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The Nowhere Men: A Comparative Study of Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* and Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*

S. INDIRA

Kamala Markandaya (born 1924) is an outstanding woman novelist in Indian-English literature. Her major theme has been the cultural clash between the western and oriental modes of life. All her novels have the backdrop of "East-West encounter" and she explores the impact of change in terms of human psychology. *The Nowhere Man*,[1] her seventh novel, underscores in artistic terms, the need for racial integration and cross-cultural understanding.

Anita Desai (born 1937) holds a prominent place among the younger group of Indian-English novelists. She distinguishes herself from the other writers with her emphasis on the individual, his inner world of sensibility and his urges and conflicts.

Anita Desai's latest novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay*,[2] brings to one's mind Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* as the theme presented in both the novels is the same. A powerful and poignant dramatization of the peculiar predicament of nationless wanderers bring these two novels together and one becomes curious to find out the extent of comparison. There is sixteen years of gap between the publication of these two novels. But the time during which the events take place in the novels is about the same though the setting is different. In *The Nowhere Man* (1972), the place of action is London and the protagonist is Srinivas, a South-Indian Brahmin. In *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), the setting is Bombay and the protagonist is Hugo Baumgartner, a German Jew. Both are victims of impersonal forces that are too large for them to comprehend and confront with.

Srinivas, a brilliant student, an ambitious youth, finds his dreams of becoming a scholar shattered forever as the shadows cast by the

British Raj darken his future. His father in the grip of lunacy, his friend Vasudev dead, his wife's father and uncles in prison, himself in the blacklist, Srinivas is forced to leave the country in search of greener pastures that are to be found in England during that time. Unable to get employment in England, he starts business and lives modestly with his wife, Vasanta and two sons Lakshman and Seshu. The second world war claims Seshu, and Vasanta too dies after sometime. When Lakshman drifts away from the family in a passion to integrate himself with the British society by marrying an English girl, Srinivas stands alone in a state of death-like stillness. Old and alone, he meets another kindred soul in Mrs. Pickering who looks after him and protects him from the onslaught of racial hatred, a change that has come over in the prejudiced youth of England, who were tolerant enough before. Srinivas bears it all with fortitude, though bewildered by this change and dies like a martyr when Fred Flecher, the son of his neighbour sets fire to his house.

Hugo Baumgartner, grown up as a solitary but happy child in a beautiful flat in Berlin finds his bright world overcome by the shadows of Nazi Germany. The shadows deepen when his father, the proud owner of a furniture show-room becomes a psychic wreck for the sin of being a Jew. The horror of his father's self-immolation, the rapid fall of all the graces and luxuries his family is used to, the poverty and oppression, the abject state of helplessness and fear, have all deeply affected the sensitive, withdrawn young boy. Hugo leaves Berlin for India hoping against hope that he would make a home for his mother there but fate frowns on him once again. The war breaks out and Baumgartner is taken as a "hostile alien" to a war camp, where he stays for six years. He comes back to Calcutta and confirms his mother's death somewhere in Germany and becomes a recluse. The rest of his life is an uneventful journey turned to a slow, quiet rhythm. A chance meeting with a young German, an Aryan incidentally, brings a melodramatic ending to the poor, futile life of Baumgartner, as for the sake of a few silver trophies, the young drug addict kills him.

Even across continents both Srinivas and Baumgartner shared a similar fate. Srinivas and Vasanta suffered from traumatic experiences as they were natives in British-occupied India. Baumgartner and his mother, being Jew were treated like "step-children" in Nazi Germany. The indignities inflicted on the fathers of both Srinivas and Baumgart-

ner turned them to be psychic-wrecks. Even in their adopted countries, Srinivas and Baumgartner never belonged and were only exiles. But there is an essential difference in the alienation they both suffered from. While Srinivas is made to feel alienated by his prejudiced neighbourhood, Baumgartner's alienation is inherent, augmented by war-psychosis.

Srinivas never tried to integrate himself totally with his adopted country mainly because of Vasanta who maintained her "Indianness" throughout her life.

> During his years with Vasanta—exiles both—he had longed like her for palm trees and oleander, sighed with her for the rivers of their vanished youth, for the ramifications of family they had sustained and been sustained by. (*The Nowhere Man*, 68)

And after Vasanta's death, he feels remorseful that he has to consign her ashes to "these alien waters." But Srinivas is always thankful to the British for their tolerance and understanding. Especially after his wife's death, when he allowed the house to become a pigsty, the English put up with him without making complaints. He even tells Mrs. Pickering rather proudly: "This is my country now. . . . I feel at home in it, more so than I would in my town." (58) So he finds it difficult to believe that the old tolerance is disappearing. He clings to his faith in the decency of the English people and thinks they will allow him to call it his country. But Abdul Zanzibari, his African friend, a business associate tells him of racial-discrimination in all public places and of racial prejudice that is spreading like wild fire. The tragic realization, that despite nearly half a century in England he is now considered an alien, projects itself in his developing leprosy. He feels like "a Nowhere Man looking for a nowhere country." (66) When he realizes that he has been transformed into a stranger, he thinks it would be better to end his life. To the dismayed Mrs. Pickering he says "it is time—when one is made to feel unwanted and liable, as a leper, to be ostracized further, perhaps beyond the limit one can reasonably expect of oneself." (193) In spite of the efforts of Mrs. Pickering to right the imbalance in his mind, Srinivas begins to feel defensive and apologetic about his presence in London.

In contrast to Srinivas who began to feel unwanted in his adopted country when he was nearing seventy, Baumgartner has lived

with the knowledge that he is an unwanted alien throughout his life. He finds his presence in India highly improbable. Anita Desai, in her characteristic way, confirms Baumgartner's ingrained sense of inferiority and a nagging sense of an unwelcome visitor through a temple scene where he feels that he is being ejected out of the divine presence. "Indigestible, inedible Baumgartner. Not fit for consumption, German or Hindu, human or divine." (190) Deeply humiliated and mortified, he begins to consider himself only as "an old turtle trudging through dusty Indian soil." (11) Even after fifty years of stay in India, Baumgartner continues to feel "uncertain" (6) and scuffles and shuffles through the narrow lanes and alleys of Bombay avoiding the main street as if he did not want to offend anybody by his presence. He never dared to think of India as his country and never had any sense of belonging to it. He is certain that he is always looked down upon contemptuously by the Indians as a dirty "Firanghi" (19) and there will not be any further rise in his status. So he does not experience either anger or despair at this total rejection from his adopted country like Srinivas.

Just as Srinivas finds decency and tolerance in some of his neighbours, Baumgartner too finds warmth and friendliness in some Indians like Habibullah and Chimanlal with whose help he could become a good businessman. Though physically they are placed in similar situations, there is an essential difference in their mental and spiritual make up. Srinivas sticks to his religion like his wife did. It is his religious values, forgiveness and resignation that sustain him when his wife and son die, Lakshman goes out of the family orbit and his very existence is under a constant threat. Baumgartner has no deep faith in his religion as he has not been brought up as an orthodox Jew. He could not even mourn his mother's death ceremoniously being ignorant of the ancient Jewish customs and words of solace. Haunted by an unexpressed sorrow at his mother's death—the most important relation he had in life—Baumgartner experiences unfathomable depths of loneliness and misery. His tragedy is that he can neither express nor share his fears and agonies with anyone. Except Lotte, a cabaret dancer who treats him quite affectionately, Baumgartner has no other German Jewish friends. He disapproves of Lotte's drunken ways. Moreover she too is a frustrated soul and hence is of no great comfort to him.

Srinivas is more fortunate than Baumgartner in this respect.

When his life has become empty and meaningless after the death of his wife and son, Mrs. Pickering comes into his life and rescues him from the sterile business that life has become to him. Mrs. Pickering is a representative of refined and balanced English society with an ingrained sense of justice and commonsense. She steps into the place of Vasanta, keeps the house immaculate, looks after Srinivas, becomes a friendly companion to him, understands his past turmoils and present apathy. She goads him gently into the business of living, to live normally and contentedly with whatever small pleasures life offers to him. It is through her that the beauty of England, its crisp winter mornings, its enchanting rivers, its woods of sycamore and oak begin to appeal to him.

In contrast, Baumgartner has no Indian friends who could make him appreciate India, unravelling its mystery, colour and glamour. But through Chimanlal, he could watch the horse-races, a dream of his childhood, fulfilled after so many years, though in a different country. Whatever he found exotic in the beginning of his stay, lost its charm later and he only wants to conceal his face from that glittering world. He feels constantly assaulted by the cruel heat which burns like "boiling oil." (83) Even after so many years, Lotte too complains about the heat that fries on "Like an egg in a pan" (69) and despises herself for being stranded in "this bloody heat and in this bloody graveyard." (68) If Lotte wastes away her life in a drunken slumber, Baumgartner takes to the life of a recluse with a resigned acceptance. If Srinivas looks like an "emaciated Buddha" (218) to Dr. Radcliffe, Baumgartner too could be included in that category as he too is singularly untouched by any insult or injury. Both of them were never men of action. Like Srinivas, Baumgartner too suffers inwardly seeing evil, exploitation and victimization. Baumgartner had witnessed a global war, a colonial war and a religious war in his life time. While the global war made him an orphan and a homeless wanderer, the colonial and religious wars in India make him shrink into himself further and further and his life is dwindled into almost nothing. Srinivas, on the other hand, suffered personal losses both from the global and the colonial wars. He was saved from partition horrors, Hindu-Muslim strife as he was away from India but now after so many years he is facing another war, a racial one. His survival amidst the general atmosphere of racial hatred proves the truth of this belief that one must fight, or go under. He goes under. He has the ability to forget and forgive unlike his

friend Abdul. He is superior to him morally as his values are enduring and spiritual, not mutable and material. Thankfully, no war is waged against Baumgartner in his old age. But that is no consolation to the parched spirit of Baumgartner as he experiences death psychically and spiritually when he confirms his mother's death. His body remained alive only to pay penalty for being alive and safe while his mother underwent unspeakable horrors in Nazi Germany. His entire life is a long journey of self- mortification and self-denial. He does not know the joys of married life, has never experienced the loving care of a wife or shared moments of laughter and warmth with children. He is a loner throughout his life. In sheer despair to overcome the burden of loneliness, Baumgartner is reduced to capturing kittens and taking them to his flat. He is delighted when the cats clamour for his attention. He does not mind people calling him contemptuously "Billewalah Pahgal," does not mind stooping to a near beggarly state of asking the restauranteurs for the remains of the food cooked the night before in order to feed his large cat family. He seeks comfort and solace from feeding and looking after the homeless cats, identifying his own homelessness with theirs.

There is an element of irony in the death of these two people. Both Srinivas and Baumgartner are unassertive people who only want to live out their lives quietly. But Srinivas becomes a victim of racial prejudice and dies due to shock when Fred Flecher, his tormentor sets fire to his house. The way he dies, as a martyr in a sacrificial bonfire attracts the attention of the whole white neighbourhood and the crowd that gathered is shocked and ashamed to realize the depths of cruelty and inhumanity they have fallen into. Constable Kent flounders in misery, Mrs. Pickering feels outrageous, "a searing light" seems to flow from her and Dr. Radcliffe remarks ruthlessly, "He is dead—and we all had a hand in it." (298)

Baumgartner too is murdered by a young German, a Teutonic who is highly contemptuous of this "Raus," Baumgartner. Baumgartner only wants to do a good turn to Farrokh, a restaurant owner by bringing the young drug addict away from the restaurant, to his flat. He wants to feed him and nurse him as if he too were "a sick cat." But the young man Kurt, a personification of evil, just like Fred Flecher, "snarls" and "roars" at him, gives him a proud account of the bizarre, blood-chilling events of his life, full of violence, horror and sickness that "paralyzed and devastated" (154) the poor Baumgartner. And for

the sake of a few silver trophies won by the horse owned jointly by Baumgartner and Chimanlal, Kurt comes back in the middle of the night and kills the sleeping Baumgartner in a most brutal way. Because it is a murder case, Baumgartner's death has attracted attention. But while Srinivas's death evokes anguish over the waste of human goodness in the British, making them feel responsible for the brutal crime, Baumgartner's death brings out only the callousness and insensitivity of the Bombay crowd, whose baser instincts are galvanized by the appeal of the drama in this ghastly event. Lotte's screaming, Farrokh's whining, all the crying, loud, shrill and scandalous make the audience shiver with "delight." (228) Thus the last scene of Baumgartner's life, who lived a lonely, passive life close with a ceremonial bang. The fate these two men escaped in their own countries has caught them in their old age in their adopted countries. Srinivas is killed by an Englishman, whose race was responsible for the many tragedies of his and his wife's family in India. Baumgartner is killed by an Aryan, the man of the same race which killed his mother and made him a nationless, faceless alien throughout his life. While poetic justice is done in the case of Fred as he too dies in the fire, it is not done in the case of Kurt. There is also another interesting parallel, in these two novels. In *Baumgartner's Bombay* it is the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany that brings the tragedy into the life of its protagonist. This persecution and extinction of Jewish race is justified by Hitler as he says in his *Meincampf*, "—my conduct is in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator. In standing guard against the Jew, I am defending the handiwork of the Lord."[3] Fred in *The Nowhere Man* too believes in this religious calling substituting "coloured" for "Jews." There are certain instances and phrases like "bloody Jew" and "ghetto" in the novel, in support of this parallel.[4]

Both Srinivas and Baumgartner seem to atone for the crime of existence itself as one is coloured in white country, and the other, a white man in a coloured country. Both are pathetic fugitives and while Srinivas, a running man, had acquired "a running mate" (210) so that she lessens the pangs of lonely suffering, Baumgartner, the unfortunate is a lone runner throughout his life. That is why *Baumgartner's Bombay* can be read as a powerful dramatization of human loneliness, and *The Nowhere Man* as a poignant study in racial prejudices and East-West encounter. This is because, while Anita Desai's focus is on the individual character, Kamala Markandaya lays her emphasis more

on the East-West confrontation than the individual's struggle.

NOTES

1. Kamala Markandaya, *The Nowhere Man* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1972).
2. Anita Desai, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988).
3. Adolf Hitler, *Meincampf*, trans. James Murfy (Sagar Publications), p. 46.
4. Margaret P. Joseph, *Kamala Markandaya* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1980), p. 140.

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The Hunger and Anger of Ravi in Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice*

K. RADHA

Hunger is a widespread phenomenon in India. It is the theme of several short stories and novels written by Indians in English and in regional languages. Novelists abroad like Dickens and Steinbeck also have dealt with this theme in a very effective manner. There are so many hungers—the hunger of sex, the hunger for love, the hunger for knowledge, the hunger for freedom and, above all, the hunger for food. While Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* just touches "the fringes of the problem of hunger," R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* and Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* give "an aerial view" of the drought-caused hunger.[1] In Anand, even though there is hunger, the problem of untouchability is given more importance. Whereas Anand's *Untouchable* is a case history of the thirties, Harrex comments, Ravi, the central character in *A Handful of Rice*, is a proletarian product of fifties: "The educated son of a peasant, Ravi tries to find for himself a decent way of life in the city where he is an 'outsider' without caste, in a no-man's land between coolie and clerk."[2]

As K.R. Chandrasekharan points out, the beggar menace in India claims Markandaya's attention. There are professional beggars and amateurs, in *Possession*. In *Some Inner Fury* a crowd of beggars surrounds a car which has broken down. *A Silence of Desire* mentions a large number of beggars who throng the roads and depend on the Swamy for their food.[3]

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (Oct. 1947) published after the transfer of power by Britain to India and Pakistan covers the war years. It tells us the story of a largely man-made hunger that took a toll of two million innocent people in Calcutta and Bengal. While the hoarders, profiteers and black-marketeers prospered, the government was apathetic. The description of hunger in *So Many Hungers* is

perhaps more powerful than that in *A Handful of Rice,* for it is generally believed that Kamala Markandaya's account is pale and lifeless as she writes about something of which she has only a dim vision. However, there are others who think that *So Many Hungers* is oversentimental. Bhattacharya's novel *He Who Rides a Tiger* also has the background of famine.

Kamala Markandaya sailed for England in 1948 at the age of twenty-four, uprooting herself from the soil of her origin. She is married to an Englishman—Taylor—and has settled down in England with her English husband and daughter. She makes occasional trips to India. Six years after her immigration, she published her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve.* This novel is the story of a peasant family which suffers much from the deprivation of its land. There is the pathetic description of Kuti, Nathan's youngest child, dying slowly of starvation. The peasant family's straying into the city does not do it much good. Ira becomes a prostitute to save Kut.

A Handful of Rice (1966) begins and ends with the hero's struggle to procure food. With the little money he has, Ravi drinks in order to forget his sorrow. He tells Apu, the tailor, "I'm starving. . . . I'm hungry, I want a meal." (6) Apu's wife hits him with all her force for breaking in like a ruffian, and blood drips from his face. "I was hungry," he explains. (9) Hunger had forced him to leave his village where people lived "between bouts of genteel poverty and acute poverty"—the kind in which the weakest went to the wall, the old ones and the babies, dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, "the falling fever," and many other names for what was basically, simply nothing but starvation.[4] Poverty had made him abandon his "decency." Ravi wonders when he had been "decent" for the last time. (12) He works under Damodar for sometime making money through unlawful activities. But while Damodar succeeds in becoming a rich man, Ravi fails because he has "a soft conscience" (14) and therefore he remains a poor "angry man" even at the end of the novel. The book is in a sense the progress of a rake in the city[5] but without much success.

After his becoming Apu's assistant and Nalini's husband, the conditions seem to improve a little. But the illness of Apu, the theft of Apu's savings by his son-in-law Puttanna, Apu's death, the burden of maintaining a big family which included lazy unemployed men like Varma and Puttanna, and also a cripple, the loss of his rich customers, the losses of his job in a hospital, the death of his first-born, Nalini's

ill-health—all these bring about his ruin. Physically and mentally worn out, Ravi has to face another problem—the rise in the price of rice day by day. Even one meal is a luxury. Bad monsoons, floods, and droughts and, above all, men themselves, are responsible for the sufferings and starvation of the poor. With his elementary school education—had he been illiterate perhaps he would have been better off—Ravi cannot get a job. How can he when hundreds of graduates are jobless? With the upward spiralling of prices, the downward incline of Ravi's family becomes "a steep slope down which they were slipping down with increasing momentum." (196) He sells Apu's bed for eight rupees—the bed on which he had slept for ten days with Nalini after their marriage. He takes a loan out on security of the Singer sewing machine: "One notion that presented itself was of putting every one on starvation rations until he had paid off the loan." (196) "*Bad Harvest.* It was the echo of a knell sounding away down the years," writes Markandaya. (205) The rice which Nalini buys is full of black stones for which Ravi scolds her. One drought had been enough to produce "a whole pack of skeletons and the burning-ground fires were hardly ever out in the village," thinks Ravi. "week by week the price crept up. Then one month it shot skyward" (226) in the city.

Srinivasa Iyengar points out that governments have proved incapable of effectively holding the price line. "The DMK Party was swept to power in Madras in 1967," Iyengar adds, "with their pledge to provide rice for the poor at 'a measure for a rupee'."[6] When the price of rice shoots skyward a handful of rice could make all the difference between life and death.[7] While his mother would have been happy with one good meal Ravi thinks that this is not enough for him and his children. "He wanted more. It was his right, his children's right." (217) Poverty and his rebellious attitude make him join a mob shouting "Rice today, *rice.* Rice today, *rice.*" It goes to the godowns where rice is stored. The mob in rice-frenzy pulls out the gunny-bags. While Ravi struggles to reach the grain, the police give him a severe blow. The angry crowd throws stones at the fashionable store EVE which had exploited Ravi and Apu by giving them low wages for what they stitched; Ravi thinks of throwing a brick but suddenly his hand drops. Unlike Damodar, Ravi is a man with a conscience and so his life continues to be one of hunger and anger. With Eliot, Ravi can also say "In my beginning is my end" and vice-versa.

Jayamma suffers from two types of hunger—rice-hunger and

sex-hunger. Jayamma who is always referred to as a bitch by Ravi is almost "raped" by him when Nalini is away. But, for Jayamma, it is on the whole a pleasant experience for even long before Apu fell ill, Apu's "pride," his "potency" had gone and he had wanted "nothing more of her than the luke-warmth of the hands against him." (149) Ravi asks her, "Do you think I don't know how you have been starved?" (221) This is perhaps one of his ways of having revenge on a woman who belonged to a higher strata of society.

