventions and so gradually become 'cultured persons' – i.e. members of their culture. They unconsciously internalize the codes which allow them to express certain concepts and ideas through their systems of representation— writing, speech, gesture, visualization, and so on— and to interpret ideas which are communicated to them using the same system. (Hall 8)

From this it follows that as meaning is the outcome of social, cultural and linguistic conventions, it can never be fixed. There are contextual applications of words where meaning gets rather slippery and cannot have an absolute or fixed connotation. Social and linguistic conventions too have their bearing on the non fixity of meaning. From this we can surmise that meaning is, in the words of Stuart Hall, the “result of signifying practice – a practice that *produces* meaning, that *makes things* mean” (Hall 10).

Going by the theories of representation, the reflective approach emphasises that meaning lies in the very object, person, idea or event in the real world and that language is only a mirror that reflects the true meaning as it exists in the world. The reflective theory, as such, rests on reflecting and imitative qualities of language for which it is also called mimetic. However, this theory works better when visual signs exhibit certain correlation to the shape and texture of the objects which they represent, but the claims of the theory fall short in representing concepts that are fictional, fantasy and belong to the world of the imaginary. The intentional approach, on the other hand, puts the whole onus on the speaker, author or the creator who with the aid of language tries to impose his or her version of meaning of the world. This approach too is flawed by the fact the moment a speaker or writer becomes the sole source of meaning in language, he or she will drift into a private language, flaunting the norms of shared linguistic conventions and shared codes. As language is a social system, it hardly allows room to negotiate with the private intended meanings. The personal intended meanings and thoughts need to conform to the rules, codes and conventions of shared language, which is, rather, a difficult process. The third approach, the constructivist or constructionist approach, is the more acceptable one and is based on the recognition of the public and social char-

acter of language. This approach nullifies the beliefs that meaning is dependent on things in themselves or can be fixed by individual users. It is based on the assumption that meaning is constructed using representational systems of concepts and signs. The approach focuses on the 'social actors' who either use their cultural conceptual systems or linguistic systems or other representational systems to construct meaning thereby making both the world and communication meaningful. In this context, Hall states:

Representational systems consist of the actual *sounds* we make with our vocal chords, the *images* we make on light-sensitive paper with cameras, the *marks* we make with paint on canvas, the digital *impulses* we transmit electronically. Representation is a practice, a kind of 'work', which uses material objects and effects. But the *meaning* depends not on the material quality of the sign, but on its *symbolic function*. It is because a particular sound or word *stands for, symbolizes or represents* a concept that it can function, in language, as a sign and convey meaning – or, as the constructionists say, signify (sign-i-fy). (Hall 11)

The social and the cultural aspects of representation are to a large extent dependent on the semiotic approach to representation developed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. To Saussure, sign can be analysed into two further elements: the form, in other words, the actual word, image, sounds, paintings, photographs etc., and the idea or the concept that is associated with the form. The first Saussure called signifier and the second signified and a correlation exists between the two. Both the signifier and the signified are indispensable to meaning, however, it's the correlation between them signalled by the cultural and linguistic codes that sustains representation. Thus, "the sign is the union of a form which signifies (*signifier*)...and an idea signified (*signified*). Though we may speak ...as if they are separate entities, they exist only as components of the sign...[which is] the central fact of language" (Culler 19).

However, Saussure also emphasised on the arbitrary nature of sign by asserting that the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Signs have no fixed meaning and their essence lies in their difference. Signs, Saussure argued, "are members of a system and are defined in relation to the other members of that system" (qtd. in Hall 16). This difference, which forms the very essence of signs, can be explained by means of binary opposition, for the meaning of a concept becomes clear only in relation to its opposite. Thus Saussure's proposition was based on the fact that for the production of meaning, "the signifiers have to be organised into a 'system of difference'" (qtd. in Hall 17). Thus,

Saussure considered the relation between the signifier and the signified, as decided by cultural and linguistic codes, variable. The meanings of the words shift, and every shift triggers a change in the conceptual map, resulting in different cultures at different historical moments to connote the same word with different meanings. This arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified coupled with the concept of shifting meanings in a way imply that meaning is dependent on specific social conventions at specific historical moments, in other words, meaning is not beyond the orbit of history and culture. This leads to the fact that meanings are always subject to change both in terms of cultural and periodical contexts, and the assumption of a "single, unchanging, universal 'true meaning'" is completely elusive (Hall 17). In this context, even Culler states: "Because it is arbitrary, the sign is totally subject to history and the combination at the particular moment of a given signifier and signified is a contingent result of the historical process" (Culler 36). This paves the way for an active process of interpretation as meaning culturally and historically passes through a process of slippage and a constant production of new meanings. There is every possibility that in the process of interpretation, meaning slips into a margin in which related or other meanings overshadow the text, giving a different twist to the intended meaning. Thus interpretation becomes inevitable in the give and take process of meaning. The reader becomes as important as the writer for if the signs encoded are not meaningfully decoded, interpretation loses the essence of being meaningful.

In Saussurean parlance, language consists of two parts: the first is *langue* (the general rules and principles underlying a language enabling production of meaningfully structured components of language), while the second component is *parole* (the individual speaker or writer's performance in terms of language using the structure and rules of the *langue*). For Saussure, *langue* or the underlying structure and codes of language is a social aspect and can be studied scientifically with a law-like precision because of its closed, limited nature. While Saussure regarded *langue* as deep structure, the individual utterance or *parole* was assigned the role of surface structure. It was because of Saussure's predominant engagements with the deep structure that his linguistic model is called structuralist. In separating *langue* from *parole*, Saussure provided a new insight into the common understanding of language: that the speaker or writer is not the originator of meaning. Every statement becomes possible and meaningful as the speaker or writer shares the codes of language with other language users.

Language, thus in Saussurean sense, becomes a social phenomenon, the source being society, culture and shared codes rather than an individual activity. Thus Saussure's postulations have paved new directions in the representational dynamics of language.

Saussure's linguistic theories have been widely applied by later theorists in studying representational models in cultural objects and praxis. Saussure himself had predicted it in one of his lectures, later published posthumously by his students as *Course in General Linguistics* (1960). In that lecture, he anticipated "A science that studies the life of signs within society...I shall call it semiology, from the Greek *semion* 'signs'" (qtd. in Hall 20). Indeed, semiotics has become a prominent branch of studying signs within culture. Thus semiotics reads all cultural objects and practices as a system of signs, and, therefore, works like language. Herein comes the applicability of Saussure's concepts of signifier/signified, langue/ parole and arbitrary nature of signs. Saussure's semiotic approach was further explored by the French critic Roland Barthes who worked on the semiotic model in reading popular culture, treating the various cultural activities as signs, as a language that communicates meaning. In his 1972 collection of essays titled *Mythologies*, Barthes applied the semiotic model in studying certain cultural phenomenon like 'The world of wrestling', 'Soap powders and detergents', 'The face of Greta Garbo' or 'The *Blue Guides* to Europe'. In much the same way, the Saussurean legacy was also applied by French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss in studying customs, rituals, totemic objects, myths, folk tales etc. of the primitives of Brazil, and tried to establish what message they conveyed about the culture. He analysed the meaning not in terms of the content but in terms of the underlying rules and codes that gave meaning to the objects or practices and in doing so he was "making a classic Saussurean or structuralist 'move', from the *paroles* of a culture to the underlying structure, its *langue*" (Hall 22).

In this fashion, through the application of semiotic models we move from narrow linguistic approach to a much wider cultural arena. And in the process, the representation concept is dependent on two operational modes: first, a basic code shared among the people in terms of language and culture (signifier) and, second, the mental concept of it (signified). The correlation between the two in Saussurean terminology is sign. Having recognised an object or image as a sign, we proceed to a second wider level that links these signs to broader cultural themes, concepts or meanings. Roland Barthes has termed the first stage as denotation, and the second connotation. While denotation is more simple and basic,

consensus is wide as more people share and agree on the same meaning, connotation is a more complex affair, connecting codes to wider semantic fields of culture and wider realms of social ideology. The second level of signification, in the words of Roland Barthes, is more “general, global and diffuse. ...It deals with ‘fragments of an ideology...’. These signifieds have a very close communication with culture, knowledge, history and it is through them, so to speak, that the environmental world [of the culture] invades the system [of representation]” (Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* 91-92). This second level of signification, a more complex and wider one, has been termed by Barthes the level of myth in his essay “Myth Today” in *Mythologies* (1972). Thus Saussure’s semiotic approach to representation, in the works of Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss found a much wider application, bringing within its compass advertising, photography, popular culture, travel, fashion etc. From such wider applications of semiotics follow the fact that meaning and representation are dependent on interpretative aspect of human and cultural sciences which can never produce a final moment of absolute truth. One interpretation is followed by another in an endless chain. As such, anything like final meaning is endlessly put off, deferred in Derridean terms.

Saussurean model of semiotics as a study in representation was rather static and closed confining the whole process to language only. Later developments in representation, however, were more concerned with representation as a source of social knowledge, an open system more to do with “social practices and questions of power” (Hall 27). As semiotics moved into the realm of wider connotations, subject was displaced from the centre of language and the circumference now included the questions of how at certain historical moments some people had power and privilege to speak about some subjects, for instance, in the nineteenth, as pointed out by Barthes, how male doctors spoke about mad female patients. So models of representations were now taking a bent towards issues of knowledge and power. With the inclusion of knowledge and power in representation, came in Michel Foucault who was concerned with the production of knowledge instead of meaning and introduced the concept of discourse in place of language. Foucault, in spite of his deviation from semiotics was still greatly indebted to Saussure and Barthes in his emphasis on cultural understanding and shared meanings. Foucault’s project was, however, more grounded in historical specifications as he declared that his main concern was “relations of power, not relations of meaning” (qtd. in Hall 28). Nevertheless, Foucault devi-

ated from the semiotic approach by developing a discursive approach which was based on three main ideas: "concept of discourse, issues of power and knowledge and the question of the subject."

The first shift that Foucault worked out in his model was to study not language but discourse as a system of representation. For him, discourse as an engagement with rules and practices that produced meaningful statements was subject to different historical periods. Thus, for Foucault, discourse would mean "...a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. ...Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect" (Hall "The West" 291). In this sense, discourse moves beyond the linguistic confines, entailing in its purview both language and practice. He has also boldly stated that material or physical objects have no meaning outside discourse. The knowledge of things, according to Foucault, is dependent on meaning, and it is discourse, not things in themselves which produces knowledge. For instance, subjects like madness, punishment or sexuality exist meaningfully only within the discourses regarding them. Foucault's sole aim was to historicise the "rather ahistorical tendency in semiotics" in relation to discourse, representation, knowledge and truth (Hall 31).