Ramesh K. Srivastava comments that unlike Nathan in *Nectar in a Sieve,* Ravi's hunger "does not arouse our sympathy as the young man becomes associated with the people who have money for intoxication but not for food. . . . Besides, the real hungry person is not choosy as Ravi appears to be when he tells Damodar, 'All I want is a meal—a nice, home-cooked meal, not bazaar muck'."[8] (140)

It may not be inappropriate to describe the hero of *A Handful of Rice* as an "Angry Young Man." But Ravi is not a typical angry young man like Lucky Jim, the hero of Amis's novel *Lucky Jim* or Charles Lumley, the hero of Wain's *Hurry on Down.* The angry young men are "disgruntled—with themselves, with their social status, with their work, with their colleagues, with the shabbiness of daily life, with their frustrated aspirations for self-fulfilment, with the competitive spirit, with the inaccessibility of women and drink, with all the small activities whose pursuit takes up their depleted energies."[9] But Ravi who has only very little education and who has to fight against starvation is more pitiable than Jim and Lumley. About the "Jims" of the fifties, Frederick Karl remarks, "Educated to discontent, they find nothing in society that appeals to them, except perhaps female breasts and buttocks."[10] Even though before marriage Ravi had gone to many women he does not do that after his marriage. For Ravi's anger the society is greatly responsible. The insensitiveness of the affluent, their mania for conspicuous consumption, their hardness of heart, the exploitation of small fish by the big—all these infuriate Ravi. He has contempt not only for the Indian and European ladies living in luxury but also for Jayamma who is his employer's wife and his mother-in-law for whom he always uses the term "bitch."

> No feelings, he thought, as if you had no feelings either. They'd shred you to pieces right in front of you as if you weren't there, the feeling part of you. And that went for all of them, the big

> memsahibs down to the would-be memsahibs, petty little squirts like this one who was a petty tailor's wife: all of them, who called themselves respectable and bamboozled you into falling down in worship. (19)

Ravi's resentment of Jayamma "rose like a wall." (23)

Ravi's main complaint against the memsahibs is that they always look at Ravi as if he were made of wood. "They don't seem to see me as a *man*." Sometimes they stand before him and Apu with next to nothing, admiring themselves in the long looking glasses. (155) He has to measure them even when they came out wearing only a bodice. After Apu's death the rich women do not show any sympathy. "A smouldering anger rose in him against the rich uncaring inmates of homes they [he and Apu] had served cheaply. . . . A few days late, and you were out." (184) While one of the memsahibs terminates his service after paying him in full, an Indian memsahib does not do even that. Of course there is some reason for the Indian woman's anger because he has not properly stitched a blouse out of costly material. But she goes too far when she shouts at him, "Fool! Wretch! Call yourself a tailor? A barber would have done better. . . . Fifty rupees a yard, fifty, do you hear?" (185) Ravi "heard, and an anger grew in him to equal hers." Fifty rupees for one jacket for one little girl! Then immediately he thinks of his own poverty. The young tailor wonders at the whims of the rich ladies who instead of wearing Banaras or Bangalore silks buy foreign silks and brocades. (10)

Perhaps the memsahibs—and the wealthy people in general—are "too much" with the poor young man. Ravi always contrasts his life with the memsahibs. Ten days after his marriage the bed which rightly belonged to Apu is taken off and he feels sad on seeing his wife lying on the floor to sleep. He thinks of women "neither younger nor more beautiful than she, in those fine houses whose bedrooms he was invited so casually to enter, reclined on sumptuous beds with mattresses as plump and puffed-up as peacocks' breasts. One day, he vowed, she [Nalini] should sleep soft too." (65) But Nalini, like her father, is very sensible and scoffs at him gently saying that this is good enough and that she is happy. Apu stitches beautiful silk jackets and sells them to the fashionable shop EVE at a very low price and these in turn are sold at a much higher price by EVE to memsahibs. Ravi shouts in anger that they should refuse to sell cheap, Apu tells

him "You aren't going to change it by shouting." (69) Ravi's pride is responsible for his anger and ruin to some extent. His foul tongue reminds us of Jimmy Porter, the hero of *Look Back in Anger*. Apu and his own father are ready to accept life as it is. Ravi feels that he does not belong to their generation. Kannan, the blacksmith, knows Ravi's nature so well that when he picks up some rods to repair the broken window in Apu's house, he is slightly worried for "you could never be sure about youngsters nowadays, they seemed to be driven by devils sterner than those his generation had known." (23)

When Ravi returns home drunk after his tiff with Apu, Nalini warns him: "you are getting high and mighty, putting yourself on a level with high-class folk. . . . Why can't you be content with what we have?" Ravi loses his temper: "Because I want more. I want more. I want a bed. . . . They all have beds, the people we slave for, do you know that? Day-beds, night-beds, double-beds, divans." He adds that they are "not made of different clay." (75) Nalini points out his weakness: "you've been corrupted, . . . You go into all these big houses, see all these things, it gives you impossible ideas." Nalini is happier than Ravi because she feels that "Ordinary folk like us can never be like them." (75) Ravi replies angrily "We can, if we stop thinking like stupid water-buffaloes." (76) Ravi, unlike Apu and Nalini, is too much obsessed with wealth. When he goes into the bedrooms of the memsahibs he peeps into other rooms, catching glimpse of the silk hangings and tall windows, gleaming doors and furniture, feeling an "awe of so much wealth." He would touch the satin-wood surfaces, sinking an inquiring toe into the inch-thick carpets. To live like this, "without worry, without wanting, every need and craving satisfied" is his life-long dream—perhaps it is this which makes him angry and which leads to his ruin. The affluence of his old friend Damodar also rouses in him thoughts of rich food (and ironically enough he has to struggle for a handful of rice in the end!), silk-shirts and enamel cuff-links. Damodar's rose sherbet and crushed ice remind him of the massive ice-boxes in the big houses. (114) Ravi feels "curling up within, grown smaller, even in his own eyes. . . . Cattle in the eyes of the world." (125) When he learns from a man that for an operation for family planning he will get money, he is eager to do it. Markandaya writes, "The earning of men always intrigued, even obsessed him." (125) Ravi wishes to have also a "nice gold watch that he could strap to his wrist, shooting his cuff smartly to show it off as the clerks

in the government offices did." "There was no end to his wants," (127) is the author's comment. He likes going to coffee-bars because it gives him "the sensation of living in high society," and "the notion that with a little luck he too might be like one of those carefree young men he saw, wearing cream linen shirts and enamel cuffi links and ordering platefuls of *marsala dosai* with their coffee." (132) On the Marina beach, he is overcome by the envy of wealth. Of course the way beggars are treated by the rich is unpardonable. But Ravi is hypersensitive and he reacts too much. Nalini reminds him again and again that the rich are rich and it is not easy to change them. Ravi is unnecessarily "angry" even with the "bleached extraordinary skins" of the European ladies, which "almost seemed to belong to another species." (155) His memsahib obsession sometimes raises foolish doubts, for example, when his wife is expecting a baby he wonders whether memsahibs in a similar condition will also be thinking of the coming expenses. Nalini, he knows, "hates the rebellious side of his nature." (162)

Very often even the slightest provocation can rouse Ravi's anger. Raju, Ravi's first-born, pulls the loin-cloth of a poor "Pattani" seller on the beach and the tray on his head tilts and a small quantity falls on the sand. Ravi who is all the time worried about his financial problems starts beating his son in anger and Nalini too gets a few blows. The people around them call him a monster. Even though he was very much attached to Nalini in the early days of their marriage, he starts quarrelling with her also later on. He finds fault with her for everything. Nalini buys a small beautiful fan, which turns him violent. The blackstones in the rice make him shout at Nalini. When Raju is ill, Nalini wants to call a doctor. Ravi asks angrily, "What are we, memsahibs or something to send for a doctor for every ache and pain?" (228) When he repents later and brings a doctor it is already late. The boy dies soon. Nalini's stony silence irritates him. Ravi feels that society should be blamed, "I blame them. *Them*. Society. Guilty of casual murder." (231)

It should be said to Ravi's credit that in spite of his hunger and anger his conscience prevents him from throwing stones at the fashionable store EVE. In his need for money he could have done worse things. The hero of *A Handful of Rice* is a victim of hunger and anger, both of which make his life a long struggle. Unfortunately, he is a "failure with a conscience" like Gerald Middleton, the hero of Angus

Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes.*

NOTES

1. Ramesh K. Srivastava, "The Theme of Hunger in Bhattacharya and Markandaya," *Explorations in Modern Indo-English Fiction*, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Bahri, 1982), p. 172.
2. "A Sense of Identity: The Novels of Kamala Markandaya," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. VI, no. 1, (1971), p. 74.
3. "East and West in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya," *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*, ed. M.K. Naik, S.K. Desai et.al. (Madras: Macmillan, 1977), p. 322.
4. Kamala Markandaya, *A Handful of Rice* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1966), p. 12.
5. P.S. Chauhan, "Kamala Markandaya: Sense and Sensibility," *Literary Criterion*, ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah, vol. XII, nos. 2 and 3 (1976), p. 3.
6. *Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1985), p. 446.
7. *Loc. cit.*
8. Srivastava, p. 179.
9. Frederick R. Karl, *The Contemporary English Novel* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1962), p. 221.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

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Raging Inferno and Fumbling Inarticulacy: Limits of Narrative Technique in Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury*

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A novel is an artistic way of transmitting the novelist's impressions and visions to the reader. Its narrative must be suited to the personality, character, age, education and experience of the narrator and must reflect time and place of action. Only exceptional circumstances or artistic considerations invite violation of the established norms of introducing passages in the narrative incompatible with the nature of the narrator, such as the poetic prose of illiterate Achakka in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and of semi-literate Rukmani in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*. Mira in Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* is quite educated and articulate, though on many occasions she too becomes puzzled before the "raging inferno" of her inner fury and is confronted with the "fumbling inarticulacy" of her narrative.

Belonging to a westernized Indian family, Mira is a young woman—emotional, imaginative and of a contemplative nature but also, on occasions, quite timid and perplexed. Being a woman and having not much experience, she as a narrator has a limited function and becomes ineffective under certain situations. A narrator's consciousness is a window through which internal and external activities of characters are viewed. In Mira's case, the window obviously has a narrow frame, and the glass panes have some scratches, distortions and opacity at certain places. It is Mira's flawed personality which is accountable for the inadequacy and inarticulacy of the narrative in Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury*.

In the very first paragraph of the novel, Mira's timidity, hesitation and undue economy in the use of words re-create a situation in which Richard's death in the political disturbances of 1942 can be

neither denied nor confirmed. Since the novel begins at the end, Mira reminisces her entire past relationship with Richard as also of what is left of him—ashes and dust. The passage leaves many questions unanswered. Much is hinted at and alluded to; nothing is elaborate and clear.

> I had not been home for a long time, and so I had forgotten the little silver box which lay in my cupboard which no one ever touched. A beautiful thing of filigree, with a raised design of lotus flowers which I knew was there, it was so worn away. *I opened it, and inside was the scrap of material I saw torn from Richard's sleeve, from his upper arm where the flesh was like milk, and which I picked from the dust when it was all over. The dust was still there—no reason why it should not be; not reddish hot and swirling madly as on that day*, but faded in this sunless air and settled on the cloth in a fine greying powder. I trembled like a coward standing there, wondering if it would, and then *the slow pain came seeping up*, filling my *throat with grief, flowing from throat to temple, I could feel it behind my eyes.* I closed the box gently and put it away, waiting for the ebb; a little frightened that I could still be hurt so easily, that time should be *so powerless to* staunch that flow.[1] (Emphasis mine)

The problem in the above passage, as also in the entire novel, is that the inner fury of Mira is not adequately articulated. If Richard had been killed in the violence of political movement, she should have mentioned it unambiguously. Even if Markandaya had allowed Mira to do so, it would not have been an inevitable conclusion, for as Frank Kermode says, "We should expect only the most trivial work to conform to preexistent types."[2] What the narrator alludes to can be taken as Richard's death. The scrap of material torn from his sleeve and kept in a silver box cannot be associated with a living person, such a relic being more befitting a dead person. If Richard had been alive, his beloved Mira could have preserved a more appropriate relic—his love letters, his photographs, his gifts—and she could have described the forces responsible for his absence and separation from her. However, the impression one gains is that the violence was so sudden and so ruthless that Mira could secure nothing from him and has no

option but to cling to the remnants of her lover. And therein lies its ambiguity, probably its openness.

If Markandaya, like Henry James, had believed in the open-ended novel, such an ambiguity and openness could have been justified. But nearly all of Markandaya's novels have well-rounded endings and hence the ambiguous conclusion in this novel can be attributed not to her belief or theory but to the flawed narration. This was inevitable for when Markandaya chose to deliver her facts and summaries from the mind of her narrator Mira, the danger of surrendering to the limits of the immediate scene and particularly of the narrator chosen as her "mouthpiece" was evident.[3] Now ambiguity, too, can have its own value and Frank Kermode does find some merit in "the presence of ambiguous clues" but only if the idea of locking them together and attempt at "full hermeneutic closure" are completely abandoned.[4] In *Some Inner Fury*, to use Kermode's expression again, "the erasers are always at work, rubbing out the novel."[5] There are decidedly certain incidents that Mira fails to see and quite a few that she intentionally holds back from the reader. She denies that Govind killed Kitsamy and asserts that she had tied him down, preventing him from killing her brother. At the same time, before the Coroner, Mira fails to recall and to tell the whole thing in a neat sequence in the court. She swears, "I would not lie," but in the next sentence confesses to the reader that she "had lied" there. (155) With this statement, the mystery deepens as to who killed Kitsamy and why.

The function of a narrator is to present an event, an incident, an object or a person to the reader in a way that comes closest to the real. Ingenuity and art have a functional significance in order to clarify, not to confuse them. Wayne Booth calls that person an unreliable narrator who does not speak for or act in accordance with the norms of the work and when "the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him."[6] W.J. Harvey refers to two types of narrators—those who narrate clearly and those who do not—reliable and unreliable narrators:

> Reliable narrators are the trustworthy spokesmen of the particular reality presented in the world of any novel; their view of the world, although it may not be precisely our own, is still reckoned by us to be sane, decent, candid, mature. Unreliable narrators may be of various kind but they all have in common the

> fact that the reader needs to introduce a correcting factor of his own into the narrative, to check or counterbalance some particular bias or blind spot.[7]

Mira belongs to the category of "unreliable narrators" in having failed to give a clear picture of Richard's fate. While the italicized sentences in the first paragraph of the novel unmistakably point to Richard's death, the following passage has certain expressions indicative of Richard being alive:

> When all this is over we can still be friends. Do you think so, darling, he said gently, and put his arms around me and held me, without passion, compassionately. (5)

It is probably the violence that has put a breach in their love. Richard may have been separated but he is not dead. The problem is that the narrator leads the reader into a bewildering world instead of steering him clear of the confused territory. Rather than giving a single clear image, she, like a defective pair of eyeglasses, makes the reader see two images simultaneously without knowing which one is the correct one. The reader may find some pleasure in figuring out these puzzling allusions and hidden intentions of the writer but it is subordinate to the chief pleasure the novel provides. The extent of confusion created can be understood from the controversy in critical studies over Richard's death. S. Krishna Sarma finds nothing "to suggest any physical injury caused to Richard, not to speak of death."[8] On the contrary, Srinivasa Iyengar,[9] H.M. Williams[10] and Meenakshi Mukherjee[11] rightly believe that Richard was murdered by the mob fury. Mira's narrative should have provided, what Harvey calls, "the stability of a gyroscope"[12] with which the reader could have charted his way. Markandaya could have got it done if she wanted to but this is what she does not do.

Whatever the position, one thing is clear that Mira, being a woman, cannot put up with violence and she even wishes to avoid it. Henry James sympathetically refers to Mr. Basant's remarks that "a young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid description of garrison life."[13] The remark becomes quite significant in the context of women in India when it was quite uncommon for them to take active part in the activities associated with India's independence

and it is possible that except for minor incidents, such as the stoning incident referred to in the novel, Markandaya had no direct knowledge of it.

Mira is sixteen and her knowledge of the world is based on theoretical grounds rather than on her own experience. She had learnt a good many speeches but they all failed her at crucial moments and she felt "if I spoke at all I would stammer, and so I kept quiet, holding back even the commonplace politeness of saying they were most kind." (13) Belonging to upper class, Markandaya must not have witnessed the crude form of violence and death, poverty and misery and it is natural that the narrator Mira shies away from them. While visiting Roshan's office, Mira felt "the sense of strangeness of being a woman among so many men." (55) It is this sense of strangeness of being a woman that breeds Markandaya's hesitation in describing the man's world of violence, terror and death. Had the question been about Mira's depiction of a dying person or of death itself, E.M. Forster's observation would have been valid because the experience of death can at best be conjectural: "Certain people pretend to tell us what birth and death are like. But it is all from the outside, and the two entities who might enlighten us, the baby and the corpse, cannot do so."[14] But the problem here is of describing violence and death from outside, and that requires simply a close observation and a good power of narration which Markandaya has.

There is an electronic device attached with a voltage stabilizer which cuts off the inflow of electric current if the voltage goes higher or lower beyond certain fixed points to save a sophisticated electrical equipment from damage. This happens with the point of violence and death when the narrative is often cut off in Markandaya's novels. A device is then found to skirt around violence after which the narrative is brought back to the usual track similar to the electronic device that supplies the electric current again when the normal voltage is restored. When Govind, among others, scolds Premala for feeding the poor children, Kitsamy in his anger and fury wishes to warn him that he had no right to scold his wife but instead of his harsh words and abuses what Mira gives is a long dash with words missing:

> "You will speak to her with respect in future," Kit's voice was mounting. "Remember who she is and . . ."
>
> He [Kitsamy] stopped, for his passion could not eject those

> cruel final words. The two men confronted each other; Kit bright with anger, its banners vivid and flaring in his cheeks; Govind dark and smouldering, the blood slowly ebbing from his face and leaving it the colour of ashes. (36)

It is here that the details of abuses and rude expressions are pushed under the carpet for decency because a woman of Mira's nature is either not used to or cannot utter them. She "did not wish to hear any more . . . already, too much had been said." (36) Markandaya could write about raised and shrill voices of the angered men but not the words which give a ring of authenticity.

Similar situation arises in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* when Raja's dead body is brought home and the workers talk loudly but the bereaved Rukmani fails to register the sense of their conversation which is a device to shortcircuit the unpleasantness of the scene originating from violence and death. It again is the failure of the narrative because one does not remain quiet when one's grown up and earning son dies; Rukmani sits uncomplaining and tolerant with Raja's dead body before her. The tannery people must have disclaimed the responsibility for Raja's death while Rukmani and Nathan must have protested angrily but this is what the novel does not have. The whole incident as narrated seems to be completely inauthentic. The weakest man fights when his son is killed or his land is taken away—not Nathan and Rukmani. Their weakness is not the weakness of a landless farmer or the helplessness of a semi-literate wife but the weakness of the narrative power. Here Markandaya writes:

> He [Raja] had been caught, they said; something about money. What had my son to do with money, who had not a pie of his own! He was not very strong, they told me. They merely laid hands on him, and he fell. As if I did not know how thin and brittle he had grown! But why should others lay hands on him? They told me, but the sense of their words escaped. They told me, but I could not remember. They repeated themselves again and again, but I [illegible]ot forgetting.[15]

In real life, even a worm turns. The poor, when driven to the wall, have been known to fight for their honour and dignity, but here Rukmani, Nathan and their remaining children do nothing. The

woman who could show her courage in fighting physically against Kunthi who could sell her sarees and utensils to pay land revenue, and who much later could with a sense of dignity work at the stone quarry to make both ends meet and return home after her husband's death could not be so weak as not to protest after her son's death. The problem is with Markandaya's inadequate experience and her narrative inarticulacy in dealing with the violent side of life. The novel then becomes like distilled water, purified of baser elements as if its reality were manufactured in a drawing room. W.J. Harvey calls such a situation a kind of "mimetic failure" and "a failure of internal consistency and reality."[16] The actions of Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* and of Mira in *Some Inner Fury* are incoherent with what they are in reality. Markandaya fails in her attempt to extend her imaginative insight into a world of which she has no adequate knowledge. The world depicted in her novel has no perfect correspondence with reality.

Mira becomes a correspondent and craves to have "a free hand to criticize," (57) which Venkatacharya, a young member of the staff, does not approve of. The incident highlights Markandaya's problem as if such implicit constraints in her writings had bred narrative inadequacy. It is this desire of Mira in which Markandaya's own desire is echoed. She would have liked to write but for the constraints of society.

Mira writes about Roshan's social activities—such as about bringing improvement in third-class travel conditions or going to the court, but about Govind she gives only this much information that he is a member of Independence party and that he, like Roshan, organizes the civil disobedience movement, except that he goes "further" and "A lot further. I do not think there are any lengths to which he would not go." (65) It is widely known that the people who wanted to liberate the country adopted violent methods, including fire arms and explosives but about this kind of violence Mira remain reticent.

In another place, Kitsamy accepts his failure in bringing about a desired change in Premala and he asks his sister what the problem is but Mira remains puzzled about what to say:

> Shall I say: She is a little upset, by tomorrow it will be forgotten? Or say: It is of no consequence, a storm that will pass with the night? Say: It is nothing; tomorrow, I promise you, it will be

> as nothing. Say it, promise it. See that look go from his face. I could not. (82)

Here it is not a complete failure of the narrative: at least a picture of the working of Mira's mind exists. If Mira fails to say so it is her, not the narrator's, weakness. However, in the next episode, the narrator's weakness is obvious. Kitsamy is upset over Premala's failure to return from the village. He asks Mira the reason for Premala's going because it is intolerable for him:

> "I cannot stand the thought of her going."
>
> "If she goes it is because—" I began, and stopped short.
>
> "Because there is nothing for her here," he finished. "Why are you afraid of the truth? Why do you not say it?"
>
> But how could I? Truth or no, there are some things which cannot be said. (92)

And it is clearly the weakness of the narrator that she cannot strike a harsh, jarring note when it comes to violence and murder. It is not that violence is omitted altogether; some references do exist here and there but the details are missing. There are references to the burning of the offices of the *Gazette*, the acts of Govind and his imprisonment and acquittal. A boycott of the British goods is reduced to Roshan's avoiding lipstick and cigarettes. Georgette and chiffon saris are thrown into the bonfire in the maidan. The government's repressive measures are reflected in the suspension of Roshan's newspaper and her subsequent imprisonment.

The same timidity and hesitation responsible for the shabby treatment of violence and death are responsible for the absence of progressive action relating to violence; in Markandaya's novels only the completion of a violent action is recorded. The school has been burnt and its skeleton left standing. Premala is dead. The narrative for a moment is choked and suspended as if it fails to report harsh realities of life and then allowed to resume when the moment is past. In her inability to faithfully report such events, Mira condenses, outlines or skips them altogether. Such a narrator cannot be relied upon. W.J. Harvey makes a distinction between the reliable and unreliable narrator:

> Thus one sort of narrator may be honest and decent, telling the truth as he best sees it, and limited only by ignorance or by partial understanding of events. . . . Or the narrator may be unreliable because he is a fool or a liar or profoundly self-deceived. Many novels—particularly modern novels—depend for their distinctive effect upon such narrators and the ambiguities they create.[17]

The narrators in Markandaya's novels often do create such ambiguities, particularly while dealing with deaths. Though the process of dying cannot be reported; at least the after-effect of the death can be detailed but that too Markandaya leaves out. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Raja's dead body arrives; the narrator neither knows *why* and *how* he died, nor does she try to know. The tannery people attempt to explain but it failed to make sense to her. In *A Handful of Rice*, the death of Ravi's son is reported in a more intelligible way. In *Possession*, Annabel's death is reported the same way as Premala's death is in *Some Inner Fury*. It is possible that since a Hindu woman is usually kept away from the cremation of a man in many places, Markandaya might have been ignorant of it and evades such things. The destruction of school and the death of Kitsamy are reported with little details. Before his death, Kitsamy lies in the mud in rain, exactly as happens to Nathan before his death in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Mira keeps Kit's head in her lap, as Rukmani had Nathan's. The fire— "that raging inferno"—was still burning (135) and the frame of the school stood there. Mira gathers courage to describe the collapse of the school—of buckling framework, melting iron girders and then the collapse of everything. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Markandaya successfully describes the fury of flood and famine but hesitates to describe fully the man-made violence in *Some Inner Fury* and finds a way out of the difficult situation by writing: "I closed my eyes. I could not watch the final consummation. . . . When I opened my eyes again the school was a mangled burning heap above which rose sparks and streaks and streamers of fire." (135) Her mother comes but Mira "cannot remember": and Premala's parents come but Mira again "cannot remember." (136) Mira describes:

> Frightened, full of my inadequacy, I went to her, and she—somehow drawing the meaning from my fumbling

> inarticulacy—said quickly, "you must not worry if I am alone." (136)

This "fumbling inarticulacy" becomes more clear when her mother says, "you have told me so little . . . would you rather not?" to which her answer is "there is little to tell. He died quickly" (136) but she never tells. At the end of the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* also, Rukmani wishes to tell about Nathan's death but she is persuaded to do it later. The device is oft-repeated. When confronted with her own fumbling inarticulacy, the woman narrator finds someone to dissuade her from narrating or her memory fails. It is only much later that the readers are informed that Govind had planned an attack on the school and that Kit had died of stab wounds. Here Mira's understanding fails as she tries to understand the discussion the same way as was Rukmani's after Raja's death. Mira writes: "I tried, but I could not concentrate; sound came as clearly as a bell, but sense was a tardy echo. Sometimes it did not come at all." (138)

Another reason for the narrator's inadequate expression is Markandaya's divided loyalty between the country of her birth and the country of her marriage—India and England. Since the novel was first published in 1955 in the independent India, there was the need for maximum details about the British and Indian relations in the wake of the Quit India movement of 1942 but Mira is silent and incommunicative. What Kitsamy feels about Roshan can be said of Markandaya herself: "Born in one world, educated in another, she entered both and moved in both with ease and nonchalance" (79) It is this dual loyalty which forces Markandaya to be neutral, without being critical of either country. Gustave Flaubert had written: "Art should rise above personal feeling and emotional susceptibilities! It is time we gave it, through rigid systematization, the exactness of physical sciences!"[18] In both *Nectar in a Sieve* and in *Some Inner Fury*, the two Englishmen come as missionaries—Kenny setting up a hospital while Hickey starting a school—for the people of villages. Markandaya does not want to hurt the British, as her husband happens to be one, nor the Indians as she is one; hence Kenny is cautiously critical of Indians while Rukmani does not utter a word about the British domination, cruelties and exploitation. Richard, an Englishman, is taken on individual level, detached from the race to which he belongs and which was illegally and immorally subjugating the Indians in the Quit India

movement of 1940s. How could Markandaya close her eyes to the discontent and rage brewing and occasionally erupting among Indians who were itching to free themselves from the foreign yoke? Instead, Markandaya has in a guarded way shown an Indian girl in love with an Englishman, implicitly suggesting that the racial and national animosities do not affect individual relationships.

Jonathan Raban talks of the function of "the macro-narrative" in making the novel a piece of history. Alluding to E.M. Forster's view of portraying historical reality in this context, he writes:

> The novelist is in a special sense answerable to history: his story is located within a particular area of time, and every detail of the decor, every snatch of dialogue, every action of the characters, must be appropriate to the period in which the novel is set.[19]

The events of 1942 are a part of the histories of India and England. It is an important year of the changing relationship between Englishmen and Indians, and, as such, deserved a detailed portrayal. This is what Markandaya does not do. She writes rather casually: "the next year—that never-to-be-forgotten year of nineteen forty-two—had hardly begun." (91) She rightly picks up Govind to portray his animosity against the British. He did not like Premala's visit to the village where Hickey, the missionary, had opened a school, because for him it was the missionaries's assault on the native religion. In order not to report the intensity of the Quit India movement, including the hatred Indians had for the British, Markandaya, as a diversionary device, makes Mira and Richard go for six weeks to the South as if the movement did not exist there. It is this first-person point of view that restricts her vision. Even when they were in the South, Mira could have reflected over the happenings in the north. Raban writes: "One of the functions of the story-teller is to be everywhere at the same time, mindful of past history, conscious of the present and aware of the possibilities of the future."[20] Mira that way thinks neither of the past, nor of the future. While being at one place, she becomes oblivious of the other place. Instead of describing the movement of 1942, Markandaya talks of "creeping hostility," "the brooding watchfulness of people," her own "growing uneasiness" while looking at the hoardings and bills on the walls and refers only to some "obscene abuse . . .

which had been written with a hate such as only an occupied country can generate." (118) The description seems as if the reality had been viewed through a distorted or dull glass. Instead of writing so, why not give the details of feelings of hatred and what generated them and what form the Quit India movement took? L.P. Hartley talks of the novelist's sensibility as "the ability to feel what one is writing about." It is "like feeling in real life" and that "a novelist will never be any good until he has learnt to exteriorize himself and to write about characters who are in no way like him."[21]

As far as the Quit India movement is concerned, Markandaya does not appear to feel what she was writing about. If the portrayal of individual love was her main concern, she could have taken any other background to serve the purpose. She does not give the objective reality.

On another level too Markandaya's narrative technique has weak spots. Many remarks in her novels can be taken, in a flexible sense and cannot be tested on reason. In both *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Some Inner Fury*, there are many remarks of this nature. Rukmani's remarks about bonfire on Diwali, Nathan's naked appearance, and Mira's ignorance of Quit India movement show that they are right only in a "flexible sense." Markandaya writes in a defensive way, diluting such a powerful movement as if it were no more than a passing phase of one's personal relationship and not concerned with the destiny of a nation. In response to Richard's request to translate the abuse, Mira's statement— "nothing I can translate" (118)—can be taken on a wider level to signify that she cannot translate violence and hatred into a good prose. The only violence she depicts is:

> There was a splintering crash, heavy, with glass in it. The sound seemed to zig-zag down the street to me, swelling as it cause. It seemed so loud it almost stupefied me. For a moment I stood where I was, staring at the sky which was suddenly full of beating wings and flying black shapes; and in that moment became aware of another sound, a low soft hiss like escaping gas. Then I found myself running, frenziedly running before that lurching tower of fear could topple down and crush me. (118)

Mira talks then of "unadmitted truth" (119) of their belonging to dif-

ferent races and the existence of hatred in them. The weakness of the movement as reported can be seen by the fact that even Richard's car remains untouched. Jonathan Raban writes:

> One of the ways in which the narrator can order a story is by varying the proportions of time allocated to particular incidents. An important event can be described at greater length than it took to happen, while a whole swathe of history can be dealt with in a paragraph. This flexibility of tempo is one of the novelist's major instruments: he can indicate the relative value of each occurrence by his handling of pace.[22]

It is upto the novelist what he wishes to see and to show and what to ignore, what to see in detail and what to view on surface. Mira takes a vantage point on a hill, focusses her binoculars to view the vale below, closes her eyes and reports nothing about certain aspects of the scene.

When Richard and Mira reach the residential area, the latter refers to "a nightmare" (120) without spelling it out. She wishes to convince Richard that he is not hated among the whole lot of British who are, and that she does not wish him to be out but the things remain inarticulate, as given below:

> "Richard," I said at last, "you mustn't think—"
>
> Nearly there, nearly at the entrance to the stone-flagged carriage way. *Swollen-thoughts, refusing to fit into words, words shying away from their obstinate turbulencies.*
>
> We were slowing down, stopping. *Words had not come. The engine died.* . . . Wordless, Richard put his arm about me. (120, Emphasis mine)

It is here that the words are needed and they refuse to oblige the narrator at the most appropriate moment. Richard feels that everything was over and hence no need to be afraid, she knows it was not so: "It was just beginning, though *exactly what I could not tell.*" Since she did not know the future, she "could not speak." (121)

The nature of the narrator again becomes the cause of narrative inadequacy. Henry James preferred the point of view of "some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested

and intelligent witness and reporter."[23] In both *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Some Inner Fury*, Markandaya has selected Rukmani and Mira as narrators who are deeply involved, tell their own tales and on occasions show their incapacity either to comprehend the situations or to criticize and interpret them. Though of the two, Mira is more intelligent, they remain perplexed and perturbed over smallest provocations which befuddle their minds.

Marjorie Boulton writes that in the first person narration "I" can give "great vitality and conviction" but one point of view "limits the field" because the life is experienced "through one pair of eyes only."[25] Rukmani's narration gives vitality and conviction to her miseries and hunger while Mira's narrative to her relationship with Richard and of Premala with Kitsamy. But Mira obviously "limits the field" not only to what can be observed but also by her refusal to report. It is Markandaya's association with England (her husband's and now her own) which blinds her to the vast political movement spread in the country.

Another reason for Mira's inarticulacy is her narrative inadequacy. Mira has the material to express but gropes for expression. When Kitsamy finally approves of Premala as his wife because of her beauty and accomplishments, he wishes to say something more but cannot. He had expected much more of his wife and was aware of the unpleasantness of the entire process of Westernization he had tried and failed. His consent to marry her must have been out of consideration for his parents and for Premala. Her beauty and accomplishments had existed earlier also when he used to get angry and was reluctant to marry her. He certainly had some reservations and expected something more in his wife. Hence the paragraph:

> And away from the Club he seemed happy enough in her company; he liked talking to her, for she listened well, he was proud of her accomplishments, and delighted in her beauty. *What else*? What feeling, more than all this, for the girl he would call his wife? I watched him closely, but I could not tell, for he had locked the coffers of his thoughts and stood vigilant beside them. (32)

It was this unpleasant fact about Premala's drawbacks that Kit would not like to point out when he was going to marry her for its possible adverse fall out in their domestic life in the future and that affects the

narrative. Mira, too, would not like to cause anguish to her brother by pointing out Premala's deficiencies. Hence she keeps quiet and "could not tell" the answer to "what else?" The problem comes when she, as a narrator, too does not inform the reader what she or Kitsamy had in mind. It is here that the question of narrative inadequacy comes. Even if Kit had "locked the coffers of his thought," it was the narrator's duty to inform the reader what lay in the locked coffers. For the fact is that there is much more that is unsaid rather than said. The inadequacy of the narrator originates from that of the author in having selected for the novel the first-person point of view and witness narrator which fail to face the challenge.

It would be quite unfair if the above limits of Markandaya's narrative were to give an impression that her narrative technique has no positive traits; she certainly has many more positive traits but they are outside the scope of this paper. However, it can safely be asserted that wherever Markandaya's narrative is based on her first-hand experience, she is par excellence. The familiar territory activates her imagination and she vexes eloquent whether it be the description of gold ornaments or the portrayal of an Englishman, a club, the drama of domestic life and the western manners. Similarly, on not so significant issues, Markandaya could be so articulate that each minute detail may make the moment vocal and visual. Two such scenes are: Roshan's act of concealing details of her marriage when Mira's mother anxiously attempts to dig them out, and Premala's clumsy act at the time of dinner while the guests waited for a signal to conclude. Markandaya is superb in portraying these rather insignificant incidents which could have been passed off easily by a lesser artist.

But Markandaya is at her best while portraying the growing relationship with Richard from its fumbling, blundering beginnings to a determined, passionate level. Here each moment, each shade of feeling finds a good depiction and the time seems to stand still. When Richard rejoins her after a period of separation, Mira seems to have recirculation of blood. Her narrative does not have a halting, timid movement but becomes detailed and expansive. Her eyes linger on Richard's physical features and her tongue wags eloquent as she reveals her love for Richard: "There was much more I wanted to say. Thoughts came surging up out of the mind's depths, and in their imperious jostling the bewildered brain was hard put to it to set words to them." (102)

The limits of Markandaya's narrative technique are not a reflection on her capability; they are the limits of her sex, her experience, her marital status, her race and her nationality. Once Markandaya steps out of these bounds, she becomes a free creature and her narrative adopts the gait of a nimble deer now released from captivity that jumps, gallops and scales over boulders and thickets but which when tied down to a peg before a tiger or a butcher's knife becomes frightened and confused, and fumbles for articulacy.

NOTES

1. Kamala Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* (1955; rpt. London: The Harborough, 1960), p. 5.
2. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 24.
3. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 174-75.
4. Frank Kermode, "Novel and Narrative," in John Halperin, ed. *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 164.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
6. Wayne C. Booth, pp. 158-59.
7. W.J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), pp. 74-75.
8. S. Krishna Sarma, "*Some Inner Fury*: A Critical Perspective," *Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya,* ed. Madhusudan Prasad (Ghaziabad: Vimal, 1984), p. 111.
9. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes, "Richard falls a victim to mob fury." *Indian Writing in English* (Bombay: Asia, 1973), p. 439.
10. H.M. Williams believes that Richard is "apparently murdered by a mob." *Studies in Modern Indian Fiction in English.* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1973), vol. II, p. 85.
11. Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice-Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1974), p. 54.
12. W.J. Harvey, p. 97.
13. Henry James, "Art of Fiction," *The Portable Henry James,* ed.

Morton Dauwen Zabel (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 396.

14. E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold, 1927), p. 47.
15. Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve* (New York: The New American Library, 1954), p. 93.
16. W.J. Harvey, p. 87.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
18. Gustave Flaubert, "Letter to Mademoiselle Levoyer de Chantepie" (19 February 1857) in *Novelists on the Novel*, ed. by Miriam Allott (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 271.
19. Jonathan Raban, *The Technique of Modern Fiction: Essays in Practical Criticism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), p. 56.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
21. L.P. Hartley, *The Novelists,' Responsibility* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957), p. 2.
22. Jonathan Raban, p. 57.
23. Henry James, Preface to *The Golden Bowl* (1909 edition), quoted by Marjorie Boulton, *The Anatomy of the Novel* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 31.
24. Marjorie Boulton, p. 33.

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Jai Nimbkar's *A Joint Venture*: A Study in Feminine-Feminist-Female Consciousness

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Jai Nimbkar's second novel *A Joint Venture*[1] (1988) is published fourteen years after the publication of her first novel *Temporary Answers*.[2] Although both novels deal essentially with the same theme . . . the middle-class [married] woman's identity crisis in the contemporary male-dominated Indian society. . . . *A Joint Venture* seems a more mature work in terms of both convictions and artistic representation. The maturity of the writer's vision in *A Joint Venture* could be the result of the long time-gap during which she must have given a thorough thought to the problem she had attempted to explicate in her first novel. Despite its first-person narrative, the earlier novel is far from being autobiographical. The latter novel, in which the omniscient narrative merges into the protagonist Jyoti's point of view, gives us a sense of a lived reality, making the novel almost autobiographically authentic not only in terms of details of a lived life but in terms of a psychological reality as well. What Vineeta in *Temporary Answers* imagines and is scared of living through, Jyoti in *A Joint Venture* actually lives through and finally emerges a more mature woman, ultimately coming to grips with herself. Though the differences between "the reality imagined" and "the reality lived through" is not much, the first novel floats mostly at the level of abstract argumentation, whereas the second one after springing from the actual experience of a lived life reaches transcendental level of "female" sublimity. The temporary answers—love and marriage—shown discovered and snatched away, and perhaps discarded in the first novel solidly concretize into a joint venture in the second. The changed vision of the second novel is due as much to the author's surer grasp of the nature of man-woman relationship in the Indian context as to

the fact that Jyoti is almost twice the age of Vineeta. Jyoti's vision, after thirty years of married life, is much more comprehensive and mature than that of Vineeta who has had only a short stint of marriage in her early twenties and fear of another in her late twenties. Both protagonists suffer due to the exciting inequality between the sexes. But whereas Vineeta remains in a state of ambivalence as regards love and marriage, Jyoti discovers a newer meaning in her relationship with Ram and finally comes home to stay with him for good. The development of Jyoti's consciousness as an alert and thinking middle-class woman from imitation to protest, and protest to self-realization and containment is what constitutes the central concern of *A Joint Venture*. The present article attempts to trace this development of Jyoti's consciousness as a representative example of Indian feminism.

II

In her book on English women writers, Elaine Showalter traces the evolution of a female tradition from Bronte to Lessing.[3] According to her the developmental phases of this tradition correspond to those of any subcultural art. She calls these phases the Feminine, the Feminist and the Female stages. During the Feminine phase, dating from about 1840 to 1880, English women writers wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about the female nature. This is the phase of imitation. In the Feminist phase, from about 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote, women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of feminity and to use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood. This could be termed as the phase of protest. In the Female phase, ongoing since 1920, women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature. This is the phase of self-realization and containment.

In the light of the extremely sketchy summary given above of Elaine Showalter's analysis of the evolution of the English female tradition in literature, one can, surprisingly enough, analyze the evolution of Jyoti's developing consciousness. The imitation, protest and containment phases of the subcultural tradition can be progressively

found in Jyoti's life. Just as the developmental phases of human embryo correspond to those of human evolution, the phases of Jyoti's consciousness correspond to the phases of the tradition of the English women writers. Whether this is just a coincidence or a deliberate attempt on the part of Jai Nimbkar is hard to determine. In the absence of a similar tradition in our country there is nothing unnatural on the part of Jai Nimbkar to be influenced by the women writers from Bronte to Lessing. It is, of course, difficult to place the Indian womanhood in a particular phase. All the phases seem to be simultaneously present in middle-class women of India. And Jyoti represents them. Though Showalter's analysis belongs to any subcultural art, the phases that she talks about can also be seen in all behavioural patterns and thought processes of the members of an evolving subcultural community. The Indian womanhood, particularly in their middle-class setting, like the womanhood elsewhere, forms a subculture of their own. And Jyoti represents that womanhood in a typical middle-class or higher middle-class setting.