To Foucault, knowledge was a form of power which in turn was dependent on the circumstances in which knowledge was applied. Knowledge when backed by power has the potential not only to assume the truth, but the power to make itself true. The application of knowledge in real world tries to establish truth. As expressed by Foucault "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute, at the same time, power relations" (*Discipline and Punish* 27). An effort is always made to convert knowledge into truth "through certain technologies and strategies of application, in specific situations, historical contexts and institutional regimes" (Hall 33). Closely related to knowledge and truth, Foucault advanced a concept of power which does not percolate down from top to bottom in a straight line, rather it circulates. Instead of being monopolised by one centre, it is deployed through a net like organisation. Instead of an overall concentration of grand narrative of power, it circulates through "many, localised circuits, tactics and mechanisms" which Foucault calls the "Meticulous rituals" or the "micro-physics" of power (Fou-

cault, *Discipline and Punish* 27). Although Saussure negated the role of subject from the schema of representation, Foucault included it in his theorizing, though not according it a central position as the author of representation. In its conventional mode, the subject is endowed with consciousness and hence the authentic source of meaning, making the subject identical with meaning. This identification place the subject in a privileged position in relation to meaning. However, with the constructionist approach to language and representation, the subject was displaced from its privileged position. This is equally applicable to Foucault's discursive approach, for in it is the discourse that produces knowledge and not the subjects who speak. Subjects, operating within the limits of episteme are capable of producing texts and are bound by discursive formation and the truth regime of a particular period/culture. Thus in Foucault's radical proposition the subject is produced within discourse and is limited by the rules and conventions of power/ knowledge. The subject can, at the most, be the bearer or object of knowledge produced by discourse, but can never exist outside power/ knowledge. As stated by Foucault himself in "The subject and power":

My objective...has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. ... It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else's control and dependence, and tied to his [*sic*] own identity by a conscience and self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (Foucault 208-212)

Foucault's discourse produces subject in two different senses or places. In one sense, discourse produces subjects like madman, hysterical woman, the homosexual etc. who embody the forms of knowledge. In the second sense, discourse produces a place for the subject, who in turn is also subjected to discourse. All discourses thus construct subject-positions, and subjects become meaningful and have effects only within discourse in the theory of representation. To sum up, in the words of Hall:

Individuals may differ as to their social class, gender, 'racial' and ethnic characteristics (among other factors), but they will not be able to take meaning until they have identified with those positions which the discourse constructs, *subjected* themselves to its rules, and hence become the *subjects of its power/ knowledge*. (Hall 40)

Advertisements as a genre of popular culture are very strong medium of representation. Looked at from both semiotic approach

of Ferdinand de Saussure and the discursive approach of Michel Foucault, advertisements become a very interesting arena where the propositions of both the approaches of representation can be applied. Applying the theoretical paradigms it can be safely surmised that mass media and specially advertisements is paving the way for a new consumer culture wherein the consumption of signs is taking over the consumption of products. Advertisements have been a great boost to a new myth called consumption. In the words of Jean Baudrillard in his book *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1999):

The washing machine *serves* as an appliance and *acts* as an element of prestige, comfort, etc. It is strictly this latter field which is the field of consumption. All kinds of other objects may be substituted here for the washing machine as signifying element. In the logic of signs, as in that of symbols, objects are no longer linked in any sense to a *definite* function or need. Precisely because they are responding here to something quite different, which is, either the social logic or the logic of desire for which they function as a shifting and unconscious field of signification. (Baudrillard ix)

Thus, consumption as a new myth has almost become a sort of morality for the present socio-cultural context. In the structural paradigm, the present day consumers consume signs in the form of images and messages rather than commodities. This leads to the fact that consumers can read the system of consumption to understand the underlying rules of what to consume. As such the consumers are well acquainted with the code of consumption. Commodities are now identified by what they signify rather than by their use. And their signification is not qualified by what they do, rather by their relationship to the entire system of commodities and signs. As the system allows for an infinite range of difference, the consumers are incapable of satiating their need for commodities leading to continual dissatisfaction of consumers. For Baudrillard "What people seek in consumption is not so much a particular object as difference and the search for the latter is unending" (*Consumer Society* 7).

Advertisements, as a system of representation have been the facilitator of various myths in the contemporary consumer society. The present paper will engage with two such myths of the consumer culture, both of which are associated with the human body vis-a-vis representation. In the consumer package that advertisements offer, the object that is presented as the most precious, finest and dazzling is the human body. An endless trail of campaign and propaganda in mass media is let loose to convince

consumers of their bodies. The body in the process is turned into a cultural fact. Having turned into a cultural object, the mode of organisation of the body reflects the mode of organisation of social relations. Referring to this, Baudrillard states:

The current structures of production/ consumption induce in the subject a dual practice, linked to a split (but profoundly interdependent) representation of his/ her own body: the representation of the body as capital and as fetish (or consumer object). In both cases, it is important that, far from the body being denied or left out of account, there is deliberate *investment* in it (in the two senses, economic and psychical, of the term). (*Consumer Society* 129)

Advertisements, through its varied projections, invest in the body a sort of sacralisation, and the body no longer remains flesh in the religious sense, or labour power in the industrial parlance, but is eulogised as a narcissist cult object, an element of social ritual and tactics – and in this conversion of the body, the two imperatives that surface are beauty and eroticism.

In this new myth then, beauty, for women, is an absolute, religious imperative. Beauty is no longer a natural phenomena or a moral supplement, it is rather a “basic, imperative quality of those who take the same care of their faces and figures as they do of their souls” (Baudrillard *Consumer Society* 132). Beauty, in the advertising industry is constructed in a way where it becomes synonymous with success. In almost all the advertisements endorsing beauty products, beauty and success are accorded the same mystical foundation: “for women, it is *sensitivity*, exploring and evoking ‘from the inside’ all the parts of the body; for the entrepreneur, it is the adequate *intuition* of all the possibilities of the market” (Baudrillard *Consumer Society* 132). And beauty becomes an absolute imperative as it is looked up as capital. Beauty in this sense is reduced to a sign material and functions as sign value. Together with beauty, sexuality too becomes akin with the rediscovery and consumption of the body. In advertising parlance, beauty imperative that turns the body into narcissist reinvestment treats the erotic as sexual foil. Eroticism, in this context, is far removed from intimacy and sensuality and comes closer to calculated social significance. In this context, Baudrillard states:

The fashion model’s body is no longer an object of desire, but a functional object, a forum of signs in which fashion and the erotic are mingled. It is no longer a synthesis of gestures, even if fashion photography puts all its artistry into *re-creating* gesture and naturalness by a process of simulation. It is no longer, strictly speaking, a body, but a *shape*. (*Consumer Society* 133)

Advertisements project the erotic not as an object of desire but of signs. Similarly, the fashion models display not their expressions, rather their figures.

Another myth associated with the body, which, in fact, has turned out to be the topmost propaganda of the advertising industry, is to bridge an affinity between beauty and slimness. Though various periods and various cultures have cherished plump and chubby as beautiful, yet in the present consumer trend, the equation between the two is upheld as being synonymous with the right and duty of the consumer. Beauty cannot be fat or slim, heavy or slender as the appropriation is only for slim and slender body. It is the outcome of a “combinatorial logic of signs, governed by the same algebraic economy as the functionality of objects or the elegance of a diagram” (Baudrillard *Consumer Society* 141). Most advertisements today charm the consumer to wear an image in line with the models and the mannequins who are the negation of flesh and exaltation of fashion.

To conclude, advertisements is propagating in the consumer society a new mythology, which strives, in the words of Jean Baudrillard, to:

Pass of as *fantasy* what is merely *fantasmagoria*, to entrap individuals, by way of a rigged symbolics, with the *myth* of their individual unconscious, to make them invest it as a consumer function. People have to believe that they ‘have’ an unconscious, that that unconscious is there, projected into an objectivised in the ‘erotic’ symbolism of advertising, which serves as a proof that it exists, that they are right to believe in it and therefore to wish to come to terms with it, first at the level of the ‘reading’ of symbols, then by the acquisition of the goods designated by those symbols and supporting those ‘fantasies’. (*Consumer Society* 147)

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Conflicts of Caste Discrimination in Girish Karnad's *Tale-Danda*

Deepak Kumar Sonkar

Though Karnad's plays comment on contemporary political issues, he is not a 'political' playwright of the kind as Utpal Dutt, G. P. Deshpande, or even Vijay Tendulkar are. But he has been a better critic in recent years of the rise of religious fundamentalism in India. Karnad is the first Kannada writer who publicly condemned the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. He uses all public platforms to warn of the threats posed to secularism, multi-culturalism and the freedom of expression. When religious fundamentalists tried to whip up communal tensions over the controversy about the Idgah Maidan in Hubli, Karnad strongly opposed them. Karnad held a press conference in New Delhi to focus attention on harassment of the Muslims. He said:

The flag-hoisting issue is only one example of the harassment and baiting to which the Muslim community in Karnataka has been continually subjected during the last two decades. (1)

History is the repository of knowledge. This pity is that mankind fails to realize this in ignorance. Projecting the truth and universality that history conveys in its text, Karnad hyphenates the past and the present in his study of the *sharana* movement in the Indian history, 800 years ago. Bringing the historical evidence into the contemporary reality, he has analysed the contemporary events in heteroglossia which makes M. K. Naik and S. A. Narayan to say, "...the putative parallel between Basavanna's radicalism and V. P. Singh's "Mandalism" is not projected effectively enough." (2) But Karnad writes in the "Preface" to the play:

I wrote *Tale-Danda* in 1989 when the 'Mandir' and the 'Mandal' movements were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers (the *Virasaivas*) were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism that has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered. Either we change our ideologies or the demon will consume us. (3)

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Karnad shows that King Bijjala was not a 'Kshatriya' by birth. He was a shudra, barber by caste, and devotee of Lord Shiva. He also expresses that the Kingly qualities of a noble character and an ideal administrator are not the qualities of the Kshatriyas alone. By virtue of his efficiency, he had become the founder of Kalachurya dynasty and married a Kshatriya princess Rambhavati of Hoysalas dynasty. But he knows that the people of higher caste do not respect him properly. He confesses: "And yet you ask the most innocent child in my Empire: what is Bijjala, son of Kalachurya Permadi, by caste? And the instant reply will be: a barber! One's caste is like the skin on one's body. You can peel it off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again: a barber, a shepherd, a scavenger!" (4)

The centre of the issue is an inter-caste marriage. For *Sharanas*, the physical parentage is of no value but for orthodox Hindus it is of utmost importance. Though Basavanna himself does not approve of this marriage because first he wants to build a ground by changing the mentality of the people and thereafter putting such matter into practice. But he is sure that there will come a day when all will be real human being. When he is questioned by his own men for not approving of the marriage, he says:

Some day this entire edifice of caste and creed, this poison-house of varnashrama, will come tumbling down. Every person will see himself only as human being. As a *bhakta*. As a *sharana*. That is inevitable. But we have a long way to go. You know the most terrible crimes have been justified in the name of *sanatana* religion. (5)

Karnad believes that the process of social change has to go a long way which cannot be made possible in an overnight revolution. Haralayya, a low caste, and Madhuvarasa, a Brahmin, are the two who really want to bring newness in the age old caste institution. They are ready to sacrifice their children to give a start to this movement. But such revolutionary views cost their lives. Through Sheelavanta, Karnad shows that caste consciousness is not only the grown ups but the children are also not free from its grip. Sheelavanta is afraid of the children who will tease Kalavati calling her the wife of a cobbler. He finds nothing wrong in his traditional profession of stitching shoes and in a way; he establishes the dignity of work. The marriage is fixed in spite of many barriers. Bijjala wants to stop the marriage as he foresees the resultant chaos. He tries to convince Basavanna to stop this marriage.

Basavanna feels 'startled-even troubled', though Kakkayya tries to justify this marriage in Act II, Scene V by saying: "We are all *sharanas*. We have surrendered ourselves to Lord Shiva. There is

no caste among *sharanas*, neither Brahmin nor cobbler. This alliance is a cause for celebration.” (6) Basavanna is an idealistic but a pragmatic man. He is actually aware of the difference between theory and practice. His anxieties are genuine and real. His arguments are fully convincing:

Until now it was only a matter of theoretical speculation. But this—this is real. The orthodox will see this mingling of castes as a blow at the very roots of the *varnashramadharm*. Bigotry has not faced such as a challenge in two thousand years. I need hardly describe what venom will gush out, what hatred will erupt once the news spreads. (7)

The *sharanas* are the devotees of Lord Shiva prayed in their common *Vachana* language undermining the traditional Sanskrit language. The Brahmins felt it an attempt to insult God and to their caste hierarchy. The *sharanas* were of the belief that caste generates the class system in their society. *Sharana* ideology and *Vachana* language were the means to establish a casteless, classless and egalitarian society. The orthodox Hindus, chiefly the Brahmins, vehemently opposed this move. In his romantic idealisation, Karnad has analysed the *sharanas* as ‘other’ and ‘marginals’ in historical proper, their reduced status in socio-ethnic hybridity, inventiveness in economic and religious overviews. Karnad seems disturbed to see when the believers of monism monopolise public faith in private politics. Damodara Bhatta, queen Rambhavati’s priest, defends the high caste cause in language, and says:

Sanskrit is a language engraved on diamond, unchanging, austere. Eternal truths can be captured in its immutability. Kannada, our mother tongue, on the other hand, is pure flux. It changes from mouth to mouth, from caste to caste, from today to tomorrow. It is geared to the needs of squabbling couples, wheedling beggars, prostitutes spreading their saris out. It can only speak in inconstant moods. Its sensuality is addictive and the *sharanas* use it to pimp for their vulgarities. (8)