III

Technically speaking, *A Joint Venture* is a very satisfying novel. Between the two crucial incidents which occur in the first and the last chapters respectively within the duration of a few days, the whole of Jyoti Deshmukh's married life of thirty long years has been compressed with remarkable brevity. "I just feel I can't continue living with you, that's all" (6) is a stunning announcement made by Jyoti to her husband Ram one evening. Jyoti is in her early fifties and has been married for over thirty years. Instead of taking the declared extreme step of leaving Ram once and for all she somehow agrees to spend a week alone at Mahabaleshwar with a view to thinking things over. Even before the week ends she rushes back to Pune and assures Ram "I've come back, . . . I've come home." (147) The novel is a series of flashbacks omnisciently narrated between these two incidents, and interspersed with Jyoti's brooding over the past and contemplation of the future. The incidents which occur during her short stay at Mahabaleshwar are intermittently narrated and dramatized. The constant narrative shifts from the present to the past and vice versa keep the reader in touch with Jyoti's evolving consciousness over the thirty years of her married life. In the remaining sections of

the article we will study the three developmental phases of Jyoti's evolving consciousness.

IV

Jyoti belonged to a lower middle-class Brahmin family of Pune. Her father worked as a doctor's compounder. She had a younger brother and a sister. Jyoti passed her B. Com. with distinction, topping the list in her college. She decided to continue her education with the help of the scholarships and prizes she had won. Then her father had a stroke which paralyzed him. She being the eldest of the children, the responsibility of family fell on her shoulders. She took a job as a bank clerk, and the possibility of marriage, never very close, receded even further. Jyoti was not exactly a good looking girl. Her father's poverty further marred the chances of her getting married. It is at this time that the first phase of Jyoti's evolving consciousness begun. As the sole breadwinner of the family, she starts imitating the conventional male-role of working for a living. In this phase of imitation, the option of choice is not involved. Imitation becomes an end in itself. It satisfies the imitator. Jyoti is satisfied with herself in this sense. Ram agrees to marry her since "because of her circumstances [she is] more responsible and less spoiled than some girl from a wealthier family." (29)

After their marriage Ram decides to look after the seed business which interests him more than farming. He decides to expand and modernize it. He thinks that Jyoti would be quite useful to him in this adventure of his. When he tells her that she could play an important role in his adventure, Jyoti, initially surprised, realizes the importance of her potential:

> "Me?" she said, surprised. "Having a commerce degree and working as a bank clerk doesn't exactly prepare one for running a business, you know."
>
> "But you can learn," he said, undaunted. "You know the book stuff, the concepts. You can apply them in practice. To begin with, you can start keeping proper accounts. . . ."
>
> She laughed, "Well, that's something I *can* help with."
>
> "Good, that's the spirit. . . . with your help, I'll do it [putting the seed business on a systematic basis]. I have this feeling that together, there's nothing we can't do." (31, Italics Nimbkar's)

The question of Jyoti's choosing to help Ram in his new adventure simply does not arise. Ram has not asked her to choose. He has taken her approval for granted. Jyoti accepts (in fact she cannot reject) his proposal "with pleasure and pride." She is most willing to learn as he has asked her to. In fact she is interested in performing the male-role which she thinks will be considered as on the same footing as Ram's. Ram's final assurance of shared togetherness is deceptive. But she does not realize this. As an imitator she needs patronizing. And Ram is more a patronizer than a partner. The narrator's comments which follow are worth-noting in full:

> It did not occur to her that he had not asked her whether this was what she would like to do. Even if he had, she would have said yes, of course. That was the essence of marriage, the negation of a woman's life up to that point, and a fresh start made with new people, new ideas and values, a new style of life. This was all in the natural order of things, and Jyoti accepted it without resentment, with pleasure and pride, in fact. She looked at Ram's shining eyes and his excitement touched her and drew her within its magic circle. She was happy. (31, 32)

The imitation phase is revealed on other occasions as well. After her marriage Jyoti was happy to find that she was not expected to take responsibility for any housework as practically all the house-work was done by Atyabai—Ram's father's widowed sister. Atyabai's position was partially that of a dependent, because she was a widow and she had no place to go. Jyoti being free, therefore, liked "the idea of working on the farm and had asked her father-in-law if he would teach her about farming." (36, 37)

> He had smiled indulgently and said, "What do you want to learn?"
>
> She had suddenly realized that it might seem insulting to a man who had spent his life farming to have a raw city-dweller come and ask to be taught the job as though it were the simplest thing to do. She had said hastily, "Oh I don't mean I would be capable of learning everything right away. But I would like to start. Maybe I could learn enough to help with the day-to-day

things like irrigating, fertilizing, harvesting." (37)

Aside from the fact that Jyoti is a city girl who tries to learn farming operations, there is a sense of inferiority that always accompanies an imitator. And it is this sense of the imitator's inferiority that is revealed through Jyoti's speech quoted above. In the course of time Jyoti did learn about farming operations. She supervised women workers and quickly learned to live on two levels—the individual level at which she was sympathetic, kind and helpful to them, and professional level where all personal considerations had to be set aside in the name of efficiency and profitability. She felt rather unhappy because she could not exactly adopt Ram's style, which she would have loved to.

In this initial phase of imitation, Jyoti was apparently happy. She felt tireless, and eager to work. She was completely involved in the work she had been doing. What she loved most was the way her personal and working life intertwined. She didn't realize that she had nowhere to go and nothing to do if she left Ram, her work, and Shirgao. The man, the place, the job were all part of a package which she had been given when she married. She could either keep them all or lose them all. This was basically so because she was a woman. And she didn't realize this truth in the initial phase of imitation.

V

The phase of protest in Jyoti's consciousness begins a little later. Because of the systematic work put in by Jyoti the seed business flourishes. Ram, despite Jyoti's disapproval, decides to install a seed-processing plant. He wants to mechanize all the operations of seed processing. Jyoti is not opposed to the process of growth in business, but she fails to appreciate the big jump that Ram has planned to take. Ram has planned the inauguration of the seed-processing plant at the hands of the agriculture minister. He has also arranged a "wet" party for the newsmen with a view to getting a good publicity. Everything that went with the inauguration was nauseating to Jyoti because it meant dishonesty, fraud, double-dealing, hypocrisy and what not. The inauguration of the processing plant marks the beginning of Jyoti's phase of protest. Jyoti's state of mind on the morning of the inauguration has been brought out in the following words:

> It was Bismilla Khan's *shehnai* that had wakened her that time, the day of the inauguration of their processing plant, and her *mental protest* had been as much against what the noise heralded, as against the violation of the quiet of the early morning. (44, Italics mine)

As years pass Ram becomes more and more ambitious until his Triveni Seeds turns into a big business empire under his full control. But Jyoti has only a small place in it now. As a result of this,

> she didn't feel as indispensable, as involved as she used to be in all the activities which formed part of the business. (53)

Jai Nimbkar has depicted a number of incidents which bring out the protest phase in Jyoti's consciousness. Whether it is the matter of naming their first child Pratap, sending their children to an English medium school in Panchgani, buying a costly flat in Pune, inviting people to parties, or not inviting an unwanted journalist like Krishnamurty to children's birthday parties, it is Ram who takes the decision. Jyoti can only protest. But her protest carries no weight. It is true that Ram does not insult her directly but he either ignores her or takes her for granted. The sense of dispensability that she starts suffering from as a result of this becomes unbearable.

Jyoti is treated with respect by people, not in her own right, but simply because she is the wife of a successful man. Even Ram's acknowledgement that "his achievements would not have been possible without her help" (49) is far from being honest. Jyoti is in fact convinced that Ram could have managed to achieve all that he did even without her if he had just put his mind to it. (50) It is in this stage of protest that she finally realizes that she is a non-entity. After thirty long years of apparently happy married life, Jyoti decides to leave Ram:

> Actually she could pinpoint the moment when she had finally made up her mind. It was during pre-dinner drinks when someone asked Ram if he had read Selbourne's book, adding, "I think it's the best book to come out about the Emergency, don't you agree?"
>
> Ram had said, "That's my wife's department. I don't read

books. I am an illiterate farmer." (4)

Ram's implication is quite clear. He has of course more important things to do:

> She had lived through this scene countless times with a tolerant smile, but this evening she found herself suddenly thinking, I've had enough. I want to get out. I am sick of it all, the poses and the dishonesty, the verbal fencing which substitutes for conversation, the one-up-manship. Everything. (5)

And finally she leaves Ram, not for good as she would have liked to, but to spend a week, as a sort of compromise, at Mahabaleshwar to think things over. It must be noted here that Jai Nimbkar has been careful enough to distinguish between Jyoti's sense of dispensability and that experienced by the modern industrial worker who feels like a cog in a wheel. (82, 83) Towards the end of this phase of protest Jyoti has a brief encounter with Aditya Rege, an engineer-businessman. Rege's failure to understand her predicament, and his naivety to take it as her vulnerability indicate not only male insensitiveness but male chauvinism as well.

VI

The last phase of Jyoti's consciousness is the most attractive phase of her inner development. It is the phase of self-realization. She must solve her problem herself—as a woman as distinct from a man. She must realize that she is neither inferior to (imitation) nor equal to (protest) but distinct from Ram. She must play a role not because Ram wants her to play it but because she must play it as a woman. In other words, she must come to grips with herself. She must become herself.

Vinnie, a friend of hers, informs her on phone that Triveni Seeds is in trouble, facing bankruptcy. She also tells her that people are saying that she (Jyoti) has left Ram because of the crisis. This, of course, is not true. On reaching home when she meets Ram she finds him the same old Ram, confident and ambitious. And yet she perceives a difference in him. Significantly she perceives the change for the first time. The narrator tells us:

> Naturally the change had not come about overnight. It must have been going on for quite a while, but she had only now achieved the perspective to observe it. (143)

At this stage Jyoti begins to think about the nature of love, marital relationship etc. But she gets confused. Must people live together simply because they love each other? Must people live together simply because they stand in a certain relationship (e.g. marital) to each other? Perhaps Ram and she expected different things from life. Ram apparently got everything he had wanted, while the things she now knew worth having had quietly slipped through her fingers. They were no longer retrievable. Perhaps she should explain this simple truth to him. It is at this stage that she goes through an epiphanic experience that altogether changes her outlook on man-woman relationship. It is this experience that makes her find her own identity under the prevailing circumstances. It not only helps her find the woman in herself but ennobles herself through a sublime emotion she had never experienced before. The whole incident is a master stroke and reads like great poetry:

> She said, "Why don't you have a wash and come to dinner?"
>
> As he emerged from the bathroom and came to the table, she said, "Your fly is open."
>
> "Oh." He zipped it up, looking a little shamefaced. It made him seem very vulnerable and she felt suddenly protective towards him. It surprised her. This was an emotion she had never felt in relation to him. But now, feeling it, she thought that there was a pattern about it, an inevitability. She thought of her mother tending her father in his last long illness. She realized that it is not merely love and loyalty, it is a certain reversal of roles. The man who takes the brunt of life burns himself out. The image he has cultivated as a dynamic young man is no longer valid in middle age. The personality traits which brought him to the pinnacle of success, now make him seem a little ridiculous, a little inadequate. And the woman who has played a passive role—even Jyoti who had shared so actively in Ram's working life, had after all not felt the stress of being the decision-maker, the weight of ultimate responsibility—been loved, protected, pampered and also perhaps held in contempt, finds

> herself suddenly the protector. Living her life at a low pitch, she stores up toughness and wisdom, and so in the evening of life, becomes the stronger one, and her mate who had all along been dominant, now seems vulnerable, and arouses her protectiveness, perhaps even pity. (144)

Jyoti's decision not to leave Ram does not come as a surrender or reconciliation. Neither does it come as a compromise. It is neither the result of her love for him nor of the necessity of her survival. It is not related to anything external to herself. It is related only to herself as a woman. It is independent of Ram's equally ennobling realization of the importance of *her* role in *his* life. His decision to move back to Shirgao is a result, once again, not of compromise but of understanding. What ultimately matters, in Ram's words, is "the *real* you and me." (146)

VII

By way of conclusion it must be explicitly stated that the purpose of the foregoing analysis has been two-fold. As an important spokeswoman of Indian feminism, Jai Nimbkar has taken certain important positions from time to time regarding the place of women in the Indian society today. This is not the palce to write about those positions of hers. But it must be borne in mind that the character of Jyoti is highly representative of the middle or upper-middle class women in contemporary India. Different women in this class may be at different developmental phases of evolution in terms of their attitudes and consciousness. All the three phases may be simultaneously present in a certain woman at a given time. In this sense the foregoing analysis is a study of Jyoti's character as a representative of a particular class of Indian women.

But the second purpose of this analysis is quite different and might seem far-fetched to some. Jai Nimbkar has been, like her mother the late Iravati Karve, a very brilliant student of sociology. She has also been a voracious reader of the English and the American literature. The developmental phases of a sub-cultural art—particularly of the sub-cultural tradition of English women's writing over the last hundred and fifty years—must have affected her. The dynamics of a sub-cultural art may be applied to the developmental phases of the

evolution of consciousness of the members of another sub-cultural community. While reading *A Joint Venture* it was perceived that the developmental pattern of Jyoti's consciousness as a woman was similar to the one traced by Elaine Showalter in connection with the English women novelists's art. Jai Nimbkar, thus, has attempted to project in her novel a woman's consciousness which has the pattern of Feminine—Feminist—Female phases of development.

NOTES

1. Jai Nimbkar, *A Joint Venture* (The Author, 1988).
2. Jai Nimbkar, *Temporary Answers* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1974).
3. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1977).

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"Roots Dragging Up": Themes in Patrick Kavanagh's *Tarry Flynn*

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Irish literature tends to reflect certain basic concerns of its political heritage.[1] It manifests itself in an unchanging tempo of an emotional bond with the land. This feeling for the land is one of the most constant characteristics of Irish literature and is indeed one of the most vital features. It is this feature which one feels is responsible for a certain inhibiting quality to the literature. Various critics and writers themselves categorise these concerns as provincial, 'a centre of paralysis' as Joyce remarks of Dublin life.[2] It is not so much the provincialism which creates this atmosphere. Rather one of the qualities which stress this aspect of Irish literature is its unchanging attitude to certain basic themes which occur and re-occur. And it is this attitude which is inflexible and dominant and not the quality of provincialism which creates this inhibiting effect. Built around this attitude Irish writers explore this concept in relation to their imaginative rendering of the Irish experience. Related to this concept is the theme of return and exile which is one of the most vital and enduring of Irish themes. In fact it is based on the constant flux and upheaval of Irish society. It becomes a living factor in the imagination of the Irish people ever since the first invasions. Return and exile assume a dominant motif in most of the Irish writers and Kavanagh's *Tarry Flynn* explores this in the context of its rural background.

What is implicit is the notion of reversal which turns out to be a painful discovery of being an alien in one's own homeland. Thus return and exile assumes new dimensions in the novel. It is a reversal of a traditional attitude – exile is associated with life in rural Ireland whereas return occurs when the hero leaves his home. This reversal of values with its ironic connotations occurs in the works of Yeats, Joyce, Beckett and O'Faolain. In Kavanagh it broadens into a tragic

awareness of the condition of life itself, though critics have suggested the dominant attitude in a comic reappraisal of rural life and its values. The comdey serves as a mode of perception to develop a tragic perspective on the evolution and nature of return and exile.

This process of exploration and reversal in *Tarry Flynn* gives it its pecular intensity of vision associated definitely with place. The social milieu of the novel brings out scenes of domestic comedy which really only serve to heighten the essential difference in the personality of Flynn though rooted in the Irish tradition. From the very beginning of the novel the stress is on the isolation of the hero, even from those who love him.

> He was a queer son in some ways. There was a kink in him which she never had been able to fathom.[3]

This alienation is creative in the sense that on the one hand he is bound to the land yet this very love generates impulses which cannot be controlled by the narrow conventions of a church-dominated rigid society. This rigidity and inflexibility runs counter to the creative impulse in Flynn and this creates the tragic intensity of his inevitable escape. It involves a clash between personality and personality rooted in tradition. He is in a sense an outsider looking in. This image of an alien is consistently maintained.

> Tarry never tired looking at these ordinary things as he tired of the Mass and of religion. In a dim way he felt he was not a Christian. In the god of Poetry he found a God more important to him than Christ. His god had never accepted Christ. (10)

Through the image of the alien the structure of the novel unfolds before us his life on two levels – that of the public man the farmer and his private fantasies as frustrated lover. Work becomes a symbol of his inner frustations, his only escape is through his romantic fantasies. It is significant in this context to note that the symbols of work and love are used as contrastive terms to explore the mind of Flynn – the lack of love is subordinated to a passion for work. The passion is transformed into an act of love service. Work ironically emphasizes one of the central concerns of the novel – the essential loneliness and isolation of the individual.

> Tarry, talking to himself, walked home alone. (98)
>
> He had faith in the day and faith in his work. That was enough. Without ambition, without desire, the beauty of the world poured in through his un-resisting mind. (121)

This loneliness, alienation and sense of insecurity is central to the tragic vision of the novel. It shows a breakdown in the traditional social pattern of Irish country life. This feeling of alienation reaches a terrifying climax, terrifying in the seemingly innocous incident at the dance hall, when Flynn is denied entrance to the dance hall. In the midst of an ordinary encounter the event seems to project a nightmarish quality.

> So he made up his mind to wait outside and pick up as much of the pleasurable emotion of the dance. . . .It was after midnight, a beautiful starlit summer night. The belfry of the chapel stood out in the ghostly night light of the western sky. The white of women's legs could be seen straddled on graves. In the distance dogs barked and from the direction of Drumnay the hoarse voices of men going home echoed across the still night valleys. Alone in the shadow of the hedge the thought of the farm came back to Tarry. (157)

It is again at this juncture that work becomes a physical solace for his mental agony. From this point onwards the novel moves fast to its conclusion. The end has already begun, as in a sense the end is implicit from the very beginning of the novel.

> The net of earthly intrigue could not catch him here. He was on a level with the horizon, it was a level on which there was laughter. (178)

After the encounter with terrifying reality, what we may term 'the centre of paralysis' of the novel it is now comic vision. The moment of tragic awareness is over. There is a perceptible slide towards comic relief, a loosening of tension. Fittingly the joke now shifts to the agent of escape, his uncle Petey who has no achievements is now the saviour. The irony is obvious, Flynn who had no room for Christ should turn to this parody of Christ for salvation. The novel ends on this note of reversal. His Christ is an agent of escape. Thus as he

leaves home his return journey is now imaginative. Reality and romance are caught and bound up theme of return and exile illustrating the notion of creativity which lies at the heart of change, whether it be social or personal.

> He was coming home alone from the crossroads of a Sunday evening and when he got home nobody was in the house save his mother who was making pancakes for him. He was wearing a new suit and he had a new soul, brand new, wondering at the newly created world. O the beauty of what we love. O the pain of roots dragging up. (188)

NOTES

1. See Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature from Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), for the interdependence of literary and political developments in Ireland.
2. It is significant that major Irish writers use paralysis as a theme signifying spiritual barrenness. In particular see Alexander Gonzalez, "A Re-Evaluation of Daniel Corkery's Fiction" (*Irish University Review*, Autumn 1984, pp. 191-201). What is interesting is their treatment of the Catholic religion. Corkery believes in the triumph of the quiet life his heroes lead, the emphasis is on the quiet moment, whereas Kavanagh's fiction reveals the energy and creativity of the Irish mind that is nurtured amidst these moments of paralysis.
3. Patrick Kavanagh, *Tarry Flynn* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978) p. 10.

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Isolation and Identity in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

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Black women writers of the twentieth century find themselves confronting two divergent forces, Western culture cutting across African heritage and gender attitudes. Their works seek to deal with both dimensions of being human – the cognitive or intellectual and the affective or emotional.

Toni Morrison's novels right from *The Bluest Eye*, to *Tar Baby* where Jadine is consumed with white societal values and ideas of success, emphasize the need for self-discovery, introspection, self-esteem and self-identity leading to self-actualization. She believes that significant learning is discovered for oneself, that human beings must learn to actualize their potential and learning more about oneself is a motivating factor in the process of enhancing one's self-esteem. Her fictional characters are engaged in a perpetual struggle to establish their identity and emotional sensitivity in an impersonal and threatening world. The development of an integrated self is possible only by imbibing or rejecting the social values of the community in which they live.