Madhuvarasa is willing to sacrifice his daughter’s life for the cause of the great movement. Basavanna warns the *sharanas* that the wrath of the bigoted will pursue the couple “like a swarm of snakes, to strike as they pause to put up a roof or light an oven.” (9) Hralayya expresses his horror to Madhuvarasa at the word “sacrifice”. He observes:

Too long have my people sacrificed our women to the greed of the upper castes, our sons to their cosmic theories of rebirth. No more sacrifices, please. (10)

Groups of *sharanas*, men and women, all thrilled by the news of the marriage, start pouring into the hall of Basavanna's house. But Basavanna is hesitant to bless two families, because he is "not ready for the kind of revolution this wedding is." (11) Moreover, the wedding may prove to be disasterous for the couple since it involves the "question of *that* boy's life, *that* girl's safety." (12) The news of the engagement of the *sharana* Brahmin girl and the *sharana* untouchable boy reaches Bijjala, the king. Bijjala feels very much concerned about the welfare of his kingdom. In order to forbid the wedding, Bijjala at once goes to the house of Basavanna. He says to Basavanna:

You know perfectly well the higher castes will not take this lying down. The wedding *pandal* will turn into a slaughterhouse. The streets of Kalyan will reek of human entrails. (13)

Bijjala orders that the "cursed wedding shall not take place," Basavanna replies that he will "go to the palace, right now, sit in the grounds there and keep on sitting till such time as the prohibition is withdrawn." (14) Bijjala is completely nonplussed because he thinks that the *sharanas* and the Brahmins are "bent on self-destruction." Bijjala, therefore, reveals his intention to Basavanna:

I wish you luck. I shall take my army away and entertain myself with a little warfare. When you are done, I shall return home to count your corpses. (15)

Through Damodara, Karnad represents hierarchy which accommodates differences while Basavanna stands for uniformity. Both are poles apart. The *Sharanas* and the orthodox Hindu become thirsty of each other's blood. The riots, stampedes, murders, rapes and destruction become a common sight. The situation is very tense. Yuvaraj Sovideva, priest Damodara Bhatta and King's adviser, Manchanna Kramita, conspire against the King, imprison him in the palace and make Yuvaraj, the King of Kalyan. The new King orders the soldiers to arrest Haralayya and Madhuvarasa, the fathers of newly married couple. After their arrest, soldiers, as Gundanna reports in Act III, Scene XII, "plucked out their eyes with iron rods-bound them hand and foot and had them dragged through the streets-tried to elephants' legs-*Ayyo!* How can I tell you? – Torn limbs along the lanes, torn entrails, flesh, bones – They died screaming!" (16) Their gruesome murder was so shocking and provoking to Jgadeva, the leader of younger *sharanas*, that he immediately rushed to the palace along with the other *sharanas* and finding former King Bijjala alone in the palace, stabbed him

to death, stared at his body and, in a mood of delirium, plunged the dagger into himself.

Noise of fighting and screams of women and children are heard everywhere. The edifice of goodwill and social harmony that had been built up by the ceaseless efforts of Basavanna and King Bijjala, is now broken into pieces. Basavanna's continuous efforts for the elimination of age-old caste based inhuman distinctions which had started their shapes, are now crumbled into pieces. Sovideva by adopting authoritarian and unscrupulous devices, has occupied the central position and had started giving orders like ruthless dictators as is evident from his last proclamation:

From this moment all *sharanas*, foreigners, and free thinker sare expelled from this land on pain of death. Women and the lower orders shall live within the norms prescribed by our ancient tradition, or else they'll suffer like dogs. Each citizen shall consider himself a soldier ready to lay down his life for the King. For the King is God incarnate! (17)

What message does this historic incident of 12th century A.D. gives us? A minor or major incident sparked off a violent upheaval and exploded the whole town into a blood bath. It resulted in the loss of innocent human lives as well as human values. Karnad touches various dimensions of the conflict created by caste consciousness. He raises a pertinent question through a female *Sharana* that a low caste boy is very happy when he is offered a girl of upper caste, but will he be as happy if he is to accept a girl lower in rank than his? Karnad highlights that not only upper caste but lower castes are also conscious when they deal with the people lower in rank than them.

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Transgressing Homogenization: A Study of Song and Performative Traditions of Bengal

Mekhala Chattopadhyay

Christopher Nolan's character the Joker, in his movie on the Batman series, said, "Give a man a mask and you would see him tell the truth." Nolan's Joker is all of us sans the fact that we don't know what the truth is. In order that the truth is known and exercised, there has to be a shattering of the glass ceilings of already established forms of truth, plaguing the present. This is not to say that the varied forms of truth have no truth value as such. The point of departure or disjuncture in all these truths is the context from which they emerge. If an analysis of the emerging trends is to be done, should it be done on the framework that has already been established? Here, the established framework is that of homogenization. Maori theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith comments on the idea of globalization and cultural homogenization as an extended metaphor for the already established metaphors of colonialism. Smith sees in this kind of discussion on "reframed discourse on globalization" a certain kind of "cultural imperialism" because it tries to homogenize and produce a discourse on behalf of the 'Other'. Here, the 'Other' has no voice but only the function of acting as the agent of the western discourses. This hegemonic structure continues to spread its network like a cobweb, and the cycle continues. The entire discussion culminates to the final question, "Who tells the story, and by what means?" This is the postcolonial predicament upon which all these structures of the Global South and Globalization are built. It would be interesting to see why and how non-European cultures which are culturally distinct from Western cultures defy the overarching theories of homogenization and universalization as a mode of discourse.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first part would be a detailed analysis of the idea of the Global South and the contingent ideas of homogenization. In this context, viewpoints of Bernard Stiegler and Jan Assmann would be dealt with. The primary

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focus would be on the aspect of memory retention and articulation as modes of living and discourse. The second part would test this idea of homogenization in cultures which do not emerge from the same metaphysical mould of thought. The third part would extend this discussion into the Song traditions of Bengal, namely Baul and Bhawaiya.

1. Memory and Theories of Homogenization of Culture(s)

When Jan Assmann, the Egyptologist analyses the cultures on the basis of cultural memory in ancient societies, a remarkable point emerges. Jan Assman's analysis of cultural memory is a specific point in case. Firstly it emerges from a particular context (which is fine), but, secondly it doesn't take into account any other context into consideration. Assman's analysis begins from the point of view of a written tradition- the Haggadah.¹ He tends to analyze the entire corpus of memory of a culture which gets transformed into religion with the help of this framework of memory stored in an external body, i.e, the script. He says, "It is through the written element of traditions that the dominance of repetition gradually gives way to that of re-presentation – ritual gives way to textual coherence. A new connective structure emerges out of this, which consists not of imitation and preservation but of interpretation and memory." (Assmann 4) This written element in traditions is something which is unique to the Christian traditions owing to their history of the written Tablets of Law taken from Moses to the people. For Assmann, it thus becomes an already established fact that all traditions owe their presence to a certain written scriptural background. He gives more emphasis to the idea of the written word than the performance of the ritual. Memory is not a concrete object per se. Memory, in the simplest sense of the term, is an intangible entity. The attempt to gauge the roots of the origin of memory is not feasible and evades human endeavour. The origins, however, leave behind traces which appear in human life and behaviour. The presence of the trace can be felt only through its articulation, if there is any. This articulation generally functions in two distinct ways: the externally objectified memory in the form of an archive or a text and the embodied memory which is transmitted by means of individual and cultural performances. All Western theories related to memory and memory transmission subtly evade the idea of embodied memory and give more emphasis on the recorded ones. This applies to Walter J.Ong and Jack Goody as well. They clearly evade

any question of memory retention in the body labelling such modes of articulation as 'primitive' and related to 'pagans'. Ong goes as far as saying that "there is hardly any completely oral culture remaining in the world." This viewpoint limits the purview to only one mode of transmitting memory which becomes the universal discourse.

Bernard Stiegler, in his analysis of culture in relation to technics/technology shows a slight disjuncture in the transmission of memory as such. He grapples with the processes involved in the transmission of memory through time. With the question of materiality at the background of his discussion, he concentrates on the Internet age/ Digital age as the point of transformation in the history of transmission of memory. Stiegler's conception emerges from the rejection of the industrial model of hypomnesic memory as proposed by Plato, and later formulated by Marx. He aims to create a counter-narrative to the Platonic picture of memory. He argues that materiality is an essential element in the entire history of evolution of human beings. Man, in his original way, is a technical being or 'prosthetic' being depending upon certain medium for the articulation of ways of thinking. The evolution of man can be viewed in the context of the technical evolution. Each epoch validates a variety of technical systems with the help of which man evolves. While Plato had discarded the possibility of a continuation of the past through exteriorized memory (as a text or an archive), Stiegler opens the possibility's essential character with respect to the present generation. With his concept of epiphylogenetic or third layer of memory, he aims to achieve this purpose. Epiphylogenetic memory is exclusive to humans. The epiphylogenetic memory is the memory retained in a body external to the individual body, which is the non-living body. For him, the evolution of man does not occur only biologically or genetically. There is always the presence of something other than the biological. This 'other' is the externally retained memory, which creates the possibility of a continuation of the past, even after the living being ceases to exist. Parts of our memories exist outside our own bodies. This is the way technics is seen to be intimately interacting with the human evolution, and its way of preserving heritage. He says, "...in a life proceeding by means other than life, the being's experience, registered in the tool (in the object), becomes transmissible and cumulative" (Stiegler 4). He identifies the different technical epochs in the history of its evolution: the stone tool, the ideogrammatic writing, the alphabet, the digital

recording, and the Internet. Each epoch gets supplemented by the next one, enabling it to fill the gap existing in the previous, but doesn't exhaust itself. All of them have one common function of preserving memory. In this context, it must be kept in mind that this evolution is not something which occurs continuously. Stiegler's major thesis revolves around the idea of intimate interaction between hypomnesia and anamnesis. Though he agrees to the fact that both can be separate modes of being, he views the present age as an amalgamation of both of them. In this context, he aims to discard the industrial model of memory retention. Just like writing, which becomes a means of systematically ordering knowledge production, these technologies follow a similar path. They perform the task of ordering the memories into meaningful units. In this context, Stiegler proceeds with the primary assumption that human memory storage started off with the lithic substrate, i.e, the stone tool.

Memory becomes an objectified realm of analysis. This hypothesis does not include embodied memories of individuals and cultures. This also does not take into consideration any kind of memory which is not inscribed/ written down upon a material substance. Whether the memories in cultures other than the Western ones which Stiegler keeps in mind evolve in a similar and continuous format remains an unanswered question. This universalization and violent creation of a homogeneity leads to an impasse. Culture(s) like Indian, or Australian Aboriginal, or others which essentially do not emerge from any such written tradition may not function in the same homogenous mould. This aspect would be pondered over in the following section.

2. Does the Homogenous exist in Non-European Cultures?

"Sensory cosmologies make us aware of the many different ways in which cultures shape perception, and the inability of standard Western models to comprehend such sensory and symbolic diversity." (Classen 162) The action and transmission of memory through symbolic means have remained the primary mode of transmission in many cultures. In order to understand this complex structure, we need to analyse certain examples which tell an alternative story. We will take the example of the Australian Aboriginal song cultures. "Songlines are epic creation songs passed to present generations by a line of singers continuous since the dreamtime. These songs, or song cycles, have various names ac-

cording to which language group they belong to, and tell the story of the creation of the land, provide maps for the country, and hand down law as decreed by the creation heroes of the dreamtime.” (Wositsky & Harney, 34). The song traditions of these Aboriginals do not depend on any external record of the stories. They get narrated by word of the mouth and through rituals and performances related to the festivals associated with the past. Culture and memory form an intersection of significance in their society as all their rituals are based on the practice of recounting the stories that have taken place in the Dreamtime or during creation. These acts of narration through songs form a major part of their cultural milieu. In this context, it also has to be remembered that the tribes do not have a homogenous way of narrating the stories of the Dreamtime. Each tribe has their own story. These stories proliferate centripetally as well as centripetally. Thus, there is no fixed form of one story, but many versions and ways of retelling the same. A similar case can be observed in the context of Indian cultural/reflective traditions and modes of living. Song and performative traditions which have emerged in each and every part of the country function by means of heterogeneity. The idea of homogeneity is an alien mode of being. There are numerous varieties of retelling of the epic of Ramayana, and each tribe or each community has its own specific one. The one thing which helps us to demarcate between the homogenous and these heterogeneous cultures is that their transmission of memory does not depend on any external recording/ documentation. Each performance is a new one, carrying traces of the previous one, but not being stereotyped in the same mode. The flexibility is retained, trans-generationally.

3. An Alternative Story: Song And Performative Traditions of Bengal

Posing a similar question of contextual specificity, a Baul song is as follows:

*Aami key Tai janlem Na, Aami Aami kori kintu Aami Amar thik hoilo na.
Korhay korhay korhi goni Chaar korhay ek gonda goni, Kotha hoite elam
aami tare koi goni!*

I do not know who I am/ I say ‘I Am. I Am.’ but I am not mine yet/ I have counted the cowries/ four of which makes one gonda(of land) Did I ever know the place from where I have come? The Baul does not claim to know what he is or from where he has

come, and expresses this sense of not knowing through his song. This not-knowing is a valid case in point. A piece of land or a certain amount of money is quantifiable in units. This similar characteristic of quantifying cannot be surely guaranteed of the culture/tradition that we carry on our backs and inside our bodies. His song on this state of not-knowing doesn't stop, as long as he keeps walking through the roads of Bolpur in Shantiniketan, or parts of Birbhum in search of his destination. On being asked about the state of the world in the present times, it is more likely that he would reply with the help of this song expressing his concern. It is more likely that he would sit beneath a tree and keep on singing one song after another explaining the situation of the world as an answer to the question. It is more likely that he would answer by means of phrases derived from the entire repertoire of songs that his memory allows him to recollect. It is less likely for him to answer in the format of an answer in the conventional sense of the term. His thinking is expressed by his songs. His familiarity with the world is by means of the songs that are an integral part of his self. He would express his sense of love, longing, sorrow or any other emotion through the songs. Just as we cannot separate a single thread from an entire piece of clothing, we cannot separate his songs from him in search of answers. His answers would be in his songs. Even if we manage to separate them, the Baul would no longer be a Baul, but be a mere human being, just like us. Though the Baul does not know the place from where he has come, he knows that he has to keep singing to reach wherever he wants to reach. Similarly, each Baul would have a completely different way of narrating the same story of crisis. The most important part of this discussion is that there is no discourse that informs the Baul culture. Everything that the culture offers is in the form of a particular performance or a song. The idea of discourse 'about' something is an alien interference. The traditional Baul singer won't be able to tell us why he sings, but he will be able to sing. The culture(s) that we are taking into consideration, do not, thus, engage in the complex processes of explaining or interpreting. They exist by modes of doing. The culture is in the doing of it, rather than explaining what it is. The memory is transmitted by this doing and not by an external written documentation. If we reach the village of Dinhat in Coochbehar, it is likely that we might hear someone's voice from quite a distance. On coming closer, we will see the drooping figure of an old lady sitting at the entrance of her house, curiously looking towards the people

who have come to her and singing her song. She was Phulti Barman (she recently died), one of the eldest singers of the Shaitol-Bishohori³ ritual songs. In between her songs, she would narrate the stories related to the songs using gestures and dramatic expressions so that the story comes alive through her narration. Occasionally you might see her irritated with the questions hurled at her by the people regarding the ritual, but you would see her singing at the next moment, with absolute ease. The ecstasy of the lady continues even at her vulnerable age of a hundred years. On being asked about her age, she replied, “Boyosh ki Jani Na...Jotodin praan, totodin gaan.” (I don’t know what my age is...As long as I’m alive and breathing, there will be these songs). She is likely to sing even at the time of her death, given the kind of passion and dedication that she has for her songs. Some of her songs are compositions of her ancestors, and some others are her own compositions. The drooping figure should not fool us into believing that she has lost all abilities. Behind that wrinkled face would be a memory bank of numerous years piled on top of another, occasionally getting transformed into her songs. Beneath her skin would be a running stream of these songs which she has listened to all her life. Her wrinkles might deceive us, but her songs would rarely do that. Just like her, the songs have evaded the ravages of time in search of a listener walking past her home, when evening arrives at the horizon, spreading an orange hue in the entire sky of Dinhat. From these cultural aberrations in the overarching framework of memory transmission with the help of writing, it is evident that the conceptual grid of homogenization is a colonial exercise. This exercise creates hegemony in the creation of the discourse, whose limits are already drawn by the Western mode of thinking. Thus, the homogenous stands as a misnomer. The emerging trend cannot be in the shape of the already established trend. If it does not take into account the ‘Other’ picture, it fails as a discourse in itself. Robert Rineheart and Elke Emerald point at this fact when they said, “We must remember, however, that approaching the other—or knowledge and understanding of the other—is not the same as being the other. The other is other—or even alien—to each of us for a reason: they are not the self. Their experience(s) (and this includes in many cases their intimate lived experiences) are singular, located specifically in time and space, and shaped by myriad influences.” (Emerald 14-15). The context becomes more important than the mode of explaining/interpreting it.

Conclusion

“Biology provides the clay, but culture is the potter” (Howes, 5). The raw material for this perception is provided by biology/physiological features whereas what finally gives shape to it is the culture which is carried forward in the modes of articulation. Since the postcolonial in us has a tendency towards assimilating all that is provided to us on a platter as a theory or a generalization, it is but time to (re)think and (re)orient our cognitive faculties. The assimilation has already led to a crisis of individuality and cultural passivity in the field of discourse and interpretation. This impasse can only be dealt by unlearning some truths and (re)learning some others from within our cultural contexts. As long as the culture remains, it can have its own way of talking about itself, rather than being talked about by ‘Others’ on its behalf.

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Notes

- ¹ The Haggadah is a Jewish text (scripture) that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder. It is a telling of the history of Exodus. However, it is read out from the text.
- ² Gonda is a land measuring unit used in all parts of Bengal. 1 Gonda=864 sq feet.
- ³ Shaitol Bishohori is a fertility ritual practised in Coochbehar region of Bengal.

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Saussure's Concept of Sign and Signification

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Language has been regarded as the process of articulation of meaning known as signification. The transference of meaning from the speaker to the listener or from the writer to the reader constitutes the process of communication. Ferdinand de Saussure's book *Course in General Linguistics* (1966) initiates the discussion on the concept of sign and its nature. The present paper attempts to study Saussure's views on signifier and signified language and parole, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship and synchronic and diachronic studies in order to arrive at Saussure's concept of signification in holistic terms.

In his book *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure rejected the traditional theory of meaning that regards signification as a direct relationship between a thing and its name. The conventional view of meaning regards meaning as a naming process whereby a thing is named by the use of a sign. Saussure raised objections to the traditionalist view of signification when he writes, "It assumes that ready-made ideas exist before words; it does not tell us whether a name is vocal or psychological in nature (*arbor*, for instance, can be considered from either view-point); finally, it lets us assume that the linking of a name and a thing is a very simple operation" (CGL, 65). Saussure propounded that the nature of a sign is psychological. A sign does not directly correspond to a thing. A sign according to Saussure consists of a signifier and a signified. A signifier exists in a material form. It is a word that consists of the combination of sounds or the arrangement of alphabets in a proper order. Signified refers to the concept or idea with which a particular signifier is associated. For example, the word 'dog' is made up of either three sounds /d/ /R/ /g/ in its spoken manifestation or three letters of the alphabet 'd', 'o', 'g' in its written manifestation. Signified, on the other hand, refers to the concept or image or meaning that is associated with the signifier 'dog'. Thus the signified is not the name of an object, thing or an action but it

is a mental or psychological concept. When a person hears the word 'dog', the signifier 'dog' evokes the image of a particular four legged animal in his mind. Saussure further extends the discussion on the nature of signs by characterizing a sign as arbitrary. According to Saussure, the signs used in human languages are arbitrary and conventional as there is no inherent or logical relationship that exists between a signifier and its relationship to the signified. Meanings are associated to words through usage and conventions. No natural or inherent bonding exists between words and their meanings. Leaving few onomatopoeic words like 'hiss', 'coo', 'mew' etc., the other words do not have any inherent or natural quality that suggests their sense. Due to arbitrary nature of words, the same concept is expressed by different signifiers in different languages. The four legged animal 'dog' is called by the use of different words or signs in different languages. In Hindi, it is called 'Kutta', in Russian it is called 'sobaka', in French it is called 'chien', in Malvi it is called 'Tegda' etc. Similarly the dynamic nature of signifiers also proves the arbitrary nature of signs. The signified which is associated with a particular signifier may be associated with a totally different signifier after a course of time. The arbitrary nature of signifier leads us to an important question concerning the signification of words. If meanings are arbitrary, how we can identify the words with which meanings are associated. Saussure meditates on this issue and comes across his concept of 'difference' or differential relationship in order to answer this puzzle. In the views of Saussure, a sign does not have any meaning or signification in isolation. A sign acquires meaning through its difference from other signs (in a syntagmatic relationship). For example the word 'cat' means a particular creature not by virtue of some conceptual quality inherent in the word but by its difference from the other words like rat, dog, bat etc. which refer to other concepts. The ideas or concepts are identified and valued through their difference from other ideas or concepts. Similarly words or signs consist of sounds in their spoken manifestation. The sounds like concepts acquire significance when they occur in differential or contrastive relationship. For example when the two sounds or phonemes /k/ and /r/ occur in contrastive distribution in minimal pair of words like 'cat' and 'rat' (/kæt/ and /ræt/), they are identified and valued as a minimal significant sound unit of English. In this way sounds acquire signification through their contrast and opposition from other sounds and their occurrence in a relationship. Thus sounds are not material but psychological or mental. This substantiates Saussure's view that a signifier

or word is not material but psychological identified through differences and their occurrence in a relationship. According to Saussure, "The linguistic signifier, which is not phonic but incorporeal – constituted not by its material substance but by the differences that separate its sound-image from all others" (CGL, 118-119).

Saussure calls the individual acts of utterance parole. He believes that an individual cannot modify 'langue'. According to him, langue as opposed to parole is beyond the individual who can neither create nor change it by himself. Langue is acquired unconsciously by the members of a community. Its acquisition is necessary for the members of a language community in order to participate in the communication process through acts of speech (parole). Langue (language) comprises of linguistic signs which are never randomly collected and used but are agreed upon by the members of a language community to be used collectively. Saussure provides a psychological dimension to the study of language through his concept of langue whether it is a signifier or signified, they represent the uniform learning ability of the language learners. Saussure is not concerned with what people speak or the actual acts of language but how these acts of language becomes a reality. He is more concerned in probing the set of structures and patterns that give rise to the individual acts of language and enables the human beings to communicate their meaning. In order to understand meaning of the acts of language (parole), it is necessary to study them in their relationship with the underlying structures or the language system which produced them. The relationship between the language system/structure and language conventions and the individual uses (parole) was the focal point of the Saussurean investigation into the nature of linguistic signs.

Saussure, thus, regards that the structures or the underlying rules and conventions of language are the deciding factor in the meaning of a text. It is the 'langue' or the language system which is the controlling center which controls the play of signifier in determining the meaning of a text. Saussure relates an individual text to the grammar or the literary rules. The meaning of a text is determined by its grammar or the underlying internal principles. All roads lead to Rome. Hence, in Structuralism, signification is always viewed with respect to the relationship of the individual texts or acts of language to the grammar or principles of literature (langue).

Saussure's concept of structure does not refer to the structure of individual texts or individual utterances. Saussure, in his study of language, ponders over the infinite number of actual utterances

produced by the people as well as the potential acts of utterance which are likely to be produced in future. If the utterance or acts of language are infinite and the new acts of language keep on occurring, how can a linguist be able to provide explanation to each and every act of the utterance? Saussure felt that studying each and every act of speech in order to explain them is not possible and also not necessary. His differentiation of the concept of 'langue' and 'parole' provides answer to this problem. Saussure's distinction between 'Langue' and 'Parole', his concept of 'differential relationship' or 'binary opposition' and his concept of 'synchronic and diachronic studies' and finally his concept of 'paradigmatic' and 'syntagmatic' relationship is necessary to study the signification process in a holistic manner. By 'Langue' Saussure means the language system that comprise of the underlying rules existing in the abstract form. According to Saussure, it is the underlying system or (*la langue*) that gives rise to the production of the individual utterances (*parole*) by the speakers. Saussure preferred to derive the underlying rules of language and codes which would aid a linguist in studying a large number of individual acts of speech (*parole*). Saussure views an individual utterance (*parole*) in its relationship with the underlying systems and structures or the conventions that govern and keep a language stable (*langue*). The meaning of an individual utterance, according to Saussure, can be comprehended in its relationship with *langue*. Saussure in his book *Course in General Linguistics* discusses in detail his preference for the study of *langue* and not *parole*.