It is this sense of painful process of self-recognition that she highlights in *Sula* where not only the main protagonist but also all the other characters suffer from a sense of isolation. In an interview she has stated, "Black community is a pariah community. Black people are pariahs. . . . But the community contains people within it that are very useful for the community."[1]

She further states that the black civilization "in juxtaposition with other civilizations is a pariah relationship. In fact the concept of black in this country is almost always one of the pariah."[2] To heighten this tragic awareness of isolation of the individual and the community she has structured *Sula* in the timelessness of time and space. Spanning the years from 1920 to 1965, time in the historical

sense has been discarded. There are no allusions to the movements that took place during the period and the characters seem to be apparently untouched by them. Time has been used to show linear progression and the reader from his spectatorial position cannot but be aware of what could have or may have influenced the thoughts and actions of the characters. Toni Morrison has deliberately used this device to involve the reader in the development of her characters. "My writing, expects," she says, "participatory reading, and that is what I think literature is supposed to do. The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the colour and sound."[3]

In terms of space the community is isolated from the white folk – it is a sort of gemeinsehaft, to use Ferdinand Tonnies' term. The characters live in Bottom, which ironically enough is at the top of the hill. Their ancestor a slave was fooled by his white master into accepting "freedom" with the promise of land – the land at the top of the hill above the valley "where planting was back-breaking, where the soil had slid down, and washed away the seeds, and where the wind lingered all through winter." (5) It was called Bottom because according to the white master, it was high up from them "but when God looks down it's the bottom. That's why we call it so. It's the bottom of heaven – best land there is." (5)

In this isolated community the two main protagonists Sula and Nel Wright undergo a series of experiences, incorporating racial and sexual experiences. Yet their self-actualization is possible only when their experiences are combined together. They are two fragments of the archetypal self. The main protagonist Sula, has no strong sense of self at the center." She had no center, no speck which to grow. For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself – to be consistent with herself." (118-19) Her quest is to fill the void caused by her isolation, with expriences. Confirmation of the ego, for her signifies total freedom for "hers was an experimental life." (118) She finally identified this freedom as "free fall."

Sula's home is governed by her grandmother Eva Peace and Hannah her mother. So right from childhood she is fatherless and does not have any father figure to relate to. Eva has a troop of male visitors who visit her, to enjoy her company and Hannah a succession of lovers and "it was man love that Eva had bequeathed to her daughters." Neither Eva nor Hannah seem to be able to show any affection, or understading for Sula. She grows up isolated from them unable to relate to either. In a home where conventional norms are not fol-

lowed and where Eva kills her son Plum – a drug addict because:

> I done everything to make him like and he a man but he wouldn't and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he would die like a man, not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man. (72)

It is not surprising then that Sula's feelings at Chicken Little's death are not the ones which one would accept any other person to have. Her passivity and lack of action when her mother was burning also stems from this background. But Sula was in search for an order which always eluded her. Hence she enjoyed not only Nel's company but also found herself at home in Mrs. Wright's orderly household.

Nel's house on the other hand is essentially fatherless. She has a father whom she rarely sees. Her house is run by her mother, a woman who is the Mrs. Grundy of the community – always neat and methodical and correct in her behaviour and one who expects others also to behave in the same manner. This exterior of hers is shattered in Nel's eyes when on a visit to her grandmother she notices her mother's servility and her identification with the white male's attitude to negritude and acceptance of it. When her mother spies at the white conductor in the train "dazzlingly and coquettishly at him," she is reminded of a puppy wagging its tail even when the butcher has unceremoniously thrown it out of his shop. Her contempt for her mother is echoed in the stricken looks of contempt of the two black soldiers who were fellow passengers in the train. It was during this visit that Nel recognizes her identity as a woman and as black. She has to come to terms with it and so decides to grow into an autonomous individual – to discover her "me-ness."

It is this sense of discovery that brings Nel and Sula together they were neither "white nor male, and all that freedom was forbidden to them, that they set about creating something else to be." (52) Both Nel and Sula are in search of an identity which will make them separate, self-actualized individuals, but they do not realize that they are but two fragments of one self "they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for." (108) For the experimental Sula, who seems so confident and rebellious, there is another half too, hesitant, questioning the temperament that needs these culminating absolutes to paste over its own deep uncertainties. This is provided by Nel and Shadrock. Nel has a personality which is at variance with her own,

the willingness to make absolute uncomplicated assertions without fear of the reasonable qualifications that might undermine their decisiveness. Nel and the community in the person of Shadrock with his "Always" and the Deweys who all look alike, are but a few of the individuals who help in nurturing Sula's sense of self, by playing affirmative and positive roles.

It may seem contradictory to think of the community as providing a nurturing role for the development of Nel and Sula's personality considering the fact that after her return from her stay outside Bottom, Sula is considered as "evil" and even Nel whom Sula considers as her only friend shuns her because Sula sleeps with Jude. Yet one must recognize the fact that it is only in this community where Sula is given a place, an identity, albeit an identification with evil. The concept of evil in Medallian does not appropriate to the same extent that a white community would consider evil. Evil exists, just as good exists and one accepts it and gives it a place, and an identity. So for the people of Medallion Sula was "evil" in that sense and they accept her just in the same way that they accept Shadrock's Suicide Day.

Outwardly Sula accepts her role in the community but this also drives home the point that her being considered evil is because she is rumoured to have slept with a "white man." It is the sense of irony that strikes the reader when we consider that Sula may have slept with a white man because she wanted to get over her feeling of being inferior because she was Black. She may have wanted to assert to herself her sense of equality with the white, but her identity within the community is that of a black woman. So for the black community their pariah status is not elevated. It can be so, only when they are recognized as separate and equal and not with a condescending attitude. They prefer to remain isolated and therefore identify Sula as evil – some force to be lived with, given a name and accepted, just as they accept the white man's attitude to them and they have learnt to accept their peculiar status of their dwelling place at the top of the hill which is called the Bottom.

For Nel the process of self-actualization is more painful because she lacks Sula's attitude of acceptance. Her childhood socialization governs her attitude to her marriage and her realization that she never loved Jude in the real sense of the term, that she was not hurt when Sula slept with him but she thought she should be hurt. It is when Eva Peace confronts her with her participation in the act of killing Chicken Little that she has a sense of self-affirmation. Again it

is ironic that like Sula she achieves her own sense of inner identity only when confronted with and identified with evil.

It is not joy that she feels at Sula's death, it is just a sense of self-affirmation because she and Sula are the exterior and interior of the same self. Theirs is a divided self. With the death of Sula the overwhelming message that comes across her, speaks of loneliness and despair. "Now it seemed that what she thought was maturity, serenity and compassion was only tranquillity that follows joyful stimulation." She only too sadly recognizes and confirms the unspoken rapport that she felt for the doomed Sula.

Morrison in her desire to depict a black woman's search for identity has through her characters shown the vision of an alternative world. In a male-dominated social reality she has foregrounded the male and reversed the social model, yet at the same time avoiding the temptation to project social utopias and make any social statements. Her theme of isolation of the individual and of the black community makes its own statement without taking recourse to any social or psychological commitments on the part of the author.

NOTES

1. Claudia Tate, ed., *Black Women Writers at Work* (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. 129.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
4. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

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The Function of Achebe's Literary Devices in *Things Fall Apart*: A Critique

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The greatest challenge for a commonwealth creative writer writing in English is language. He can either let the English language overpower and dominate his creative expression or he can seek to affix the stamp of his creativity on the language of his former colonial rulers, by communicating the lilt, rhythm and cadence of his native speech and ratiocinative patterns. It has been indisputably established by critics such as Eustace Palmer and D. Olu Olagoke that Achebe has conveyed African speech and thought patterns authentically by moulding and shaping the English language to suit the exigencies of his creative demands.[1]

Achebe has made aesthetically appropriate and highly functional use of proverbs, similes, folk tales, folk songs, folk myths and powerfully appealing imagery in his fictional narratives dealing with the native ethos viz. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964). These literary devices have a two-fold function – they present a clear picture of African traditional society and they serve as the fictionist's conduit for communicating African speech and thought patterns with fidelity. Achebe has, in his novels dealing with the past, displayed remarkable linguistic virtuosity and technical competence by integrating these devices into the very core of his fictional fibre while muffling aesthetic dissonance.

Achebe has given us the answer as to why he has made profuse use of proverbs in both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* when he writes: "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten."[2] In the first chapter of *Things Fall Apart* Achebe while recording the conversation between Okoye and Unoka mentions that Okoye spoke half a dozen sentences in proverbs. He does not, however, allow

Okoye to speak these proverbs in direct speech. There seems to be a reason for this; Achebe wants his statement regarding Okoye's use of half a dozen proverbs to foreshadow the prolific use of proverbs in later conversations between Okonkwo and Nwakibie in chapter III and Okonkwo and Obierika in chapter VIII.

One of the very first proverbs which we come across in *Things Fall Apart* relates to Okonkwo's achievements: "if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings." (6) The proverb immediately makes us aware that Okonkwo is a self-made man and held in respect by his clan. The scene describing the conversation between Nwakibie and Okonkwo in the presence of the elderly neighbours of Nwakibie, Ogbuefi Idigo and Akukalia, which comes early in the novel, (16-17) is replete with proverbs. Ogbuefi Idigo, referring to the palm-wine tapper Obiako who gave up his trade for no ostensible reason, says: "There must be a reason for it. A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing." (17) Akukalia then provides us with the reason for Obiako's having given up his trade – the warning of the Oracle that Obiako would fall off a palm tree and die. The next proverb is spoken by the authorial voice. Nwakibie has just narrated an amusing incident about Obiako. It appears that the Oracle had conveyed to Obiako his dead father's desire for a goat-sacrifice, reacting to which Obiako requests the Oracle to ask his dead father whether he had even possessed a fowl when he was alive. Achebe, in an authorial intrusion states that Nwakibie's recital of this amusing incident caused everybody, execept Okonkwo, to laugh heartily because "an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb." (17) Okonkwo's father, Unoka, like Obiako's father, had been in straitened circumstances all his life. Okonkwo, while asking for the loan of yam seeds from Nwakibie, has to impress his own worth upon Nwakibie, Ogbuefi and Akukalia and yet justify his having to sing his own praise: "I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of hard work. The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did." (18) Nwakibie's reply contains another couple of telling proverbs: "Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching. I have learnt to be stingy with my yams. But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look." (18)

Shortly after this conversation-scene we come across another apt

proverb spoken by an old man as he refers to Okonkwo's achievement and his phenomenal rise from a poor man to one of the lords of the clan: "Looking at a king's mouth . . . one would think he never sucked at his mother's breast." (22) In the conversation between Okonkwo and Obierika, shortly after Ikemefuna's death, we come across another couple of meaningful proverbs. Okonkwo after praising Maduka (Obierika's son) who is a good wrestler, just as Okonkwo was, expresses his disappointment with his own son Nwoye. Obierika tries to give him hope by saying that both children are still too young, to which Okonkwo replies: "Nwoye is old enough to impregnate a woman. . . . A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches." (58) Okonkwo uses another significant proverb a little later in the same conversation when he defends his act of killing Ikemefuna: "The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger, . . . A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into his palm." (59)

During the marriage negotiations for Obierika's daughter Akuekue, another striking proverb is spoken by Obierika's elder brother to emphasize the similarity between father and son: "When mother-cow is chewing grass its young ones watch its mouth." (62) This similarity between Obierika and Maduka is in sharp contradistinction to the dissimilarity between Okonkwo and Nwoye and the proverb which Achebe puts in the mouth of Maduka's uncle is meant to highlight this fact.

Part I of *Things Fall Apart* closes with a singularly apt proverb. Obierika is sitting in a pensive mood and trying to comprehend the nature of the tragedy which has befallen his bosom friend Okonkwo. Okonkwo has offended the mighty Earth goddess by killing a clansman even though the death occurs because of an accident. If the clan did not exact punishment by exiling Okonkwo, burning his houses, killing his animals and destroying his barn, the anger of the goddess would be unleashed on the entire clan; reasons Obierika, and Achebe concludes this interior monologue with a proverb which is particularly significant: "if one finger brought oil it soiled the others." (112)

Okonkwo while talking to his wife Ekwefi about the thanksgiving feast which he plans to give his mother's kinsmen at the end of his exile at Mbanta utters another aesthetically appropriate proverb. Ekwefi suggests that two goats would be enough for the feast, to which Okonkwo retorts that he is giving the feast because he has the

wherewithal to do so: "I cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle." (148) And, during the thanksgiving feast, Okonkwo's uncle Uchenou, the oldest member among the assembled throng of kinsmen sees fit to utter the proverb: "An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him." (149)

Achebe uses an artistically effective proverb to sketch in the supercilious and unaccommodating Reverend James Smith, who rides rough-shod over native sentiments in his attempt to firmly establish Christianity in their midst: "There was a saying in Umuofia that as a man danced so the drums were beaten for him. Mr. Smith danced a furious step and so the drums went mad." (165) Achebe uses another meaningful proverb in his character-sketch of the over-enthusiastic neo-convert Enoch: "Enoch's devotion to the new faith had seemed so much greater than Mr. Brown's that the villagers called him the outsider who wept louder than the bereaved." (165)

Palmer is one of the first critics to draw our attention to Achebe's use of the literary device of proverbs, and to the fact that in *Arrow of God* proverbs recur like motifs and are essential to the novel's meaning.[3] This recurring of proverb is also to be observed in *Things Fall Apart*. Towards the end of the novel we find Okika uttering the proverb: "Whenever you see a toad jumping in broad daylight then know that something is after its life." (180) This proverb is used to refer to the serious and desperate situation which has arisen due to the clan's conflict with the white man's religion. It is Okika who speaks the other proverb that recurs. This is the proverb which is spoken in the folk tale by the bird, Eneke: "Men have learnt to shoot without missing their mark and I have learnt to fly without perching on a twig." (81)

Achebe's language is fecund in similes as in proverbs. These similes convey powerfully alluring images and are used to describe the characters, their achievements and states of mind, to narrate various occurrences and describe natural phenomena.

The harvest in the drought year is "sad, like a funeral," (20) the night on which Ezinma is taken to the Oracle's cave is "as black as charcoal" (84) and the Hills and the Caves in which the Oracle's shrine is located are "as silent as death." (100) The sands before the rain feel "like live coal to the feet." (116)

While depicting Okonkwo's prowess as a wrestler, Achebe writes: "Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in winter" (1) and while referring

to the growth in his fame, he uses the captivating simile: "Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bus fire in the harmattan." (1) When in good health "Ezinma bubbled with energy like fresh palm-wine," (70) Obierika's compound is "as busy as an ant-hill" (100) during the festivities relating to Akuekue's marriage. Okonkwo and his family's first year in exile is likened to "learning to become lefthanded in old-age," (116) and his being cast out of his clan is expressed in the appealing simile: "He had been cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting." (117) The tremendous impact which Christianity has on Nwoye is communicated by the use of a singularly effective simile: "The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth." (132) The neo-converts to the new religion in Mbanta are described "as a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens." (137) One of the oldest members of the *umunna* while speaking after Okonkwo's thanksgiving feast laments that the new religion has made a mockery of their traditional religion and time-hallowed religious practices and says that converts "can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors, like a hunter's dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master." (150)

Achebe uses an appealing simile to convey that no single member of the clan is indispensable to it, that the individual is dependant on the clan and not *vice versa*. Okonkwo on returning to his clan from an exile of seven years discovers that he will have to again make a place for himself in the clan for "The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another." (153) The band of *egwugwu* as it moves to destroy Enoch's compound is compared to "a furious whirlwind," (168) and the momentary check in its onrush as it moves to burn the church in Umuofia is "like the tense silence between balsts of thunder." (169) The simile used to depict Umuofia after the arrest of its six leaders is particularly appealing: "Umuofia was like a started animal with ears erect, sniffing the silent, ominous air and not knowing which way to run." (175)

Apart from the powerfully captivating and appealing images to be found in Achebe's similes we also find some other aesthetically surchaged images in *Things Fall Apart*. The drummers in the wrestling scene become "possessed by the spirit of the drums" (40) and after taking a brief rest they become normal human beings. These two states of mind are expressed in language which is rich in imagery. "The air, which had been stretched with excitement, relaxed again. It

was as if water had been poured on the tightened skin of a drum." (42) Okonkwo says of Nwoye, "A bowl of pounded yams can throw him in a wrestling match," (116) two or three moons before the rains come. There is "an angry, metallic and thirsty clap" (116) in the thunder which precedes the rain and a mighty wind "combed" the leaves of the palm tree into "flying crests like strange and fantastic coiffure." (126)

Okonkwo seeking to come to terms with his anger, frustration and disappointment at his eldest son's conversion to Christianity comes to the realization that "living fire begets cold, impotent ash." (138) Achebe uses image-rich language to convey the strong emotions which cause characters to utter curses such as "Agbala shave your head with a blunt razor!" (93) and "Go and burn our mother's genitals." (139) He also couches his language in imagery to convey the deep anguish the clan feels when Enoch commits an unimagined sacrilege by unmasking an *egwugwu* in public: "It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept." (166) Achebe takes recourse to another telling image, when he makes Okonkwo, who is contemptuous of Egonwanne, say "His sweet tongue can change fire into cold ash." (178) The depth of Obierika's sorrow on Okonkwo's death and his pent-up grief and anger are again skilfully conveyed by Achebe through the powerful image which we come across in Obierika's speech "and now he will be buried like dog." (185)

The longest folk tale in *Things Fall Apart* is the one about Tortoise and the feast of the birds by their hosts in the sky, related by Ekwefi to Ezinma and spans four pages. (85-88) The folk tale tells about the value of clan unity and how Tortoise was punished because he used his cunning to put his interest above the clan's interest. It also stresses another important clan-value—the belief in customs. The birds agree to take on new names at the behest of the wily Tortoise because they want to respect the age-old custom of their hosts in the sky; the clever Tortoise is able to gorge himself with the best part of the feast by explaining to the birds that it is the custom of their hosts in the sky to serve the spokesman first by playing upon the words "all of you" which he has taken as his new name. The people of the sky sense nothing amiss when the Tortoise eats most of the feast himself because they think it must be the custom among the animals to let their king (whom they have mistaken the Tortoise to be) have most of the food and to eat the left-overs.

Achebe has stated that "I would be quite satisfied if my novels

(especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them."[4] While critically evaluating Achebe's use of folk tales, folk myths and folk songs we must keep this statement of the author in mind, as it clearly implies that it is Igbo life which is as important a character in his novels set in the past as Okonkwo or Ezeulu. We would otherwise be led into making unduly harsh value judgements such as the one made by David Cook when he writes: "The intimate display of the whole life of the Igbo is an integral part of the subject of *Things Fall Apart*, yet this does not have to be recounted in disconnected incidents, such as we sometimes find, with little part to play in the development of plot or characterization or other aspects of the novel."[5]

In part I of *Things Fall Apart,* Nwoye remembers the tales his mother used to tell him as he listens to his father's "stories of the land—masculine stories of violence and bloodshed." (46) As Nwoye remembers these folk tales, especially the one about the quarrel between Earth and Sky we gain a meaningful insight into his emotional make-up. The folk tale about Mother Kite and her daughter (125) projects Uchendu's attitude regarding the massacre at Abame and is contrasted with Okonkwo's view that the men of Abame should have anticipated the danger which lay ahead and should have armed themselves and been prepared to fight till death. The Mbanta clan's attitude towards the onslaught of colonialism is that of circumspection and is typified by Uchendu's recital of this folk tale which teaches "Never kill a man who says nothing." (124)

Palmer makes a perceptive comment regarding Achebe's assimilaton "sociological lore" into the very core of *Things Fall Apart*: "it is presented as part of the life and activity of the people and is almost always related to some aspect of human character."[6]

However Palmer is mistaken when he states that the women's song after the wrestling match is in Okonkwo's praise[7] when it is actually sung in Okafo's praise.

Who will wrestle for our village?
Okafo will wrestle for our village
Has he thrown a hundred men?
He has thrown four hundred men.
Has he thrown a hundred cats?

He has thrown four hundred cats.
Then send him word to fight for us.

This song is undoubtedly relevant to the wrestling scene as it brings this scene to an artistically neat finish and also because it echoes the wrestling feats of Okonkwo which have become legendary. Okonkwo had thrown Amalinze the Cat "in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights." (1) The folk song too, refers to the throwing of cats, though their numbers are in hyperbolic hundreds.

The scene portraying the marriage festivities of Akueke (100-6) is also brought to a close with the recital of a folk song. (105-6) Here a number of "gay" or ribald songs are sung and these are in harmony with the joy and merriment of wedding occasions.

Shortly after the conclusion of Amikwu's (Uchendu's fifth son's) marriage festivities, there is a short scene in which Uchendu in his family gathering seeks to console and advise his nephew, Okonkwo, regarding his misfortune. Uchendu's conclusion of his speech with a couple of lines from a folk song is particularly appealing:

For whom is it well, for whom is it well?
There is no one for whom it is well. (120)

"Kotma of the ash buttocks" is a brilliantly improvised satirical song and though initially sung by those Umuofia men who are the white man's prisoners gains currency as a folk song:

Kotma of the ash buttocks,
He is fit to be a slave.
The white man has no sense,
He is fit to be a slave. (156)

The folk myth of the market of Umuike gives us a meaningful insight into the mental make-up of the Umuofia men and also conveys the feel of native speech patterns in sentences such as: "There are so many people *on* it that if you threw up a grain of sand it would not find a way to fall to Earth again." (Emphasis mine) The use of the preposition "on" and the image of the grain of sand getting entangled in people's hair and not falling to the earth is noteworthy.