Ferdinand de Saussure views signification as a process that involves both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship. A paradigm consists of a set of choices at the level of phonology, morphology, lexis and syntax. Paradigmatic relationship involves both the process of selection and rejection. The selection and rejection of different choices is based on co-occurrence possibility. For example the co-occurrence of articles with the lexical items which follow them depends on the following lexical items. If a lexical item that follows an article begins with a vowel sound, the indefinite article 'an' will occur with it. On the other hand, indefinite article 'a' shall occur with a following lexical item beginning with a consonant sound. The selection or use of a language item is always governed by rules. Hence a paradigmatic relationship depends on the mutually exclusive relations between different linguistic items. Secondly paradigmatic choices occur at the vertical axis where a number of choices are available to fill up the blanks in a syntagmatic relationship. But the selection of one paradigm-

matic choice is based on the rejection of the other. However, according to Saussure, signification in human language does not depend on scattered or haphazard or chaotic individual elements competing with each other in order to be selected to be placed in a sequence. He believes that it is the sequential arrangement of choices that contributes to the signification of a text. The syntagmatic relationship involves the combination and arrangement of sounds, morphemes and words in a sentence. When words are combined with other words on a horizontal axis to contribute to a structural or symmetrical whole then signification takes places. For example signification of the sentence 'The speed is attracting the youth' depends on two axes. The sentence involves placement of different words at different positions in a sequential or syntagmatic relationship. It involves a structure or a sentence pattern (S+ Auxiliary Verb +Main Verb +object). If the sequential arrangement is disturbed, the meaning is lost. But the construction of this sentence also involves selection of a number of choices from different grammatical inventories like determiners, Nouns, Auxiliary Verbs, Main verbs. The proper selection of choice at the expense of the rejection of other and their proper sequential arrangement (syntagmatic axis) contributes to the signification. According to Saussure, a word does not have its meaning in isolation. Its meaning is determined through its position in a sequential chain or syntagmatic relationship. Thus, meaning is something relational or is viewed in a relationship with other words or signs.

Saussure regards that the two types of relationship, one paradigmatic and the other syntagmatic reflects the different types of our mental activities. Paradigmatic activity is characterized by indefiniteness and indeterminateness where a human being is in possession of an indefinite number of language items and the language items remains in the mind of the human beings in a disorderly and indeterminate manner unless they are arranged in a sequential order to convey meaning. The second activity performed by human brain in using a language is the 'syntagmatic activity'. This activity reflects the human tendency of organizing things. In languages human mind organize the individual and isolate choices into an organized or symmetrical whole to convey meaning. Saussure regards both the 'paradigmatic' and 'syntagmatic' activities "indispensable to the life of language".

Before the publication of Saussure's work *Course in General Linguistics*, linguistic studies in the 19th century were historical one. Comparison of different languages over a period of time in the

past was undertaken to trace similarities and dissimilarities among them. The aim was to discover language groups or language families which possess the uniform features. These studies were known as philological studies. Saussure distinguishes between synchronic and diachronic approach to the study of language. According to him, diachronic method traces the origin and the growth of languages and the relationship between them through comparing and contrasting them across time. The diachronic approach is largely comparative and historical in nature. Synchronic approach according to Saussure, views the study of language structure and function as they are in use in the present. Saussure discarded the diachronic approach and preferred the synchronic approach. According to Saussure, the signification of a text cannot be seen in historical terms. Recommending ahistorical approach, Saussure took a synchronic approach and viewed that signification process should be seen as an exploration of the structure which are to be studied in totality at a given point in time. A literary text should be studied in its relationship with the underlying structure or rules or codes which give birth to it and which also provides meaning to it. According to synchronic view, a language act (*parole*) or a literary text should be studied with respect to its contemporariness. An act of speech (*parole*) should be comprehended with respect to its occurrence in the present time as it is uttered in the present and not in the past. Comprehension of its meaning diachronically will be misleading as it is uttered in the present. Due to dynamic nature of human language, Saussure recommended the study of meaning of an act of language with respect to its present form, occurrence and context.

Saussure differentiated between synchronic and diachronic studies and emphasized on the preference of synchronic study. He calls synchronic as the static and diachronic as the evolutionary study. A speaker is exposed to a 'language-state' and not to the evolutionary phase of language. Linguistics, therefore, has to ignore the diachronic study in the signification process. The changes in language across time do not matter to a linguist as this type of study will divert his attention from his aim of describing a language. According to Saussure, "Speaking operates only on a language-state, and the changes that intervene between states have no place in either state" (CGL, 89). Saussure dwells at length on the difference between the two approaches. According to him,

"Synchronic study has as its object, not everything that is simultaneous, but only the totality of facts corresponding to each language;

separation will go as far as dialects and subdialects when necessary... Against this, diachronic linguistics not only does not need but even rejects such specialization; the terms that it studies do not necessarily belong to the same language (compare Proto-Indo-European *esti*, Greek *esti*, German *ist*, and French *est*)" (CGL, 90).

Saussure's distinctions between the two approaches have relevance for the afore-mentioned concept of signification which remains the focus of his study. Saussure believes that in order to comprehend an utterance one has to see it from a synchronic lens and not from a diachronic or historical lens or perspective.

Elaborating on the nature of concepts, Saussure concedes that "Concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not" (CGL, 117). The concepts are identified not by something which is present in them but by absence. If we clarify this point with an example by saying that a particular four-legged animal is 'dog', we also implicitly state that this animal is not a 'cat' or a 'rat' or a 'cow'. Saussure's definition of concept cannot be regarded as positive as we do not identify something from its inherent attributes but negatively we identify a concept by what it is not. A 'dog' is identified as a 'dog' as it is not 'a cat' or 'a rat'. Saussure distinguishes between linguistic value and signification. Words may have some signification but different values. Values, according to Saussure, "are always composed: (1) of a *dissimilar* thing that can be *exchanged* for the thing of which the value is to be determined; and (2) of *similar* things that can be *compared* with the thing of which the value is to be determined" (CGL, 115). Saussure illustrates it with an example. According to him, "Modern French *mouton* can have the same signification as English *sheep* but not the same value, and this for several reasons, particularly because in speaking of a piece of meat ready to be served on the table English uses *mutton* and not *sheep*. The difference in value between *sheep* and *mouton* is due to the fact that *sheep* has beside it a second term while the French word does not" (CGL, 115 - 116). Saussure extends the discussion of concept to sound which are materialistic rather than psychological. Just as concepts are distinguished by their difference (contrast) from other concepts, similarly sounds too are distinguished through their difference from other sounds. Just as concepts in isolation do not have any signification and value, similarly sounds too acquire signification and value through interaction and difference from other sounds. Saussure also hints

that isolated sounds or individual sounds in isolation do not belong to language but the contrastive sounds or difference between sounds (sounds in differential relationship) form part of language. Saussure felt that signification and value is assigned to signifier and signified through differential and syntagmatic relationship. According to Saussure, "Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact; it is even the sole type of facts that language has, for maintaining the parallelism between the two classes of differences is the distinctive function of the linguistic institution" (CGL,120 -121).

Saussure's views about 'sign, signifier and signified', 'language and parole', 'syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship' and 'synchronic and diachronic studies' taken as a whole points out towards his composite theory of signification. As Saussure's book *Course in General Linguistics* is a collection of his lectures published posthumously, we come across his scattered views about the process of signification. But the discussion of the aforementioned concepts in one way or the other brings his views together and weaves them into a precise theory. What these scattered seemingly unorganized views point out is that the signification of speech (parole) depends on the underlying core structure and the conventions of language and the signification of a language act (parole) is concerned with the synchronic study of an act in a syntagmatic relationship. The choices which represent the individual linguistic units at the vertical axis when used in a sequential syntagmatic relationship contribute to the signification of an utterance. However, the language act when viewed synchronically in relation to the underlying language structures and conventions (langue) aids to the signification of an utterance.

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A Comparative Study of the Poetic Eco-system in William Wordsworth and Emily Dickinson

Sikandar Kumar Bhaskar

Introduction

Nature is the centre of all human imaginations. In Indian mythology : Prakriti is considered as 'adi parashakti' – the originator of whole universe. It is an immense source of energy and powers, beauty and divinity, and truth and immortality. Both William Wordsworth and Emily Dickinson explored its immensity and treated natural things very emotionally and lovingly in their poems. Their natural poems reflect their deep thoughts and sensibility to the height of imagination. The true paradise is experienced in the intimacy of nature. The sources of joy and real happiness are in the human mind which are aroused by nature as between true lovers. According to the poets, nature is the world where rivers, trees, mountains, birds, lakes, springs, waves, sunrise, sunset, moonlight, vales, stars, rainbow are transformed by the poetic imagination into significant objects and eternal truth. The world of nature is changed into the world of thoughts by the poetic creations. Both the poets believe that the world of Nature is not separate from the human world, but the human world is created by Nature and so both are inter-related. Our souls act in harmony with nature and get nourishment and satisfaction. Both William Wordsworth and Emily Dickinson received their consciousness from nature and put their insights, inner-realization and experiences in their poems on nature. They treated nature with great honour and revelation. On side, William Wordsworth regarded nature as 'Nurse' and 'true guide', on the other hand, Emily Dickinson honoured nature as "The gentlest mother". The both poets tried to explore the mystery of nature in their poetic creations. Their treatment of literary ecology is highly praiseworthy and valuable in literary forms.

William Wordsworth was born on 7th April 1770 at Cocker-mouth in Lake District of North England and died in April 1850. He wandered throughout the countryside and explored the woods

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and valleys, mountains and fields and rivers and springs which shaped his poetry. Among the cluster of poets of Nature, he shines supreme. He is considered as the great worshiper of Nature, devotee of its beauty and high priest of its love and imaginations. He seems as a romantic explorer of nature and passionate philosopher of its beauty which are chiefly seen in his five poems on Lucy. His best poetry flourished between 1797 and 1807. These ten years are the most fruitful of his long poetic career. His stupendous work *The 'Prelude'* is a landmark in English literary history. He conceived of Nature as a living personality and said "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her". He believes that nature gives everything to her lovers to face and overcome all sorrows and sufferings of life.

Miss Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born at Amherst, Massachusetts New England in USA on 10th December 1830 and died on May 15, in 1886. She led secluded and austere life. She explored original and profound insight into nature and life. She put her extraordinary vividness of descriptive and imaginative power in her poems on nature. She composed more than five hundred poems on nature she visualized blossoming of nature that instructed her with freshness of beauty and frankness of creativity. She observed every minute object of nature and explored its utmost philosophical meaning. These objects soothed her life and soul. The common objects of nature fascinated and stirred her imagination and filled her with immense pleasure. She was influenced by the nature poems of William Wordsworth. Emily Dickinson's sensitive and creative mind grasped natural phenomena and manifested natural objects to the human life. Her nature poems revitalizes readers to come closer to ecology and environmental conservation and protection for the existence of mankind.

Nature and Life

William Wordsworth influenced modern thinking on the natural goodness of childhood, the need of morality in young society and the inspiring and healing powers of nature. He believes that people living in the midst of nature possess better moral attitude to develop the sense of divinity with nature. He sought original state of happiness and self enjoyment, sense of freedom and fragrance, and wealth of peace and pleasure in the world of nature, Wordsworth's poetic imagination mediates between man and nature and finally brings organic unity of the universe as the cosmic pleasure. He thinks nature as a great gift of God for human life.