The folk myth about the locusts which come once in a life-time, reappear every year for seven years and then disappear for a life-time into their caves guarded by a race of stunted men, is highly functional artistically. The Oracle's prophecy, as reported by Obierika, (123) uses the image of the locust to stand for the advent of the white man and there is a subtle interplay between this image and the folk myth causing ironic undercurrents.

Achebe, then, is a conscious literary artist, who in his novels dealing with the African traditional way of life has made sustained and deliberate use of proverbs, similes, folk tales, folk songs, folk myths and compelling imagery to firmly ground his fictional narratives viz. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* in the socio-cultural reality of the African past and to authentically convey the feel of African speech rhythms and thought patterns.

NOTES

1. Eustace Palmer, *The Growth of the African Novel* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), p. 75 and D. Olu Olagoke, "The Language of the Nigerian Novel from Tutuola to Soyinka," *Subjects Worthy of Fame*, ed. A.L. Mcleod (New Delhi: Sterling, 1989), pp. 98-99.
2. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: William Heinemann, 1958), p. 4.
3. Palmer, pp. 77-78.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
5. David Cook, *African Literature* (London: Longman, 1977), p. 78.
6. Palmer, p. 72.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

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From Reality to Myth: A Study of Two Novels by Samuel Selvon

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A close observation of Caribbean writing reveals that these islands lack an indigenous, pre-European history and that has created a sense of historical void in the writers. The only known history is that of the colonisers, colonisation and slavery. Europeans had gone to these islands not as settlers but with the main intention of exploiting them for economic advantage. Slaves from different parts of West-Africa with diverse traditional myths and beliefs were made the work force, and natural inhabitants of the island and when slavery was abolished by the Emancipation Act, labour was imported from the East Indies. With the two world wars Americans and Germans made their way to the Islands. This mix of European, African and Asian people in an environment where none had deep roots is the reason for the uncertainty of a cultural identity. This therefore becomes the dominant note in West Indian writing. The double exiled writers preferred to be referred to as Caribbean writers than as writers from West Indies as the term implies colonial limitation. They are thus first Caribbean and then only Barbadian, Trinidadian, Jamaican or Grenadian.

The West Indian novelists of this century have made it their prime concern to focus their attention on the evils of their social and economic systems. For the majority, the pervasive consciousness was that of race and colour, lack of a history to be proud of and the absence of settled values. The mingling of race and colour has resulted in the creation of Creole community and a culture which is typical of the Caribbean. Four major writers have made their remarkable presence felt and they are V.S. Naipaul, the Oxford educated writer from Trinidad, who has isolated himself from his fellow writers claiming "I think of myself as a citizen of the world," George Lamming the

writer from the Barbados who has turned the relationship between Caliban and Prospero into an allegory of colonialism and of the relationship between slave and colonist; Wilson Harris from Guyana, who sees the cultural diversity of the West Indian experience to be an opportunity for growth and enrichment rather than despair and the pioneer in Trinidadian fiction Samuel Selvon the writer who has moulded the folk tradition of the Caribbean into a recognized literary function.

Of these writers Samuel Selvon (1923) and V.S. Naipaul (1932) are of Indian descent, domiciled in London since 1950. Naipaul started publishing his work six years after Samuel Selvon and published his novel *A Brighter Sun* (1952). Though Naipaul and Samuel Selvon are of East-Indian descent and are from the same island, there is not much common ground of interests between them. Probably this could be because of their different religious and social background. On the other hand there is similar community of intrests and understanding between George Lamming and Samuel Selvon, though they belong to different social groups. Talking about this association Lamming in his *Pleasures of Exile* says:

> What holds Selvon and myself together is precisely what could hold Indians and Negroes together in Trinidad. It is their common background of social history which can be called West Indian, a background whose basic feature is the peasant sensibility. Neither Sam nor I could feel the slightest embarassment about this; whereas Naipaul, with the diabolical help of Oxford University, has done a thorough job of wiping this out of his guts.

Naipaul is a Trinidad East Indian who could never come to terms with the Negro Creole World or East Indian World in Trinidad, the greyness of English life or even with life in India where he tried to search for his roots. He had made reality a farce in his early works. The attempt of the Creoles and Indians to be like the whites was ridiculed and viewed with contempt rather than compassion. Somehow he is of the opinion that West Indian history can never be satisfactorily told because nothing was created in the West Indies, where there is neither achievement, nor a tradition of accepted values. He might not have given a pleasant interpretation of the life he has observed but has succeeded in giving a profoundly compelling and often

poignantly moving vision of his world. Compared to him Samuel Selvon is a much simpler novelist with a consistent love for the West Indian peasant. He is rather generous and has never been sarcastic about his characters. He is always with them trying to understand the quest for harmony which is very evident in his young protagonists; who could be East Indian, European, Creole or Chinese. He is consistent in recording the social changes that took place during the war time and the manner in which this affected the Trinidadian common folk. He is not a writer inclined to write about the past but a writer who lives for the present. He sees himself as belonging to an isolated generation because of westernization. The process of westernization was not slow in Trinidad but it was quite rapid.

Starting with his first novel *A Brighter Sun*, Selvon has written ten novels so far and a collection of short stories entitled *Ways of Sunlight*. His novels can be grouped into two categories – those that are set in Trinidad, in and around the capital Port of Spain; and those that deal with West Indians in London, in search of houses, jobs and women. In the first category we have *A Brighter Sun* (1952), *An Island is a World* (1955), *Turn again Tiger* (1958), *I hear Thunder* (1963), *The Plains of Caroni* (1970) and *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* (1972). The novels belonging to the second category are *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *The Housing Lark* (1965) and *Moses Ascending* (1975). His latest novel *Moses Migrating* (1983) is a class by itself as Moses comes back from London to Trinidad but migrates back to London. In all his novels and short stories Selvon has given sensitive treatment to human behaviour in a situation of social change and the psychic hurts that accompany it. Two novels of Selvon – his first *A Brighter Sun* published in 1952 and his last *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* published in 1972 – are a sensitive protrayal and delineation of social consciousness in the West Indies and the disruption it creates in social life. Finally, how the conflict is resolved by an understanding and awareness of the human element. Quite significantly the first novel is set in the pre-independence era and the later novel in the post-independence.

During the 1940s just before the declaration of Second World War, Trinidad has seen the immigration of Jews and Germans into the Port of Spain. This influx has brought about rapid social changes and the crisis reached a peak when the Americans started building bases and connecting roads from the villages to the capital Port of Spain. In spite of these new changes the relationship between the

whites and non-whites maintained a status quo. When the island was going through the turbulent throes of the World War, the peasant community remained ignorant, insulated against the consequences of war and the subsequent predicament. Against this background Selvon has narrated the story of Tiger, a sixteen-year-old, inexperienced, uneducated boy who was forced to marry Urmilla and live on his own with two hundred dollars in cash, a milch cow and a hut in Bartaria. Besides the Central Indian couple, Tiger and Urmilla, the other characters of importance are Negro, Chinese and Portuguese, while some of the vivid minor figures are American and English. The entire action of the novel is set between January 1939 to January 1945, the year in which the Prime Minister of England declared peace. The declaration of war was not an event of importance to the people of the island – they hardly took any notice of it, but the day peace was declared there was sudden celebration and pandemonium in Trinidad when they were allowed to indulge in two days of Carnival.

The migration of the young couple from the rural plantation of Chaguanas to the suburbs of the capital Port of Spain had alienated Tiger from his friends and environment. There was a sudden transformation from childhood to adulthood, from a peasant background to semi-urban surroundings, undergoing all the while a process of creolization. Racial tensions between Indian, Creole and White communities are set against a wider background of international affairs – the Second World War. The tension between Creole and Indian and the transition between the rural and urban population are explored throughout the book. Tiger's story is connected with the comparable evolution of neighbouring couples like Creole Joe Martin and Rita, with the result that the destiny of Tiger is seen in a historical perspective: obligations and tensions appear between the two groups in society.

In the novel, Bartaria was as cosmopolitan as the city. Indians and Negroes were in the majority. In the back streets the Indians lived simply observing their native customs and tending their fields. The Negroes were never farmers and most of them did odd jobs in the village or city. Tiger moves to this place immediately after marriage "the biggest thing to happen, bigger even than the war, was Tiger's wedding." The whole village turned up for it, "Negro and Indian alike." (4) He started his livelihood acquiring "two lots of land."

By 1941 there was a change in the economic and social life and

outlook in Trinidadians. United States personnel arrived and the construction of bases provided work at high wages. Many from neighbouring islands, lured by Yankee dollar came to Trinidad to make their fortunes. Acquisition of lands for the bases left hundreds homeless and posed a problem. Americans have become imposters and the harmony of the island is disturbed. Villagers who have accepted the white man rejected the Americans in Trinidad. The complacency of the village is shaken and starts showing preferences for the power block. The idea of self-Government has come to the peasants in preference to the administration by the British and the Americans. The blacks in Trinidad had become aware of the incongruous situation of the blacks in America.

Tiger's neighbour Joe Martin is a Creole born in George Street. The girl Ethel who bore him had many boy friends as she at an early age found out that whoring was the easiet way to make a living. When she deserted him, it is Ma Lambie the Negress who has brought him up. There are many such people in urban areas where there is dense negro population. They are capable of deep love or deep hatred. They have no typical culture, religion or bonds and everything according to convenience. Marriage is not a ceremony for them but just "staying together." That is how Joe Martin along with Rita shifts to the Bartaria to enjoy better living conditions. What is denied to them becomes precious in the lives of these people with Rita thinking "why we creole can't live like Indian, quite and nice?" and Urmilla, Tiger's wife who knew from experience that Indians fought and quarrelled as much as Creoles thinking, "It was the thing all over. Only white people. If they could only be like white people!" The racial differences are forgotten at the time of crisis and a sense of togetherness prevails between Creoles and Indians. The younger generation left to fend for themselves develop close bonds to face the reality but the older generation stands firm in maintaining distance between the races. Tiger's father chides him for being friendly with Joe Martin and Rita saying:

> Is only Nigger friend you makeam since you come? Plently Indian live am dis side. Indian must keep together.

and his uncle advising him: "Nigger people all right, but you must let Creole keep they distance." This leaves Tiger in serious contemplation, "Why I should only look for Indian friend? What wrong with Joe and Rita? Is true used to play with Indian friend in the estate, but

that ain't no reason why I must shut my heart to other people. Ain't a man is a man, don't mind if he skin not white or if he hair curl?" This acceptance from the young East Indians of Creoles is new change that has come to Trinidad in nineteen forties. Time and again in the novel many have realized the necessity of congenial existence between non-whites. Sookdeo, the man of experience and education who refuses to accept the friendship between Creoles and Indians who are referred to as coolies, dies leaving a prophetic message to the village, "Don't mind you is Creole and I is coolie! Everybody must live good together a friend." (153) The plight of Sookdeo is the plight of many Indians who have gone to the Islands as an indentured labour on the white man's plantations.

By the time it was 1942, the tentacles of the war reached into the country as in the shortage of foodstuffs and the putting up of bases here and there, villagers continued with their life. The news that the enemy had retreated was treated in the same manner as news of an adverse advance. Tiger becomes conscious about the cost of living and knew that something big was happening, men were killing each other for something. Decides to educate himself by learning, reading and writing with the help of Sookdeo. The exercise made Tiger feel that things happened to other people, but nothing was happening to him. The curiosity to know the world prompts him to make a trip to the capital, Port of Spain along with Boysie, a much disliked person by the elderly Indians in the village as he believes that nationality and colour are nothing compared to the happiness of the individual. He is a typical cosmopolitan, awaiting a chance to leave Trinidad to America or England to turn over a new leaf. He is typical of many Indians that wished to leave West Indies in search of greater freedom. The spirit of freedom that is there with Boysie makes Tiger feel a revulsion towards his wife and child, whom he identifies as hurdles in his way to progress. For the first time the idea of migrating to urban land possesses him, "I going to read plenty books, about America and England, and all them places. Man I will go and live in Port of Spain; this village too small, you can't learn anything except how to plant crop." (82) His ideas take concrete shape when he sees the Red House in the Port of Spain and decides "'One day I going to get education and come a big man in this country. I going to be like big shot people in the Red House." (88) He gets shattered psychologically when he is ignored in preference for a white person in a shop. Boysie deciphers the situation with his experience telling him "Lis-

ten, is one ting yuh have to learn quick, and dat is dat wite people is God in dis country, boy" when Tiger potests that he is not Black but Indian "Don't mind! As long as yuh ain't wife, dey does call yuh black, wedder yuh coolie or nigger or Chinee." (95) This strange encounter with truth makes Tiger contemplate "why I living? What all of we doing here? Why some black and some white? Why some people rich and some people poor? But is that they fighting a war for?" His questions have no answers but he decides to become rich and joins Yankee service when they start building the road. The second alienation from his garden brings out the finest in Tiger making him a chronicler of change of social scene in the village. He decides to write a book on how he had garden, the Americans came and how he had to leave and how he had to build the road. He starts equipping himself to record things and in the process improves his skills in learning and communicating in standard English leaving the dialect. This love for words and exact meanings alienate Tiger from his surroundings. In the process of learning and mastering the master's language, Tiger imbibes the knowledge to please the boss and invites them home hoping to get promotion. In the course of the Dinner, Tiger gets to know the American way of seeing culture and politics. Tiger impresses the Americans and they compliment Tiger and his island Trinidad. It is like a tribute paid to Tiger personally when he says: "It's a fascinating place, but besides that, the people are up-to-date on everything and keeping abreast of the times too." (173) Tiger who struggled to be Western both in thought and ways fails to appreciate the same in his wife. The basic desire to be traditional and living to the expectation of his people overpowers him and acts gruff with his wife.

Corresponding to the changes in the inner life of Tiger, Trinidad also experienced many things for the first time during 1942-43, when an enemy submarine sneaked into the harbour and blasted two ships at anchor. Foodstuffs were subsidized by the Government to keep down prices and in spite of all this cost of living rose in 1943. The campaign to grow more food was intensified.

When Tiger realized that he was going to have one more child in the house he feels betrayed. This lets him down and estranges him from his immediate family and neighbours. The job he was enjoying so far becomes distasteful. Unmindful of Tiger's disinterest the road work progresses. Life has become lifeless for him and Tiger was forced to undergo one more traumatic experience. When Urmilla

falls sick he goes in search of finding medical assistance for her and in the process goes to a Negro doctor and an Indian doctor who refuse to attend on to the patient in the night. It is the white doctor that attends on to Urmilla. This incident makes him completely a transformed person and realizes that money has no value and it is ethics that count the most in life. He voices his opinion in public:

> A wite doctor, man! You don't see how is a shame! I mean, you don't see how wite man must always laugh at we coloured people, because we so stupid? You don't see why it is that black people can't get on in this country at all at all? (187)

The necessity of thinking about general good of the society strikes him and he hopes to look forward to a situation where society can raise to the heights of self sufficiency, irrespective of white, non-white feeling. With the opening of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway road the tensions that surrounded Tiger get dissolved. He makes peace with his surroundings, making compromises and amendments to his personality. Once this inner harmony is achieved life appeared bright for Tiger. With the declaration of peace in January 1945 people expected changes in their lives and in the society but the reality for Tiger is "Plenty things happened, but nothing new." He awaits the results of the story-contest organized by the *Trinidad Guardian* for which he sent his highway story.

It is in 1950 that Sam Selvon left for England along with George Lamming. This novel was in progress at that time and has recorded in his book *Pleasures of Exile* how Selvon liked to work on the book and praised him as "the greatest folk poet the British Caribbean has yet produced." Selvon worked as Journalist for *Trindad Guardian* for nearly five years immediately after the war. He identified himself with the island and has confessed that he has recorded part of his experiences and realized change is inevitable in the process of westernization. The striking feature about the novel is that Selvon has not discussed about cultural and religious background or the roots of the races who are the rightful natives of the islands. He tried to create historical sense of the past to the situation he dealt with by recording the social change quite carefully and methodically.

The much talked about Yankee built road that is in *A Brighter Sun* is seen as a narrow strip of asphalt and in deteriorated condition in *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* which is published twenty years after

the publication of the first novel. In between Selvon has written many other novels and enjoyed many more scholarships which gave him a chance to see the world in a new light and desire freedom. Many changes had taken place in Trinidad also. The Yankees had left and Trinidad had recovered from the wounds of war and its repercussion and had become an independent island with a much desired self-Government. The exodus made by Selvon from Trinidad had not shown its effect on his writing. One can say that the experience had made the writer feel sentimental about his nativeland. The lack of knowledge about West Indian native legends and folk arts is quite significant in the early works of Selvon. The gap in this context was filled when Selvon decided to write a story revolving round a popular myth that

> Those who eat the Cascadura will, the native legend says, wheresoever they may wander, end in Trinidad their days.

The novel *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* is by a much experienced and mature novelist and in one sense he is exploiting the idea of a willing suspension of disbelief! Folklore and myth form the essential core of reality. It is this aspect that Selvon explores in this novel. Further there are other changes that take place with regard to inter-racial relationships.

The racial relationships in the novel are not explicit and the white man in the novel is no longer in the superior role of the master of the natives. The situation is that of extending good will to each other. Many of the points are made believable in the novel as one of the characters takes up the role of an anthropologist. The novel deals not with inter-racial jealousies of the non-whites as in *A Brighter Sun* but with a romance between an Indian girl Sarojini and Gary Johnson.

Certain stereotyped characters of West Indian fiction figure in this novel. The story is quite gripping and set in an exotic landscape taking the characters and the readers away from reality. The incredulous is made believable by the writer by making white and non-white characters participate in certain superstitious experiences. The writer is in full control of the situation and has allotted definite roles to his characters.

The colonial situation is changed in the novel as the story is about Roger Franklin, the Cacao estate owner of Sans Souci and his employees comprising both blacks and Indians. The two black charac-

ters in the novel are Eloisa the housekeeper who has made slavery a way of life, is God-fearing and Manko the servant on the farm with obeah powers and a source of comfort for the villagers when they were in trouble. The Indian characters are Ramdeen a labourer on the farm and the father of most beautiful girl of the village Sarojini. Ramdeen is fond of quoting famous quotes and his irresponsible attitude towards family reminds us of Sookdeo of *A Brighter Sun*. Prakash is the young overseer of the farm who is in deep love with Sarojini. The relationship between Franklin and Prakash signifies the change in attitudes between whites and non-whites. In school Prakash had never had a white man as teacher, but he knew that all the things he was learning taught him to behave as the white man, to think like him, to talk like him, to live like him. In spite of this, whenever Franklin tries to make him feel at ease to soothe the transition from colony to independent country, the servile attitude of Prakash surfaces to the disgust of Franklin. Sarojini the beautiful girl of the village is the most lovable character in the novel. She is the symbol of faith and good will and is most strong-willed person who shows immense faith in Manko's predictions. It is her faith that makes us believe whatever Manko tries to establish through his black magic. She is the one who makes Gary Johnson's life eventful in the village, not only by submission but also by being his guide. The antecedents of Sarojini are doubtful in the novel as she disturbs not only Gary but also Franklin. Kayshee her mother had been in love with Franklin deceiving her husband Ramdeen. The day Sarojini was born is the day her mother died without disclosing the paternity of her child. By the time Gary leaves the village Sarojini suspects that she is bearing his child and keeps it a secret for herself.

When the things are running smooth for everybody on the farm the stranger that Manko predicts for Sarojini comes in the name of Gary Johnson. Gary was ten years younger than Franklin. He is a writer researching into West Indian folk ways. The moment he lands he informs Franklin.

> You remender my old war wounds – There is still a tiny bit of sharpnel somewhere near my brain and it can't be operated on. . . . I tried the best surgeons. Believe me, there's nothing that could be done. (34)

He decides to spend his time in the tropics and comes to San Souci.

Gary takes lot of interest in Manko and comes to know about Soucouyant, Lagahoo, la diablesse, Corbeau's egg, douens etc. Manko also shocks him by talking about Gary's past, wound and the fire incident that took place on board the ship as he is arriving to Sans Souci. Manko becomes a threat to Gary's logic and intelligences. The western advanced research in science and medicine has been challenged by the herbal cure offered by Manko. The disbelief of Gary in Manko's process of curing causes hurricane leaving everything destroyed on the village.

When Franklin comes to know about the relationship between Sarojini and Gary, Gary decides to leave the village. With a strong hope to make Gary come back, Sarojini as a last resort puts the popular practice into belief by cooking Cascadura fish for Gary.

Besides all these things, Selvon has incorporated local colour into the novel in such scenes as "dancing the cocoa," fertility dance by women of the village as part of marriage ritual, the belief of Hindus in Peepal tree as object of worship. He has also used the love rivalry as symbol and the Hurricane as metaphor in the novel to connote wider social tensions on the estate San Souci.