He wanted to show men the right path of humanity in the race of industrialism and commercialism with the lamp of his poetic sense of nature. William Wordsworth honoured nature as a guardian of one's soul, as a friend, as a guardian, guide and philosopher. When one comes in contact with nature, one encounters with the consciousness of philosophical truth and life relieves peace and pleasure. Because, nature provides us rich hearts, sincere feelings and purity of mind. The poet built the entire superstructure on the central theme of man-nature relationship with his nature poems. He discovered Nature's 'unknown modes of being' which are reflected in his nature poems. The poet can't miss the way of pleasure that he finds in nature. As he wrote in the prelude : Childhood and school time

"I cannot miss my way, I breathe again" - 28 lines

The poet believes that life without joy is like desert and so he emphasized ecological glorification and environmental protection for humanity. The poet found the value of life in the lap of nature and got the perception of deeper enjoyment of the pleasure and so he wrote :

"I wandered lonely as a cloud"

According to the poet, Nature generates hope in our heart which kills fear of loss and pain and boosts up our life to be sustained. The poet believes that human beings become perfect in every respect with the closeness of nature. His nature poems show an ecological consciousness and eco scientific value for mankind.

Wordsworth considers that man and nature are adapted to each other and nature always gives gift to her people. It depends upon the mind of people in what way they think about nature. The poet thinks that men receive what ever they need from the objects of nature. His nature poems explain the majestic nature in various forms which interfuse environment to the human world to make life happy and admirable. If anybody talks about humanism, he must also think about environmentalism. Both environmentalism and humanism are indispensable. The poet advocates ecological consciousness in his nature poems as many other romantic poets related human beings with nature to broken bonds of their hearts. The poet believes that men should develop and practice the symbiosis between them and nature to establish peace and harmony. Nature is always alive and it imparts its wealth, beauty and pleasure to human beings. [Lines written in Early spring]

The ecological notions of William Wordsworth's nature-poems hold the same opinion as the modern ecological science of today holds the nature. Nature manifests all the aspects of human world, Wordsworth has proved these ideas by his nature poems. He considered nature as the valley of peace and wisdom and explored the sense of the ultimate unity of the universe. He believes the world of nature in its relationship to human needs. He thinks nature as vision of world and as centre of life where all things and all beings are co-related and co-existed. B.R.Schneider Jr. Says "Wordsworth undoubtedly knew the famous affirmations in Ovid and in Virgil of the living unity of the Universe"¹

Emily Dickinson depicted vividly the scenes of nature from every day experiences of life. Her nature poems flash the original and profound insight of both Nature and life. She put her extra-ordinary vividness of descriptive and imaginative power to honour and associate nature with human life. As she describes in the poem 668:

"Nature", is what we see- / The Hill-the afternoon / Squirrel-Eclipse-
The bumble bee / Nay-Nature is Heaven / Nature What we hear /
The bobolink the sea / Thunder-the Cricket / Nay-Nature is Har-
mony / Nature is what we know / Yet have no art to say / So impor-
tant our wisdom is / To her simplicity (Thomas H.Johnson, *The Com-
plete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, p. 332.)

Here she exposes the Master Nature to make it supreme. This poem gives the philosophical meaning for life, associated with nature. The importance of nature depends upon the human eyes in what ways they see and upon the human minds in what ways they think. In the above poem she pondered over the mysteries of nature. She used varied elements of nature for the descriptions which are occupied by human beings. Dickinson explored that men have unspeakable relationship with nature. She discovered a mysterious link between men and nature. A lot of her poems deal with nature from an Ecological perspective.

Emily Dickinson regarded nature as God's supreme creation. As Richard Chae said "Emily Dickinson presented man, nature and God as radically distinction.... For the nature is both reality and symbol. She claimed human nature with the cosmic nature".²

The Eco-system of Love and Nature

William Wordsworth felt that love is the path of truth and bliss which leads to happiness and faith for oneself. He discovered an organic love in nature which developed his faith and intimation

for natural objects. His nature poems provoke 'Return to Nature'. His imagination of love made him a great romantic poet and so he is also called a great worshiper of Nature, a high priest of Nature and a roll model lover of Nature. He thought nature as his best beloved. With natural objects and its phenomena, we develop our unity and integrity of mind with real happiness. He believes that nature is very sublime and fair which makes us to love her, and constitutes the bond of union between life and joy. As the poet has expressed in prelude:

... "Nor, sedulous as I have been to trace / How Nature by extrinsic passion first / People the mind with forms sublime as fair / And make me love them, may I here them" ...550

He developed a romantic idealism with nature which is also a psychological exploration for human mind. He believes that man's moral depends on how the mind works with the sources of nature. The poet's imagination in his poem "Daffodils" mediates between man and nature and indicates the organic unity of the universe. As the poem depicts:

"I wandered lonely as a cloud"

This poem reflects his romantic mood with human emotional intensities. The poem endows with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness of mankind. William Wordsworth's love for nature is purely based on the physical sense of the mundane world. Through his nature poems he gave the most pervasive myth that one life within all things around him. He praised the grandeur beauty of nature with the imagination of love generated by it. His poem "The Daffodils" provides the delight and the knowledge of love along with the full relationship of the world around us. The poet encounters with the eternal joys and happiness in nature. His love is revived with natural beauty. His Lucy poems manifest that the journey of love is completed when the lovers fall into the beauty of nature. After that human life becomes a visionary life.

Emily Dickinson was different in romantic views with nature to the other romantic poets. Her nature poems explored a normal urge for love and life in human world. She found the thought of love in the lap of nature and received some relief in association with nature. Although the nature vision betrayed her solitary life, even then she observed natural phenomena keenly and found the tenderness of nature's beauty and got inner happiness. Emily Dickinson sings of nature, its dignity and its purity with full force

and insight and her creative genius comes into play to show the human attachment with the world of nature. She showed her strong affinity for the flowers (1980, 380) for the Sunrise (232), bird (328), The mind (436). The poet presented creatures and the phenomena of seasons very lively and more friendly. Her association with the world of nature was of eternal happiness and delight as she wrote in poem (257). The poet felt an intellectual love in viewing nature's gifts.

Emily Dickinson often thought of Lord Christ as her divine lover. She celebrated the moment of happiness when she observed the truth and beauty of nature. She was more alert to the varying moods of nature. Her nature poems always inspire to Worship nature and it's glorification in all profound things. She explored that beauty is nature's fact. She was fascinated by nature in all it's appearances and actions of creativity. She observed living qualities in nature. She was always hopeful with nature awaiting spring-time as resurrection "The poet confidently expects reunion in heaven with her beloved".³ She feels both visibility and audibility in the natural events and receives heavenly influences for metaphysical world.

Nature and Spirituality

William Wordsworth explored his spiritual relationship with nature. As he wrote in the prelude

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze. / ... where I will... (1-9 lines)

Here breeze represents a conscious joy coming from nature. The soft breeze brings blessings of nature for mankind. The poet saw the whole world of nature with his inner eyes, with his soul and spiritual devotion and highlighted the joyful world of mental peace and true identity of human world. The poet meditates to fly in the infinite sky of his soul for the search of harmony between man and nature. The poet associated himself with nature for his inner growth. He treated objects of nature as the manifestation of spirit. The poet discovered the spiritual principles of nature and reached to the spiritual core of realization of both truth and beauty. His nature poems connect human spirit with the spirit of Nature. He experienced the natural force to give spiritual validity, awareness of soul and revelation of life for the human world. The poet investigated the passions in nature which build up human soul and endure things with life and nature, purity of hu-

man heart. Thus man attains eternity of thought, light of soul, wisdom and spirit to the universe through natural activities. As it is explained in the prelude line 401-410. The poet felt natural scenes and scenery so bright, so beautiful, so majestic and so wonderful that transformed his mundane world to spiritual world where liberty, happiness and pleasure flow continuously (The prelude lines 601 to 610). The poet focused on the evolution of realization of real happiness which can remove the fear and frustration from the minds of youths in present era. Thus the poet explains the perception of the ultimate tranquility in which all life ends. Human society and nature are inter related side by side "He cultivated the notion of nature as a guide to the simple life".⁴ He says that the sources of human joy are in human mind if he remains close to the nature.

Emily Dickinson developed her spiritual faith by fascinating towards nature. She found heavenly bliss, eternal truth and intellectual beauty in exploring the natural activities. She confronted all the facts of life in the nature's creativity. Her highly sensitive and creative mind imagined God and heaven even in the face of nature. She developed profound insights and deep faith in the glimpses of nature. For her, nature and its objects serve as a means to reach transcendent. She considered nature as a manifestation of supreme and divine spirit. She experienced the presence of God in all natural things either in minor or in major ones. She wanted to reach to more powerful spirit through nature. She observed every facet of nature with a heavenly boon and felt truth in it's beauty. As she expresses the hidden message in the poem 827:

The only News I know / Is bulletins all Day / From Immortality...
(T.H. Johnson, The complete poems of Emily Dickinson, p. 401)

She linked human nature to cosmic nature where supreme power reins whole universe. She believes nature as heaven and for her paradise lies not any where but on the earth. She confirmed the rhythm of nature with the rhythm of human heart which is a life giving force. Emily Dickinson was not against the development of science but she was feared about the loss of divine beauty of nature. She felt nature's destruction and danger which would bring disaster, catastrophe and calamity world wide for humanity. It is because science destroys the spiritual aspects of nature and the aesthetic pleasure. The loss of nature brings loss of lives which are seen now a days. The spread of Covid-19, Corona viral deadly disease world-wide is the consequence of loss of nature's

spirituality. Her poems 97, 108, 185 indicate science's advances and suffering of essence of nature. She gave the microscopic vision of nature and its sublimity. She perceived as insight and renunciation with the encounter of nature.

Poetic Vision of Nature

All the nature poets consider Nature as an ample source of life-supporting forces. Here both William Wordsworth and Emily Dickinson treated nature as a faithful guide and as the gentlest another. They found truth and beauty in the natural phenomena. According to them life receives permanent happiness and eternal truth in the lap of nature. Both of them share almost the same ethical understanding of Nature and both of them seem to suggest that life becomes spiritual and self conscious while coming closer to nature. This is nature which provides human beings : Love in heart, peace in mind, spirituality in soul and immortality and eternity in after life. We can get rid of frustration of loss and pain by developing faith for nature. God comes nearer to mankind through the beautiful process (activities) of nature.

Thus we see that William Wordsworth considers nature as a cradle of joy, love and happiness (in Daffodils) whereas Emily Dickinson believes nature as the gentlest mother, sacrificing kindled heart and life giving force for mankind.

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Pashmina: Transgressing the Quest for Identity

Ananya Banerjee

Introduction

The world is globalizing and developing at a very faster rate. Along with this progress, modernization is paving its way into the developing countries too. Certainly, modernization and globalization can promise a better future and greater connection not only among the global communities, but also among people, in general. But the matter of fact is that, according to Vandana Shiva, the opposite is only resulting. Shiva's view is that due to this globalization, a more factionalized, dominant and conflict prone world is actually emerging and that too at the expense of women. Progress of the society means progress in all aspects - physical as well as mental. But in developing countries like India though physical progress is quite visible yet the patriarchal dominating mentality is still persisting. Progress seems to be just for a namesake. In real sense, in spite of being educated, women still suffer from the stigma of being suppressed under the patriarchal male dominated society. They are denied of having their self-identity which ultimately results in they suffering from identity crisis.

"He is the subject, he is the Absolute - She is the other."

Simon de Beauvoir (1997: 205)

From the ancient time the power and position of women has always been belittled and challenged by the patriarchal male dominated society. Women's position is simply reduced to be 'the Other' in the society. Amidst this situation there are a few writers like Chanani whose writings have proved repeatedly that women are not just a pale reflection of their male counterpart they too have their own existence, their own identity. With the fast-changing world, the 'new women' are mentally and physically ready to accept all challenges and attain their self-identity, their own self esteem. Identity crisis is the common question among people nowadays. This can be the result of globalization which

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has questioned the crisis of identity in individuals, groups, culture, religion, nation or profession. The word identity is a many-sided phenomenon. The postmodern world is going through cultural mutations and the basic question in today's world is about the individual's position and situation in the society.

The graphic novel *Pashmina* reasons out the hidden theme of alienation which cornerstones identity crisis and the quest for the same. Though being a young author, Chanani, with the graphics has marvelously portrayed the people suffering an existential estrangement. Due to various issues in their life, the sensitive people get rancorous to their known world and hence feel a sense of isolation which they finally have to combat on their own. The despair and suffering that the people endure are clearly extrapolated with the help of graphics in the novel *Pashmina*. One can easily sensitize the situation when they see the graphics and read the quotes representing the thoughts of the characters and feel the pangs of isolation due to the cultural identity loss, gender identity loss or identity loss due to the absence of one's knowledge about her roots.