All this happens against a social scene when there was a bad market for Cocoa which had made many English proprietors sell up and returned to England. That was the time Roger Franklin had bought the plantation and the villagers had been happy when he had given them work. He had a good relationship with his men: "They treated him with respect and in spite of Independence and the cry to fling the white man out of the country, Sans Souci was divorced from the unrest and strikes that were the birthpangs of a people moving from subjugation." (27)

Of these two novels *A Brighter Sun* is a much more lyrical novel of a remarkable quality as the portrait of a community in the novel makes us question the relevance of such existence. The novel *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* is built on the enchanting world of traditions and beliefs of innocent people, who while living in the present are yet untouched by the corruption of the world around.

Racial discrimination which is so obvious all over the world and the most disruptive factor in social and political life in the West Indies can only be eliminated and minimized by the offsprings. The end of the novel is very significant, where Sarojini looks at the two seeds which were so similar in every detail that no one could tell the difference. In the earlier novel the narrative focuses on the awakening of

the protagonist to the requirements of a multi-racial society. The very title is symbolic, as it indicates the hope of a brighter future—a brighter sun. If in this novel it is only a hope, in the later novel it is a reality, where the wider interests of society are protected and there is the suggestion that racial discrimination can be wiped out in the presence of the universal element of a greater humanity. The narrative in *A Brighter Sun* focuses on the protagonists's awakening to the requirements of a multiracial society under neo-colonial domination and on the limitations necessarily caused by his background. That then is the reality namely the individual and his direct interaction with various forces in life. In the later novel Selvon uses inter-racial sexual rivalry as a symbol and the hurricane as a metaphor and also myth and folklore, in order to connote wider social tensions. Selvon has successfully exploited the topical tensions and the reassuring fact of mythical beliefs which brings about a tangible meaning in life and he has been able to render them in strikingly accurate literary form.

The works of Selvon make us question the validity of one man taking for himself more than he can use in a life time, while people walk by deprived of many things that are essential in this existence. Of all the commonwealth countries the displaced condition of Caribbean islands is quite pathetic as the people have nothing to boast about. It is essential for the Caribbeans to have writers like Selvon and Lamming who have genuine interest and admiration for the island. The identification of the writer with the island is essential as he is the spokesman of his nation.

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Contrast as Technique in Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*

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Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is regarded as a splendid and a unique novel mainly because of the author's successful attempt to deal with one of the most fascinating themes: the theme of the eternal contrast, conflict, and occasional confrontation of the "Known" and the "Unknown." It might also be argued that the contrast and the conflict are not between the two "worlds" but between the two ends of the same world: the "civilized" society and the primitive one. I, however, believe that even these two ends of the same world are so different that they have to be regarded as two separate worlds.

This novel is remarkable not only for its fascinating theme but also for Joshi's "Jigsaw-puzzle technique" of narration. But even more important than the method of narration is his use of contrast as technique in characterization, narration, and in description of locales, scenes, and settings. What Joshi aims at, as he unfolds the story of Billy, is to make the reader conscious of the contrast between these two worlds. He reveals, very cleverly, the contrast between two attitudes, persons, atmospheres and settings, employing certain images, or through description. It is this skill of the novelist in making the suggestions of contrast between the two worlds organic and functional that makes the novel extremely readable and gives it a metaphysical dimension.

Bimal Biswas the son of a Supreme Court-Judge is intelligent and sensitive. He is full of many oddities. His range of knowledge is staggering, and he is passionately involved with his subject, anthropology, but what nobody, except Tuula Lindgren and Romi, his two close friends, notices is that Billy's interest in the primitive man and the mysterious forces that govern life is something more than a mere

interest in a subject of his study. As Romi puts it, Billy's whole life is organized around this interest in the primitive man. This primaeval force and the urge to live like a primitive, which is latent in everyone, becomes the government force in Billy's case. It makes him a rebel as it endows him with an unusual power of perception.

Even as a boy Billy was a rebel. The Bhubaneswar incident in Billy's adolescence, his deliberate choice of Harlem to live in (during his stay in America), his choice of anthropology as subject for specialization, his becoming a University teacher against his father's wish and his final rejection of the civilized, urban society – all these explain his rebellious spirit and his ununsual temperament.

The contrast between the two locales, – Harlem, the "Black-Area" of New York and the "white world" – and between the high society of Delhi and the tribal areas of Orissa and North West India has a symbolic significance. It suggests two different worlds: the world of tribal primitive people and the world of the urban educated people who are blind and insensitive to the role of occult powers that govern human life.

This contrast is inherent in Billy's own personality, between his "two selves" – the civilized rational Billy who is attracted to the talkative modern Meena (who is deeply interested in his intellectual pursuits) and the primitive Billy who is bewitched by the jungle girl Bilasiya. The contrast that Joshi reveals is not only between the two selves of Billy but also between the two manifestations of "the female power." The description of Bilasiya is eloquent enough:

> She had that untamed beauty that comes to flower only in our primitive people. It was as though nature were cocking a snook at the Meena Biswases of the world. (141)

Looking at her Billy thought that,

> It was that passing moment that rarely comes in a man's life when he suddenly discovered that bit of himself that he has searched for all his life and without which life is nothing more than the poor reflection of million others.

If Meena and the people like her (Billy's parents, for example) represent one kind of reality, Bilasiya represents the other. Billy tells Romi: "She seemed like another vision, elusive as a gust of wind."

She represents that primitive force that lies in ambush in Billy's own personality. Perhaps that is why there seems to be a strange bond between Billy and Bilasiya (as is between Anuradha and Som in *The Last Labyrinth*) that pulls them together. Billy rebels, finally and decisively against the civilized world, its norms and values by obeying the call of the primitive force in Bilasiya:

> Her enormous eyes . . . poured out a sexuality that was nearly as primeval as the forest that surrounded them. Come, come, come, she called, and Billy Biswas, the son of Supreme Court Justice, went. (141)

Bilasiya, too, rebels against the laws of the jungle community, by picking up Billy as her lover and husband. Dhunia the chief doesn't like it and asks Billy to stay away from her. The elders in the society are aggrieved and permit Billy to leave Bilasiya and the jungle if he is ready to pay the compensation money to Bilasiya. But she, we are told, "stormed their meeting, spat in their midst." (184)

Billy's choice of anthropology as his area of specialization was neither accidental nor whimsical. It was the silent move of the urge in him to take him towards the primitive people and their world. As Romi puts it, "It was an obvious fact, and yet I think it was ignored by all except Tuula Lindgren and myself." (14)

It can also be regarded as part of the great incongruity in Billy's life that he was interested in things like theory of relativity, jazz music, witchcraft and pornography besides his academic pursuits.

It is rather ironic that Billy becomes acutely conscious of the contrast between the normal everyday world and the "Other world" when he serves at a mental hospital for a brief period. As he tells Romi,

> Most of us are aware only of the side on which we are born but there is always the other side,—the valley beyond the hill, the hill beyond the valley (19)

and,

> There were people who looked at life from a totally different point of view. (19)

In a sense, Billy himself is one of them: not mentally ill, of course, but as a man with unusual perception. His physical appearance, especially his eyes, are unusual, "almost inhumanly sharp" and suggest his power of perception. Romi notices, soon after he meets Billy, that his (Billy's) eyes never lose "that sombre look" though he laughs and banters with people around.

He seems, almost always, aware of the existence of the other world and its incomprehensible lawa. He argues with his father about the Krishna Murder Case:

> Once it is proved that a person at the time was operating under the laws of a world other than this everyday world's, then we will have to pause and ponder what laws he is to be judged by. (54)

Ironically, Billy is offering a justification, though unconsciously, for his own decision to reject the civilized world that he would soon make in his life.

Arun Joshi does not use contrast as a part of technique in characterization only: he subtly reveals even the contrast and incongruity in the atmosphere, environment, actions, situations, moods and in descriptions of locales.

The contrast between sounds and scenes suggests the deeper and wider incongruity that enriches the thematic content of the novel. When Romi comes to stay at Billy's apartment in Harlem, he "could not help noticing the incongruity of that self-cultivated voice amidst the clatter of pots and pans, the thumping of children's feets, the raucous noises of late afternoon Harlem that continued to climb up the stair." (11)

The contrast between sound and silence is also made suggestive in Romi's description of a party at Georges's apartment. At the party, Billy does not change his position as he sits moodily, his legs tucked under him, and then he starts playing the bongo drums. The description is quite suggestive:

> One by one we fell silent until there was nothing in the little room except the steady reverberation of the drums. . . . All along Billy sat perfectly immobile, only his hands and forearms moving, staring at the orange globe of lights. The little package of sounds that exploded carried a fundamental message that

was incomprehensible. (20)

The words, phrases and images that Arun Joshi uses to describe the sounds and its effect upon the gathering highlight the contrast between two realities; the immediate and the remote; the known and the unknown. Romi writes:

> They blazed through our liquor-stimulated sensibilities, like meteors through the astral night lighting up landscapes, hills and valleys, gaping chasms of the mind that are otherwise forever shrouded in the black mist of the unconscious. They had brought into the room a reality that had not been there before. (21)

When Billy thinks of marrying Meena, he wants Romi's views on the matter and, as they walk on the nearly empty road outside the city, discussing the matter, Romi notices, in the dim light, that Billy's face registers unusual emotions. These emotions, Romi writes, are those "that one tends to associate with a great predicament. It was drawn and had that peculiar intensity of concentration, which in my life I have seen only on the faces of doctors and rioters." This expression is "as out of place in a person like Billy as clouds on a spring afternoon." (44)

The description attains more significance by the contrast between the silence of the countryside and the booming of the guns down the valley that serves as a background.

By means of such clever suggestive descriptions, Joshi creates a remarkable harmony between the thematic content and the casual incidents and situations. The tone of these descriptions is perfectly in tune with the central theme.

Years later, when Billy has become almost a primitive man, Romi and Billy meet accidentally in the jungle and they talk near the Temple of Fate. (It is a moon-lit night.)

The description of light and shadow and Billy's and Romi's positions at the place is symbolic of the contrast of the two different worlds as well as between their physical and mental states. The wall of the temple throws across the platform, "a dark shadow cutting it diagonally into half."

As Billy is above to tell Romi of his (Billy's) seduction of Rima Kaul, Romi notices that, "In the beginning both Billy and I had been

in moon-light. Now Billy was in shadow." (187)

The shadow, almost a symbol of the reality of the dark mysterious powers that control human life inexplicably, is in contrast with the soft moonlight which is almost a symbol of the normal world around them.

As Romi is about to ask Billy how he had become a priest, he is distracted by the shadow. It is as if the shadow is a force that forbids Romi to enter into a prohibited area. Romi notices, "The shadow had moved further, taking me entirely in its embrace. All of a sudden I had the feeling that we were not alone that there was another presence besides us on the platform." (191)

It is only right that the dark force should warn Romi: "Beware. There are things that the like of you may never know. There are circles within circles and worlds within worlds." (192) It controls even Romi's behaviour. He does not ask that question.

Arun Joshi, thus, employs contrast as a tool, in his characterization and in descriptions of locales, atmospheres, scenes and sights, to keep a remarkable bearing on the central theme of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*.

Dhule

An Integrated Writer with a Divided Heritage: Derek Walcott

K. VENKATA REDDY

It is gratifying to note that the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature, like that of the 1991, has once again gone to a Commonwealth author, Derek Walcott, who is a Caribbean writer. This was done in a move to crown his lifetime interest in exploring the ethnic tapestry of his native region. As the Swedish Academy observed in its citation, the motivation factor for selecting Walcott for the most prestigious honour in literature was his "poetic luminosity sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment." The Academy rightly hailed his sensitive style and poetic work in which reside three loyalties—the Caribbean, the English language and his African origin.

A light, brown-skinned mulatto with a deep love of English literature, Walcott was born on 23rd January, 1930 in Castries, St. Lucia, West Indies. His fater was a civil servant who was extremely well read. His mother was a school teacher and an amateur actress. He was educated at St. Mary's College and the University of the West Indies. He taught for sometime at St. Mary's College and Jamaica College. Earlier, he was a feature writer for *Public Opinion* and *Trinidad Guardian*. He received a Rockefeller Fellowship to study drama in the United States during 1958, and eventually formed his own drama group in Trinidad. Walcott was also a recipient of the Guinness Award in 1961, the Heinemann Award in 1966, the Cholmondeley Award in 1969 and the Obie Award in 1971. These prestigious awards speak volumes of Walcott's literary genius. He is 'par excellence' a poet and a playwright.

While many of the West Indian writers of the fifties went into exile, cursing provincial colonial society as backward, isolated and uncreative, Walcott stayed at home using his personal dilemma as

material for his poetry. He learned to master the various styles of English verse and make them respond to his own personality and West Indian voice. The examination of the drama of his own life against that of his community and region has been one of Walcott's main themes. His individual experience has become part of what it means to be West Indian. The first and simplest pleasure offered by Walcott's poetry is the sense of being alive and out-of-doors in the West Indies – sand and salt on the skin, sunlight and space, the open beach, sea-grapes and sea-almonds and liners and islands – where "the starved eye devours the seascape for the morsel of a sail."

In his early poems Walcott is concerned with his isolation within his community. He received local attention with his publication of *25 Poems* (1949) which was reviewed by the English poet, Roy Fuller on the B.B.C. *Caribbean Voices*. Walcott's second volume, *Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos* (1948), is in an experimental modern style with echoes of T.S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas and James Joyce. Though immature in both theme and craft, *Epitaph* is an attempt to move beyond the fragments of lyric poetry to a larger structure shaped around the inner life of the author. His third volume, *Poems* (1952), which was published in Jamaica, shows a concern with the racial, economic and cultural problems of the region. While Walcott's early poems reveal a consciousness of racial and social problems, the Jamaica poems are most striking for rhymed verse forms and witty puns that were fashionable in American and British literary circles during the 1940s and 1950s.

Walcott's fourth volume, *Selected Poems* (1964), clearly marks the distance between his early attitudes of irony and protest and the more fully thought out positions. These poems, in general, and *A Far Cry from Africa* in particular, are remarkable for their complexity of emotions. Most of them treat of the author's 'divided heritage' in paradoxical celebrations. A recognition of a shared humanity changes accusations of guilt to feelings of compassion. Walcott's concern with the common humanity of all races is implicit in the multiracial situation of the region, especially the East Caribbean where many bloodstocks may be mixed in one family. The fusion of races involves a mixture of guilty pasts. But, the poems show how rebirth is possible from such a mixture. The West Indian will be a new Adam, a Robinson Crusoe making his own civilization from various cultural roots, but at the same time, creating something new which is unique to the region.

Small wonder, therefore, if Walcott's next volume of poems, *The Castaway* (1965), uses the myth of Crusoe to suggest that the New World is a new beginning, a new Eden. Here Walcott becomes increasingly conscious of the life of the St. Lucian community which he has left. While others have sought their roots in Africa or have identified with the black urban slum-dweller, Walcott sees the poor, French-influenced, Catholic, black community of St. Lucia as his home.

Naturally Walcott's long, autobiographical poem, *Another Life* (1973), springs from the setting of the author's life within his community. The power of the poem, like that of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, results mainly from the sensitivity with which the poet's childhood is shown and from the way the verse universalizes the particularities of St. Lucian society without sentimentalizing or claiming a false dignity. Walcott's examination of the divided consciousness of the mulatto in a mixed community—the evocations of childhood, the stage of maturation, middle-class life, family, individuals in the community, school, the priest, local merchants, friendships, early loves—recreates a world of which the narrator is a product and in which he is still involved. As Bruce King rightly points out, "by using the confessional mode which Robert Lowell made popular, Walcott has produced a classic of West Indian literature which celebrated the local landscape, the many races, mixed culture and languages of the islands."

Walcott was a painter before he became a poet. As a youth he set off with a friend around his native island of St. Lucia to put it on canvas and thus recreate it in the imagination. Later, he found that he could do the work of creation better with words and metaphor. He has kept his painter's eye throughout his poetic career. Like Keats, he often compares life with art just as he often quotes or echoes lines from the English metaphysicals, Tennyson and others. These acts of imitations, taken together with the high polish of his verse, have sometimes led to accusations of 'virtuoso preciosity' and even artificiality. There may be some lapses in Walcott's poetry which deserve such strictures. But then, it is the successful transmuting of life into art which makes Walcott's achievement really significant. At his best, he fuses the outward scene with inward experience artistically. In so doing, he enhances and illustrates the landscape and the human lives that are found on the islands, thereby recreating them most successfully.

Walcott is also a successful and prolific playwright, the founder-director of the Trinidand Theatre Workshop. If his poetry is almost entirely in standard English, the plays are largely in the Creole idiom of the West Indies. He has about a dozen plays to his credit. They range from attempting to give classical form to folk society to examining the psychology of black radicalism in the Caribbean. The most important of his plays are *The Sea at Dauphin*, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* and *Dream on Monkey Mountain* which reveal his dramatic genius.

The Sea at Dauphin (1954) is a deeply moving tragedy that combines celebration of folk life with protest. It is obviously influenced by J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, in its ritualistic style, its mixture of folk speech and formal poetry and, above all, in its elevation of the peasantry to tragic dignity. In the play, the sea and the island appear as elemental divine forces against which man is pitted to survive. Like Maurya in *Riders to the Sea*, Afa, the bravest of fishermen, challenges God saying that "God is a whiteman. The sky is his blue eye, His spit on Dauphin people is the sea." No doubt, the play expresses man's incomprehension of the human condition. But it also suggests that the condition of the islanders is the result of the world made by the whiteman.

Ti-Jean and His Brothers (1958) shows how the techniques of the West Indian oral literature and folk-tale are successfully adapted to the stage. The plot of the play is based on the common folk-tale motif of three brothers who make choices that exemplify their essential character. The play has several kinds of significance which are conveyed rather through juxtaposition than by straightforward development. It suggests that neither brute resistance nor intellectual position can defeat colonialism and neo-colonialism. The rebellious hero, Ti-Jean, refuses to become entangled in attitudes inherited from the colonial situation. As Bruce King puts it, "he is an unfallen Adam who can act directly and in a straightforward fashion because he has faith. It is faith that gives dignity to the peasant and ex-slave, that creates a new world from the old and that avoids the self-torturing, self-defeating anguish of the black and Third World intellectual."

Walcott's best-known play, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967) is as complex and comprehensive as Wole Soyinka's *The Road*. Time and space are treated quite freely and poetically through Walcott's artistic use of dream and fantasy. Song, dance and masquerade con-

tribute to the sense of an African heritage. The core of the play consists of dreams Makak, a sixty-year-old peasant, has while drunk. However, they are not simple fantasies inasmuch as he progressively gains in knowledge. In the last dream he finds himself forced by others to be king of an African tribe, who demand that he should behead the white 'Venus, the Virgin, the Sleeping Beauty' of his vision. As soon as he does so, he wakes up from his sleep, announces his real name as Felix Hobain, and, released from jail, returns home singing :

> Other men will come, other prophets will come and they will be stoned, and mocked, and betrayed, but now this old hermit is going back home, back to the beginning, to the green beginning of this world.

It is important to note that Makak remembers his real name, Felix Hobain, which is a non-African name, only when he has been confronted by the death of the blonde woman, who gave him his vision. From this it is clear that European culture has alienated him from his true self and led to the compensatory fantasy of Africa. What Walcott suggests is that it is only by freeing himself from such dichotomies that Makak can realise that he is a new man, a West Indian, whose origins are in the mountain village of his island. In this sense, Makak is "an epitome of the confused desires and hopes that have shaped the black West Indian peasant – fantasies of blonde white women, dreams of returning to Africa, desires to find one's origins in the African kingdoms of the past, and a mixture of Christian faith with peasant superstition."

Thus, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* forms part of the West Indian debate about African sources of folk society and the availability of Africa as a replacement for European culture. The treatment of ritualistic possession and its failure shows Walcott's belief that a spiritual return to Africa can only be a dream to West Indians. Though the surface characteristics of the play are consciously West Indian, the masquerading, changes of identity and rapid dissolutions of scene and fantasy world demonstrate Walcott's debt to the Theatre of the Absurd and conventions of the modern Western theatre. Thus, Walcott remains a cosmopolitan, while contributing to the search for a regional theatre.

In an attempt to translate his divided heritage into a new Carib-

bean Creole culture, Walcott, in an interview (*New Yorker*, 26 June 1971) said "the problem is to recognize our African origins, not to romanticize them." This makes us feel that Walcott has little sympathy for exploitation of the past by modern ideologists, even if they are negro ideologists. Some of his bitterest lines are reserved for post-independence politicians. Against their power and rhetoric, he sets out on a subtler and more revolutionary course when he says:

> I sought more power than you, more fame than yours
> I was more hermetic, I knew the commonweal
> I pretended subtly to lose myself in crowds
> Knowing my passage would alter their reflection.

and at the same time to redeem the past:

> Its racial quarters blown like smoke to sea
> From all that sorrow, beauty is our gain
> Though it may not seem so
> To an old fisherman rowing home in the rain.