Search for Diasporic Identity

The globalized version of the world has brought the world under a nutshell where people easily migrate from one place to another due to various reasons. This urban migration though superficially seems to be successful yet it leaves behind a trail of cultural confrontation and identity crisis. The expatriates often are the prey to an alienated environment which urges one to search for their own identity. The expatriates oscillate between 'cultural adaptation' and 'self-identity'. Due to the alienation they feel confused about their own individual existence. Finally, they resort to search for their own identity which may be done either by seeking refuge to their own host country or accept the tradition of being known as the other in a foreign land. In the graphic novel *Pashmina*, we see the same kind of existential crisis being suffered by Priyanka whose roots are ground to India but had to settle down in California with her mother. She felt herself alienated from the culture around her in California. Hence every time she tried to delve deep into her past by questioning her mother about India and about her estranged father. Various questions churned her mind- Who was her father? Why did her mother leave India? Why doesn't her mother want to visit India anymore? She leads a confused life and tries to adjust herself by adopting the culture

and life of California. Though being a talented artist Priyanka was a bit of a loner. It was Uncle Jatin her father figure with whom she felt comfortable. Soon when Shilpa was born and Uncle Jatin became less available, Pri felt that her entire existence, her identity was slipping away from her.

In spite of being brought up in California, Pri was not quite an American. She was a social outcast among the cool girls at school who teased her for not wearing clothes that fit in. Amidst this mental turmoil Pri finds 'a home' when she gets transported to the colourful magical world of India - with the help of the magical Pashmina shawl that she discovered inside an abandoned old suitcase. She dreamt a romanticized version of India and felt to be at her real home where she would trace her original culture, her root and aspire to return. In her juggle between two cultures and two worlds Priyanka was unable to position herself in the Californian culture. She feels as if she has been exiled. Even her name Priyanka was misspelt as 'PRIYUCKA', for which she preferred to be called Pri. Even the foreigners could not accept her and treated Priyanka like an alien. Uncle Jatin himself cannot return to India but he lived in his glorious memories of his past. He kept the memory of his homeland alive and often told stories about India to Pri. Her love for India can be felt through Pri's obsession for Bollywood songs. Her stock of books like *Shiva Parvati* proves her desperate longing for India. This unfulfilled desire gradually frustrated her. Her frustration grew to such an extent that Pri rudely confronted her mother by saying, "Maybe you should have stayed there with my dad." (Chanani 33).

Every time when she wraps the Pashmina she could feel being in the idyllic version of India where she longed to travel. The elephant Kanta and the blue bird Mayur turned her black and white life into a colourful vibrant world. She could taste the Indian delicacies. The Pashmina as if gave a flight to her long-cherished imagination and Pri could hallucinate the Mughal palace, Taj Mahal, tigers, eating mangoes, dosa with coconut chutney, sitafal, jamun and pichu. Everything associated with India was Pri's passion. When her mother said about saree, Pri fantasized herself in saree and felt looking exotic in her Indian attire.

Gender Ideologies and the question of Identity

Every individual yearns for recognition and the path to recognition always comes after one knows her own self better. Modern women no longer want her to be projected as the

vulnerable - the one who is emotionally and financially dependent. They no longer want to restrict themselves as being called a traditional woman who would stoically endure all pains imposed by the patriarchal male dominated society. They no longer want to be tagged as a victim. Rather they fight against their crisis, feelings, tortures, emotional imbalances and try to explore their own self or their own 'identity'. In this graphic novel Chanani tries to bring forth the identity quest of Pri, her mother - Nimisha and Meena Mausi.

This graphic novel depicts the picture of Indian women whose whole hearted devotion to their families and their duties hegemonize their own desires and longings. Meena Mausi is always suppressed by her husband, whose domination she accepts calmly. She always tried to accept the orders been imposed upon her by her husband. It reflects how the life of an Indian women changes and how she frames her lifestyle according to the wishes of her husband. Through the use of graphics, Chanani portrays Meena Mausi's inner feelings which she tries to conceal. She loved to teach the poor kids of a slum in Jadavpur. She found the same quest of identity in the girls there, which she always had in herself. The girls reciprocated to the call of their teacher and proved to be bright students. She is an epitome of a traditional Indian woman who always compromises with her longings and adjusts to her family. She started teaching the girls only after getting the permission from her husband, but had to leave it immediately when she was pregnant, at the wish of her husband. She envisions that learning will definitely change the lives of the slum girls and would enable them to have a psychological development to achieve their quest for identity. At every point of her life she had to make various personal compromises. With the help of the Pashmina shawl, she could visualize what the priorities of her life were – what she wished. She could even see her dream daughter trying to teach in the slums. Finally, she tried to keep away her emotional idealism and for the first time rationally took up the decision to take Pri to Sualkuchi Silks, Nagpur without the permission of her husband.

Pri's mother Nimisha was victimized by the patriarchal society as she disobeyed the unwritten societal codes of conduct. She was convinced to visit Rahul before their marriage and was denied by Rahul to marry, after being pregnant with his child. Nimisha thereafter never turned to Rahul for her or her daughter's survival. She became the 'new women' with a strong personality who had the courage to subsist in a foreign land away from her so called

near and dear ones. She tried to contrive a distinct identity of her own self with her daughter Pri, though initially she appeared to be a weak character, who had accepted the disgrace forced upon by Rahul and left India silently with her daughter, yet ultimately she chose to struggle alone and face her fate in an unknown land. The identity crisis created by Rahul in her life was courageously shoved off by Nimisha. She revolted against the norms of the society and proved that women are never inferior to men. She created a new world of her own in California, where she had striven hard to establish an identity beyond the patriarchal force that threatened her self-identity, in India. In her words "Life with you would have been impossible in India. Here I can be independent. I made the right choice" (Chanani 155) proves the fact.

Pri too struggled hard to establish her own identity amidst the foreign people. She was brought up by her single mother who influenced her to have a strong religious faith and belief on Shakti. Pri was caught in a limbo between two different cultural traditions—the East and the West. As a result, she herself was not sure about her own identity, culture and traditions. She was so much subdued by her identity crisis that she hated her Indianized name Priyanka and asked people to call her Pri. The Pashmina shawl enabled her to seek and re-establish her identity after her visit to India. At the end of the novel we can see Pri asks Eddie to call her Priyanka. She championed in her discovery of a new and independent identity. She reversed her position and completed her quest for identity by emerging as a writer of her own comic book Pashmina.

The Elusive Pursuit of the Roots

The graphic novel *Pashmina* entails a search for values and meaning of life which is the very base of human existence. A person's journey for existence is somewhat dependent on her parental roots. A person feels a crisis in her existence when that root is missing. The same thing happens in Priyanka's life - she was denied of the basic knowledge about her father. Right from her childhood Uncle Jatin was like the father figure for Pri, who took great care of her tiniest demands. He was the person who was always calm with her and the most trustworthy driving instructor than Pri found in her mother. The void space of her father's existence is more or less filled by Uncle Jatin's love. It was Uncle Jatin who had actually created a vision of India in Pri, by his stories. When Uncle Jatin revealed the news of his wife being pregnant, it was as if a bolt from the blue for Pri. Her entire

existence was as if uprooted for the second time. Once again, she realized herself to be an alienated soul, who wanted to seek the meaning of existence. She underwent a traumatic psychic experience when Uncle Jatin said that he may not be available for the frequent outings after the baby arrives. She spent sleepless nights crying and looking at the photographs of Uncle Jatin and her. Finally, the religious soul of Pri forces her to pray to Shakti, not to take Uncle Jatin away from her and he must not need the baby. When the baby was born Pri's world was as if shattered. She even didn't want to see the baby. Her words, "The Shakti stuff doesn't work" and "Prayers are useless" - reveals her frustration when baby Shilpa was born. She felt as if just like the world, even goddess Shakti was not bothered about her. This again shows her revolt against the social motivation or the spiritual order or meanings of life. Due to this suffocative isolation and in order to escape from all the human mundane predicaments she finally decided to visit India even without her mother. She wanted to have the knowledge of her past and get back the relations that she has been deprived off.

Conclusion

The Pashmina shawl reflects a strong feminine sensibility which enables the women to foresee the things that are there in their minds. In the novel whenever Pri, her mother or her Mausi - suffered from depressions or hostility with their own selves the shawl acted as an agent to make their ever challenging and difficult life subtle.

Pri was suffering from an identity crisis when baby Shilpa was born. She wanted to know her root. She was in a combat with her reason and her heart whenever her mother refused to speak anything about her father or India. It was the Pashmina shawl which enabled Pri to visualize an idealized India which made her pine for a visit to India. Pri's Meena Mausi too with the help of Pashmina, made an identity free from her husband when she envisaged her dream daughter fulfilling her dream of teaching the girls in the slum. She finally emerged as the 'new women' who are rebellious and have their own distinct voice that can be raised against any injustice. In the later part of the novel it is also proved that Pri's mother too could gain her own identity when she envisioned a self-independent honourable life in California with the help of the Pashmina shawl. It can be said that the Pashmina shawl acted as a catalyst in effectuating the crisis and

liberating an individual from their entanglement of their existence. Through the women protagonists, Chanani has voiced the sufferings of thousands of women who are mentally, emotionally, physically and psychologically dominated and tortured at every step of their life. The Pashmina shawl is actually the women's own dreams and aspirations which enable them to realize what they want. It enables the women characters to have a distinct and particular identity of their own which cannot be oppressed or silenced by any member of the patriarchy. They are free to dream, to aspire, to set their goals and to live.

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INTERVIEW

Suresh Kumar in conversation with **Jaiwanti Dimri**,
author, academic, critic, and former professor of
English, Himachal Pradesh University

Suresh Kumar: Since most of your writings, both critical and creative deal with the issues of Indian women, as a feminist writer and critic where do you locate the place of Indian women in society?

Jaiwanti Dimri: As an academic I am familiar with the feminist discourse and as a woman I can certainly relate and empathize with gendered issues. However, this does not qualify me as a feminist writer per se for my concerns and sympathies extend beyond women to human. My novel *To Surju, With Love* is as much the story of a woman as it is of her small son Surju as the title suggests. I have been deeply intrigued by the unfathomable complexities, the unexpected twists and turns in a person's life, the interplay of human relationships topped up like the icing on the cake by human predicament. My writing is an endeavour to understand this enigma called life.

Coming to the second part of your query regarding the place of an Indian woman in society, the construct of an "Indian woman" itself is a contested category. An Indian woman or any other woman irrespective of her caste, class or colour is not a monolithic entity. Given the complex, multi-faceted framework of Indian society in terms of caste, class, region, religion, locale and so on, there cannot be one uniform, homogenized image of an Indian woman. In the formation of the image of an Indian woman the aforesaid diversities would be the defining determinants. My book *Images and Representation of Rural Woman in Contemporary Women's Writings* engages with the polemic issue of imaging and representation of a woman.

S. K.: It is generally argued that Indian women had a liberated status as compared to the western women as traditionally they

were allowed access to education and assigned a place superior to men. What is your take on this most controversial question?

J. D.: This is partially true. In the Vedic period the Indian women certainly enjoyed equality in the patriarchal setup as liberated, educated beings. However, in the succeeding years, the position of women in Indian society was largely impacted by foreign invasions culminating in the colonial rule. As for the position of woman in the nation state, this cannot be determined in view of the dominant urbanite elitist section of society but needs to be examined in the context of the socially and economically weaker and marginalized sections of women who are still located on the margins in social, economic and political terms.

S. K.: Where do you trace the beginning of feminism in India?

J. D.: Our two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* offer the best instance of feminist postulates of identity, female voice and agency inherent in the act of Sita's disappearance underneath the ground after the insulting second fire ordeal in the *Ramayana* and Draupadi's questions in the *Sabha Parva*, Amba's defiance of Bhishma and Gandhari's act of blindfolding herself in the *Mahabharata*. Moving on to contemporary times, I look at feminism from two perspectives,— active feminism and theoretical feminism. My professional orientation inclines me more towards theoretical feminist discourse which was initially an offshoot of western feminism in India. Indian feminist critics Uma Chakravarti, Meenakshi Mukherji, Susie Tharu, Sharmila Rege, Flavia Agnes, Bina Aggarwal and Gayatri Spivak, for instance have addressed feministic issues from the Indian perspective. However, an illiterate woman can also be a feminist. Gaura Devi of Chipko Movement in Uttarakhand and Kinkeri Devi of Himachal Pradesh would reiterate this fact. The large corpus of *Bhasa* literature by women writers offers varying facets of feminism.

S. K.: As you are well aware of, Indian society is traditionally stratified in terms of religion, caste, class and gender and in most of your work you have addressed the issues of the non-dominant socio-economic groups such as *adivasis*, labourers and women. Could you please illustrate on tribal issues, how they are different from other subordinated or non-dominant socio-economic groups?

J. D.: At the centre of my novel *To Surju, With Love* is a young tribal Dumka woman. Her tribal identity acts as an asset as well as a detriment to her. As a liberated and uninhibited woman, she negotiates her journey from her homeland in India to neighbouring

Bhutan but these tribal specificities of her character concurrently render her vulnerable in terms of physical and economic exploitation. The polarities in the value systems of the mainstream and tribal communities need to be understood in the socio-cultural context. I must admit my understanding of the tribals is largely based on literary and visual artefacts in the form of fiction and films. I don't find myself competent to speak on this subject.

S. K.: It is generally argued that the tribal societies have been more egalitarian and gender neutral as compared to the so called mainstream Indian societies so the tribal women had an elevated status. To what extent do you agree this?

J. D.: As you have rightly said the tribal societies are far more egalitarian and gender friendly than the dominant patriarchal societies. The position of women in the polyandrous tribes of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, for instance would offer an interesting study. Despite the apparent pit holes in a polyandrous society, the system empowers a woman's familial and social position in many ways. The tribal women of the hill states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and North-East share many similarities due to their topographical similarities. The problem crops up when the alien mainstream value system is imposed on them.

Many of our misconceptions about the tribal communities are circulated by the print and visual media. As Spivak has pointed out, the 'exoticization' of the tribals by the market forces for consumerist purposes needs to be interrogated. The naive tribal communities are appropriated by the social and political agents for ulterior motives.

S. K.: Do you find tribal women different from dalit women?

J. D.: Certainly. As I have argued, the identity of a person is impacted by his/her familial and social setup which is distinctly dissimilar in these two respective societies. As forest-dwellers, the *vanवासियों*, these tribal societies have their own priorities, preferences and life governing rules which have now been impinged upon by outside forces. Unlike dalit women, they do not suffer the stigma of untouchability. I find the position of Dalit woman in Indian society to be far more precarious than tribal woman in a socio-cultural context.

S. K.: In your critically acclaimed novel, *To Surju, With Love* Sukurmani, the central character is the victim of poverty, sexual exploitation in an alien land but despite that she doesn't lose hope

and strives for a better life which suggests that tribal women are strong and capable of fighting back. What according to you makes them that strong?

J. D.: The egalitarian framework of a vast majority of the tribal societies grants equal status to women unlike the normative patriarchal system. Sukurmani of *To Surju, With Love* is verily a liberated, uninhibited woman unlike her co-women labourers. She is a fighter till the last breath of her life. However, her physical exploitation and subsequent death is related with the dynamics of power and knowledge. It is imperative for a woman to be equipped with the knowledge of a system to contest or subvert it. This empowering knowledge of the dominant patriarchal mindset is unfortunately denied to Sukurmani.

S. K.: Most tribal writers posit that the tribals are facing severe identity crisis. What according to you leads them to this identity crisis?

J. D.: Mahasweta Devi, Gopilal Mohanti, Pratibha Ray and Virendra Kumar Bhattacharya are some notable Indian writers who have been engaged with various tribal issues in their writings. The appropriation of the tribals by outside forces for personal gains is examined in Gopilal Mohanti's Oriya novel *Paraja* and Mahasweta Devi's Bengali novel *Araneyer Adhikar*. The tribal women fall an easy prey to these alien forces. Promotion of consumer culture by the market forces among the tribal women is a significant contributing factor in diffusing their tribal identity. The homogenization of tribal societies for development purposes also sends them on the crossroads.

S. K.: It is noted that the Indian dalit writers present Buddha, Kabir, Ravidas, Phule, Ambedkar, Iyothee Thass, Periyar and some other anti-Hindu intellectuals as their ideals in literature. Who are the ideals for tribal writers?

J. D.: The Dalit societies are far more organized and sensitized in social and political terms than the tribal societies. As forest dwellers the tribal societies were for along time could escape the public gaze and avoid confrontation with the dominant group.

Till date the legendary figure of Birsa Munda is the sole tribal leader to achieve nationwide recognition as a freedom fighter, religious leader and tribal hero who spearheaded the tribal movement against the British rule in the late 19th century. His heroism is celebrated in Mahasweta Devi's *Araneyer Adhikar*-Rights of Forest.

S. K.: Do you think tribal culture is diminishing as most tribals especially, the educated ones try to adopt the mainstream culture and religion so that they can pass as Hindus. How do you see this?

J. D.: Sure. The distinct identity of the tribals is gradually dif-fusing and submerging in the mainstream identity in the back-drop of the developmental plans. Their religious identity was initially appropriated by the Christian missionaries and is now assimilated in Hindu identity.

S. K.: Your Hindi novel *Pinddaan* deals with the post-death rites and other Hindu religio-cultural facets but it seems to speak beyond this. Please illustrate a bit more on the trajectory of this novel.

J. D.: Pinddan literally signifies Oblations. This post-death ritualistic practice is located in the male domains the rites are performed by men. My novel *Piddaan* revisits this practice from a female and feminist point of view. Located in the Garhwal Himalayas this is a woman-centric narrative, a nostalgic tale of the hardworking solitary women, of their pain and silent suffering, their unconditional love for their maternal land akin to the goddess Nanda, Shiva's consort visiting her natal home after every twelve years. The narrative is woven around the historic as well as mythical Nanda Rajajt- pilgrimage.

S. K.: Could you please tell us about your current writing projects?

J. D.: Prompted by the favourable response to my novel *To Surju, With Love* which is the English translation of my Hindi novel *Surju Kei Naam* I am translating *Pinddaan* into English. Given the socio-cultural context and the intricacies of the local idiom, this is turning out to be a bigger challenge than my earlier attempt. Meanwhile, I am also finalizing a collection of my short stories which has been pending for quite some time. Some projects permanently stay in some corner of your mind waiting patiently for their turn to be translated in print.

Thank you.

The interviewer is an Assistant Professor of English at Government Sanskrit College, Tungesh, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh.

BOOK REVIEW

A Philosophy of Autobiography: Body and Text
By Aakash Singh Rathore (Routledge, 2019)

Prashant Kumar

“Soul is word formed from the body” (p. 142)

In 2015, Christopher Cowley edited a book titled *The Philosophy of Autobiography* which took up the question of how we might fill a lacuna in the literature on philosophical aesthetics in relation to autobiographies. The issues at hand were (a) the nature of narratives, (b) the understanding of memory and its validity, (c) the role of agency and its relation to memory, (d) the possibility of self-deception and other issues related to an expression of the self. One reviewer of the book, James R. Hamilton, points out that the book poses two central questions over the course of ten articles by different contributors – 1) how does a person’s conception of herself find expression? 2) Can that expression be narrative in form?

Aakash Singh Rathore’s recent book takes up similar themes but differs radically in two respects. First, the hesitation to use “the” in the title, thus the title *A Philosophy of Autobiography*. Second, the manner of posing the question. Rathore is more interested in asking how one’s conception of oneself is formed in the process of living life. Rathore’s inquiry into the fuzzy ground of philosophy of autobiography not only inaugurates the discipline itself but also offers a robust foundation for Cowley’s edited volume.

In justifying his title, he devotes a short paragraph in the epilogue which, arguably, is central to the whole book. He writes –

... what all of the narratives of these profoundly diverse person-ages have been revealing to us ... is not *the* ultimate philosophy of autobiography, not by any stretch of the imagination; it is, a thousand times more modestly, just *a* philosophy of autobiography. Hence the title. (p. 136)

But it would be a mistake to think that Rathore’s title is simply an expression of modesty. Instead, it entails a philosophical point: we must hesitate leaping from the instances of autobiographies to *the* philosophy of autobiography. Instead, he offers a particular perspective, leaving open questions for the reader to answer.

What is this perspective? Rathore is quite clear about this right from the inception of the book: he offers an intimate reading of and reflections on a diverse range of global autobiographies with a consistent emphasis on the physical body. So, the question is not about how to understand the life of the mind, but rather, how to understand the authorial relationship to her or his body. In short, “where is the flesh in the autobiographical self?” (p. 7)

The role of flesh becomes significant if you sincerely ask about the formation of the understanding of one’s self. Rathore argues against the traditional understanding of self where body hardly finds any place and focuses more on *the material condition(s)* through which a particular experience of a person emerges. Think of Elie Wiesel’s autobiography – his narration of survival. Had he been born in India, there could not have been *this* story of a survivor.

Just so, in order to understand oneself as ‘Mahatma’, ‘Untouchable’, ‘Nigger’, ‘Survivor’, ‘Dalit’, ‘Samurai’, ‘Daughter’ and so on (i.e. the categories through which the author addresses each of the autobiographies that he analyzes), one must accord a significant role to one’s body and its material conditions. Exclude the body and the narration of a particular self loses its meaning. There will be no nigger without a black body, no mahatma without a pure body, no untouchable without a polluted body. It implies “that body is ever present as the mediator, vehicle, conduit, and crucible of lived experiences” (p. 134). Rathore concludes, accordingly, that autobiographies are the transubstantiation of flesh into words that *convey* the spirit.

Interestingly, Rathore does not depart from the conception of autobiography as conveying the spirit. What makes this work different from other extant works is the centrality of the body in conveying the spirit. However, is the physical body enough to support the complexities of spirit? A narrow interpretation of body provokes this question. Rathore actually proposes a wider interpretation of body, broadening the conception to accommodate physical body as well as the bodies of the world – in quite the same sense as Eve Ensler’s experience of her body among the bodies of the world in her autobiography, *In the Body of the World*.

The wider interpretation implies different understandings of bodies. So, what roles do bodies play? Rathore, I believe, only implicitly answers this question. He seems to be suggesting that the body can be deep and sacred, a battleground for experiments, deserted home, the better half to soul, ground for suffering, burden, or the subject of political theology. There are other subtle clues about a complex understanding of the body: as a veil, as

beauty, as beast, and so on. Each understanding of the body translates the experience into words quite differently than the others. This justifies the crucial role that bodies are read to play in all autobiographies.

The major problem that this work faces is the opaque relationship between somatic experiences, their linguistic expression, and the spirit. R. Krishnaswamy, in another review of Rathore's book, frames the problem thus: "How is linguistic expression related to bodily affection?" Here, I think, "bodily affection" privileges the narrow interpretation of body. I would prefer to frame the question – How is linguistic expression of lived experiences related to somatic experience? A vague answer to this question available in the book is, through artistic creativity. But this could be further interrogated: is not artistic creativity itself the transubstantiation of body into capability?

Evidently, it is not a direct relationship. It is not as if one's somatic experiences are being expressed linguistically each time one experiences. The process actually needs a mechanism where experiences can be saved and then expressed later. Generally, this problem has been solved by the introduction of memory; however, this brings forth another serious challenge – the validity of the expression of somatic experiences. Can the writer *actually* recall the somatic experience? Even if she can, can she truly express it through words? Rathore deals with this in passing in the analysis of Andy Warhol's autobiography. Nevertheless, a rigorous analysis of this problem and a solution to it are missing.

And this raises a further problem: if the validity of the expression of somatic experiences are in question, can we really call this autobiography anymore? Maybe in the process of expressing somatic experience, I actually create another self. Here again, the *relationship* between the expression and autobiography is at stake. To cite one of the autobiographies that Rathore studies: "Somewhere the two must be connected. Where, though?" (p. 102)

Despite the fact that there remain crucial unanswered questions in Rathore's thesis which need further thought, the insertion of the body into the philosophy of autobiography actually places this book as a crucial resource for understanding not only the genre, but even for understanding oneself, one's own narrative or story. Rathore's *A Philosophy of Autobiography: Body & Text* is a bold and challenging experiment and mirror in this regard.

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