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Communication in Absurd Drama

PRADIP LAHIRI

Like all arts theatre too has its experimental or avant-gardé aspect. An experiment is an attempt to find something new, something which has hitherto not been explored or invented, possibilities and potentialities which have not yet been tried out. It, therefore, always runs the risk of being misunderstood in one way or the other. Theatre, being an exercise directly in the public, has no suitable scope to remain obscure for long. Because its professed purpose is to involve people at large and entertain them to their satisfaction. Contemporary time has been acquiring a new consciousness requiring a new idiom of expression. Theatre needed to have attained a dimension which could not be found even by such accomplished playwrights as Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) or Sir Noel Coward (1899-1973) although they tried to assess the stress of the contemporary social change. The exact imaginative awareness was yet to be attained, depth of vision to be obtained, and above all the precise idiom of dramatic expression to be found out. Post Second World War society, especially the period after 1956 when Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* came up on the stage, became much tolerant, progressively accommodating and acutely perceptive so much so that avant-gardé experimental plays which could have previously been considered almost a taboo to be put on a public stage, came to be widely accepted and appreciated. We know how the initial audience rejected Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1955) or Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958). Audience-hostility softened down by degrees. Beckett had his success upto the Nobel Prize and Pinter is now considered as the "best living playwright"[1] of our time. A sea change has occurred in the area of modern Absurd drama with successful and popular existentialist plays of Beckett (1906-89), Adamov (1908-70), Genet (1910-86), Ionesco (1912-), Albee (1928-), Pinter (1930-), Bond (1934-) and others. These plays have transformed many of our set-

tled ideas about what a good play should be like, what sort of things it is capable of saying and more specifically in what 'way' it says them. Referring to a pointed theatre culture Gamini Salgado has pertinently observed that "among many changes brought about . . . was a transformation in the economic organization of the theatre and its capacity to serve as a centre for the sort of serious drama."[2] In the modern theatre the literal depiction of events and of nature started to give way to far more imaginative and symbolic renderings of them.

Absurdist playwrights started arguing, as David Thompson rightly holds, that what "happened on a stage was not 'real' . . . but acting, and pretence, and illusion, and that it was artistically dishonest to pretend otherwise."[3] In consonance with such arguments, absurdist stage technique tends towards underlining the fact that a play is some sort of a pretence. Playwrights have brought in topics and opinions of contemporary awareness of a fast changing world. They make continual attempts to break away from the 'realistic' sort of stage where actors suppose that they are not being watched by any audience and are enacting slice-of-life reality. What the contemporary theatre presents are all types of staging which bring actors and audience into closer contact with each other, in order to emphasize that a play is performance, an enactment of life and not the real life out of which it emanates. Common naturalistic drama may be said to be the equivalent of a prose fiction which pursues logical sequence of events and episodes to culminate in a neat, satisfactory resolution. Absurdistic plays are a far cry. Nothing 'happens' in Beckett's *Godot* in terms of action. It does not move as such. Pinter's *No Man's Land* (1975) does not move too. Hirst says in the play:

> *No man's land . . . does not move . . . or change . . . or grow old.*[4]

What is significant is that these playwrights try to say things about some sharp sensibilities of life which can ill-afford to be expressed in any ordinary prose terms. The full meaning of these plays can only be considerably grasped by imagination of an audience when it scales down their use of fantasy, symbolism and poetic imagery and not by any approach through logic or reason. The use of such fantasy-oriented illogical situations in Absurd drama refers to a particular way of interpreting the contemporary world we live in, as it is experienced by the artist as well as by the audience in individual terms. We happen to live in a time-frame when we do not believe in the primacy

of reason, as did our predecessors. Man's faith in himself has broken down to a major extent. He has condescended to discard logical approaches towards issues involving human situation. To-day our excruciating agony arises out of a sad situation that man does neither understand, nor can he make himself understood. A helpless, hopeless mute wailing torments him. He frantically gropes for words, for expression, for communication when he is shot through with the gnawing Existential anguish. Absurd theatre underlines the tension between the verbal and the non-verbal.

Absurd drama focuses on language. All the important playwrights, such as Beckett, Pinter, Ionesco or Albee, have created a theatre of language of their own. The single issue which an audience of contemporary drama can hardly miss noticing is the dramatist's utilization of and relationship of language. A strong centrality of language is the hallmark of the Absurdistic plays. The new generation playwrights felt that the reality of living has moved far ahead of the conventional cliches and jargons and phrases which have lost authenticity by being used too frequently and too carelessly. Jargons bury their true meaning under heaps of other intentions, involving the speaker's desire to either hoodwink, seduce, impress or persuade. Beaten-track language has become incapable of expressing certain acutely felt human experience, because the range of familiar vocabulary is far too limited.

In modern theatre there is a tendency for keeping the stage almost bare, so that the imagination of the audience gets prominent on which everything is made to depend. The playwright's power of suggestion relies on the actors' dialogue specially designed for this purpose. The new situation ipso facto demands a new lingual idiom capable enough to carry forward the feeling of the artist. Martin Esslin significantly remarks:

> the theatre is the place where a nation thinks in public in front of itself . . . for, ultimately, there is a close link between the general beliefs of a society, its concept of proper behaviour and good manners, its view of good manners, its view of sexual morals and the political climate of a nation.[5]

As the theatre stands for a collective public experience, it normally deals with themes having some topical relevance and affinity, even if told by means of sly allusions or symbolic allegory. A perceptive au-

dience always tend to fork the right pie in being communicated home the criticism of life, in Arnoldian sense, of the existing milieu around it. Drama, therefore, has to be symptomatic of any major change in the society, more so when the change is drastic, subtle and complicated. Dramatic language has to undergo a definite qualitative change too. A good modern playwright, as Fraser understands, "makes use of pauses, silences, stage grouping, sudden transition from one mood to another, which, to a reader unfamiliar with the theatre, convey nothing on the page."[6]

In order to reflect or illuminate life exactly as the playwright has perceived in and around him, he tries to make the theatre speak effectively with a sure force of pragmatism behind it. Contemporary absurdistic playwrights subsequent to Brecht (1898-1956), Ibsen (1828-1906) and Pirandello (1867-1936), such as Beckett, Genet, Ionesco, Pinter and others have made ceaseless efforts to control "theatrical reality in words, actions and time, so that the plays say what the authors want to say now, to present audiences and in present theatrical conditions."[7] Modern Existentialist drama can no longer be appreciated as fine literary pieces like the Elizabethan or Jacobean drama. In order to comprehend and enjoy an Existentialist absurdistic play one has to see or imagine its performance on the stage which is no simple exercise. Theatre language has undergone a highly sensitive, subtle transfiguration so much so that words at their face value take us nowhere. Careful dialogic deployment with movements, gestures, insinuations, symbolic overtones, pauses, silences, light-effects, connotative undertones of the words spoken by characters all these tend to contribute richly towards what the audience is essentially communicated by the play." The development of drama, therefore, as Fraser rightly points out, "is not strictly a literary development."[8]

Theatre language to-day inheres all the synchronized elements on the stage over and above the written text. it is no less a director's theatre than it is that of the author. As such the importance of the sub-text has assumed an enlarged dimension in modern dramaturgy. Theatrical experience is thus a composite one as derived by the audience. The total structure of a dramatic work depends on a very delicate balance of a multitude of interdependent elements which unifiedly contribute to the total pattern in the right context. In the right context an almost imperceptible gesture, a nod or a shuffle may be of cardinal importance as a communicative chord. Similarly the

simplest phrase may turn to be the indispensable lingual master-key with which to unlock the theatrical cabinet containing the casket of cryptic, esoteric dramatic meaning. Absurdist playwrights concede that words of the vocabulary are not enough to carry the burden of drama. Nevertheless words are the only major components with which it is possible to raise a dramatic structure. Other corollaries come only as adjuncts to words. Tom Stoppard (1937-) has told us in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967) that "words, words, they're all we've got to go on."[9] We also remember how Eliot wanted to attain "order of speech" out of the "slimy mud of words, out of the sleet and hail of verbal imprecisions."[10] Osborne felt that "when millions of people seem unable to communicate with one another, it is vitally important that words are made to work . . . they're the only thing."[11] Absurdist playwrights in their own way try to hit upon appropriate technique that words are made to work. British playwright David Hare (1947-) has pertinently observed that "words can only be tested by being spoken. Ideas can only be worked out in real situations . . . the theatre is the best court society has."

What the Absurdists especially try to attain in their plays is to present the human situation when the words fail us and man confronts an inadequacy of expression. They also try to lay bare man's deliberate effort sometimes to duck under cover of inconsequential words when he tries not to reveal his mind. Knut Hamsun (1909-1952), the most important Norwegian writer since Ibsen, said that "one must know and recognise not merely the direct but the secret power of the word."[13] T.S. Eliot echoes Hamsun with his lines of *Gerontion* (1920):

> The word within a word, unable to speak a word.
> Swaddled with darkness.[14]

In an Absurdist play what the audience is required is to try to penetrate the darkness into which the word is ensconced, it is to feel the impact of the secret power of the word. Absurd drama demonstrates knife-edge use of language. Drama is essentially a means of artistic communication with people at large. Audience avidly intends to absorb this communication by decoding theatre language.

The mental make-up of people of a particular time-frame called an age or a generation is determined by its awareness, the degree of historical awareness it has attained, its psychological depth and spiri-

tual dimension. Dramatic language performs its basic duty of communicating to the audience the age-knit consciousness, and as such the language needs to be re-treated as and when required. In *Rhinoceros* (1960) Ionesco tries to focus his view that human life, being devoid of meaning and coherence, has become chaotic. Man has no way of any meaningful communication. He felt the need to break away from the traditional, worn-out, fossilized language which has lost its worth for any effective communication. Ionesco believed that art is supposed to be the expression of an incommunicable reality which an artist takes pains to communicate, and which "sometimes can be communicated," this being "its paradox and its truth."[15]

In their effort to spell out the Existential human trauma the Absurdist playwrights employ such a dramatic language which hold up the willed irrationalism of man fettered by his fatal passion for logic. Ionesco's *The Chairs* (1952), Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1955), Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) adopt almost similar dialogic pattern to hold up this malaise. "Language evolves," as John Elsom rightly points out, "from the human need to discover effective symbols which can correspond to and communicate experiences. They should reflect a vital response to life."[16] Absurdists discover effective symbols, tokens and meaningful lingual components containing in them a core of meaning which is not supposed to fluctuate at random from individual to individual. However, no communication may be said to be total, accurate and final. Man encounters and experiences life strictly as an individual. Sense impressions are never homogeneous or interchangeable. An absurdist playwright like Beckett, Ionesco or Pinter concerns himself with that 'life' as Virginia Woolf has defined in her stream-of-consciousness novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927):

> Look within and life . . . is very far from being "like this." . . . The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent . . . from all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms . . . as they shape themselves into the life . . . the accents fall differently. . . Life is . . . a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.[17]

It is therefore a complex task for an absurdist playwright to try at communication in respect of this "semi-transparent envelope" of

sense impressions of the immediate present as we live it from moment to moment. The playwright is at pains to find a stage language which is considerably capable to record this individual experience made from the silt of diverse instants of consciousness. Identical impressions are almost an impossibility as these are highly relative discontinuous, flickering and inconclusive. What is possible is a fairly close co-relation or association of these impressions. Intensity and expanse may vary, but there remains a discernible replica. To that extent communication is possible. Here lies the importance of language in Absurd drama from the standpoint of objective co-relative. A pause is added, a line breaks up into extended silence, a moment of apparently casual conversation marked by repetitions, pleonasms and non-sequiturs is poised amid a definite human situation with highly suggestive meaningfulness. No character-insight or character-conflict is intended. The intention of the Absurdist is to present the complex of colour, shape, shadow, tone, temper and intensity of "life" as perceived by man in his inexorable Existential predicament. Such perceptions can be considerably communicated through the right dialogic idiom.

Urge for communication leads the Absurdist dramatist towards the quest for a theatre language. This urge causes by-passing the deficiencies of an inherited conventional language through a continual process of borrowing, resurrecting and inventively creating words, expressions and multifarious dialogic patterns as has been done creditably by Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter and others. Absurdist playwrights have been able to communicate in various ways and extents individual human experiences which would have been otherwise hard put or even impossible to express.

NOTES

1. Irving Wardle in *The Times*. See Martin Esslin, *Pinter the Playwright* (London: Methuen, 1982, rpt. 1984), 4th Cover Page.
2. *English Drama: A Critical Introduction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), p. 3.
3. David Thompson, ed., *Theatre To-day* (London: Longman, 1965, rpt. 1978), p. ix.
4. *Pinter Plays Four* (London: Methuen, 1981, rpt. 1984), p. 96.

5. *An Anatomy of Drama* (London: Temple Smith, 1976), p. 101.
6. George Sutherland Fraser, *The Modern Writer and his World* (London: Penguin, 1953, rev. edn. 1964), p. 50.
7. John Russell Brown, *Theatre Language* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), p. 12.
8. *The Modern Writer and his World*, p. 50.
9. Quoted by C.W.E. Bigsby in *Contemporary English Drama* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), p. 11.
10. *The Rock* (1934), Ninth Chorus. *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954, rep. 1967), p. 123.
11. Quoted in *Contemporary English Drama*, p. 11.
12. *Loc. cit.*
13. Quoted by S.I. Hayakawa in *Language in Thought and Action* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1939, rpt. 1978), p. 105.
14. *Selected Poems*, p. 31.
15. Martin Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Pelican, 1968, rpt. 1972), p. 127.
16. John Elsom, *Post-war British Theatre* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, rpt. 1979), p. 1.
17. *To the Lighthouse*. Quoted by Arnold Kettle in *An Introduction to the English Novel* (London: Hutchinson, 1953, second edn. 1967), vol. 2, p. 91.

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Striptease of the Mind: Indian Response to Confessional Poetry

PASHUPATI JHA

Recently, an American scholar John O. Perry branded the criticism of Indian English poetry as "terribly pedestrian, scarcely more than paraphrases and precis."[1] One of the many ways by which the criticism of Indian English poetry can be made meaningful is through a comparative canvas on which it should be juxtaposed with English poetry written in other countries. So, it has been attempted in the present paper to put the Indian confessionals side by side with their American counterparts, in order to analyse how the Indian response matches with, and differs from, the American experience and expression. The obvious clue for this study comes from the use of "striptease" both in Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das. Plath invites the "peanut-crunching crowd," in her famous poem "Lady Lazarus," for a "big strip tease," while Kamala Das explains, in "Composition," "I must let my mind striptease."

So, tentatively speaking, there seems to be some common point in the confession of these two poets. But, before any further venture, it is a pre-requisite to understand the precise nature and scope of confessional poetry, which recorded its clear presence in 1959 with the publications of *Life Studies* by Robert Lowell and *Heart's Needle* by W.D. Snodgrass, though Delmore Schwart, Theodore Roethke, and Allen Ginsberg were already writing in the confessional strain. The credit of coining the term "confessional" goes to M.L. Rosenthal, who stumbled upon this expression while reviewing *Life Studies* and since then this expression has stuck not only with Lowell but also with Snodgrass, Berryman, Plath, Sexton, and several others. But just like the epithet "metaphysical," the term "confessional" in poetry is a wee bit misleading. As despite their metaphysical theme, Milton and Blake cannot be called Metaphysical poets, so despite their con-

fessions, Shakespeare of the Sonnets, John Donne, and the Romantics cannot be called confessional poets because they confess something of their personal life. Romantic confession and confessional laceration are two different poetic experiences. Only embarrassing, unsettling, and poignant confessions in verse, closely related to private shame and personal humiliation, tortuous mental agony, psychic problems like nervous breakdown, lunacy, and suicide, sexual guilt and social maladjustments, come under the scope of modern confessional poetry. While "most of us carry in our heart Jocasta who begs Oedipus for God's sake not to enquire further,"[2] the confessionals do the exact opposite by exploring the humiliating truth to the end. Subjects hitherto taken to be taboos for poetry are analysed with agonising details by placing the poet "himself at the center of the poem in such a way as to make his psychological vulnerability and shame the embodiment of his civilization."[3] This putting up of the literal self at the core of the poem negates the impersonal theory of Eliot by almost obliterating the distance between the man who suffers and the mind which creates. The confessionals aim at the expression and not the negation of personality. This type of poetic exposure cannot be equated with romantic agony, but, as Plath says in "Three Women,"

> It is a terrible thing
> To be so open: it is as if my heart
> Put on a face and walked into the world.

The peak period of confessional poetry in America was the sixties and early seventies, when it became a craze in both the academic and the popular circles. Though poles apart in cultural and social ethos, Indian English poets writing during those years and years thereafter, came under the spell of confessional poetry. The first among the Indian confessionals is none else than Nissim Ezekiel, in many ways an Indian edition of Robert Lowell. Like Lowell, Ezekiel's early poetry is quite formal in finish; but later on he seems to have become impatient with the sophisticated pose and ironic posture, as he himself points out in "November Poems," "Let the existence boil/to agonise the moralist/within another style." The "unfinished man" within Ezekiel groping for an "exact name" finally finds out the confessional mode in what may be called his "hymns in darkness." Like Lowell confronting his family's Puritan heritage and his own Catholic con-

version, Ezekiel has to face his Bene-Israeli-Jewish background with the acceptance of Indian identity. Damned further in the domestic game, he can only be an onlooker of the romantic love of Radha and Krishna:

> They have a different truth
> Within the kingdom of their own
> We envy them. "A Marriage"

But soon the hurt of domestic discord is counterbalanced by hilarity and humour:

> Shout at me, woman
> Pull me up for this and that.
> You're right and I'm wrong.
> This is not an excuse,
> It's only a song. "Song to be shouted out"

With complete confessional candour, Ezekiel removes the camouflage of hypocrisy and self pity: his confession is controlled by a superb craftsmanship lying beneath. Unlike Kamala Das, Ezekiel waits for word: as a result the stormy waves of emotion in him never breach the beaches. Daruwalla's interpretation of Ezekiel seems, therefore, too simplistic when he comments, "His poetry is confessional in the literal sense, in that it is littered with a record of his failure."[4] It is to the credit of Ezekiel that he transmutes his personal failure into poetic success.

While confession is controlled in Ezekiel, it explodes in Kamala Das. She exhibits excess of emotion, sometimes bordering on sentimentality. Love and lust become one in her because of sheer frustration, and she does not spare even "the jerky way he/Urinates." It is only when she gets tired of her "flamboyant lust" that the real poet lurks out of her:

> After that love became a swivel-door,
> When one went out, another came in,
> Then I lost count, for always in my arms
> Was a substitute for a substitute. "Substitute"

But till that point of satiety is reached, Kamala Das remains "a pris-

oner to her own passions and prejudices."[5] The clash between her Nair background and the city life of Calcutta and Bombay should have provided her with enough aesthetic tension, but she is aware of only the confessional madness and not the method behind it. In a hurry to cash on her explosive material, she devours a lot, digests very little, and delivers premature lines on the page. One recalls here the warning of Plath that she "cannot sympathize with these cries of the heart that are informed by nothing else except a needle or a knife."[6] But Kamala Das, engrossed in the exposure of "the musk of sweat between the breasts," begins to glorify her confession. Her early and easy fame during the mid-sixties for her uninhibited expression of feminine feeling against the conservative background of Indian cultural ethos crucified her talent. Consequently, much of her work till "The Anamalai Poems"[7] suffers from crude and "callow exhibitionism."[8] Still, in Indian context, her historical importance as a pioneer cannot be denied, a pioneer with a lot of potential, but little patience.

While the instant fame engulfed the inherent strength of Kamala Das, the comparatively slow arrival of recognition perfected the confessional craft of Sunita Jain and Eunice de Souza. Sunita Jain records richly and vividly how and what a keenly sensitive modern woman feels, without adding any ideological stance or feministic fire to her experience. Man-woman relationship runs through most of her poems, where love alternates between fulfilment and frustration. There is a sour taste of her recollection, for "the one that arrived" was not the one she had "wanted"! This bitter realisation can no longer be hushed further that for twenty five years life has been "tied to an elephant foot." A rush of humiliation and loathsome submission find an anguished utterance of the naked truth:

> My youth wept into the wilderness of nights,
> the bones are a witness to my shame:
> excretion seeded my belly. "Mother"

There is a subtle suggestion of extra-marital relationship, but alas, the lover came too late, "you arrived/after others like a pack of boys/has shredded the kite." ("Visit") The rancour and remorse of Jain is restrained with puritan rigour and her poem becomes a bottled genie. There is no flippancy and no surface action in her, whatever happens in her poems, happens deep down. So, "for all the

tumult of sense and emotion, order is respected and in the end upheld."[9]

The seething rage in Jain is unlike that of Plath. Because the degree of emotional persecution is more, so Plath cries out in "Medusa" against the mother," "off, off, eely tentacle/ There is nothing between us." "Jain, though aware of the injustice mother heaps because of "the moth eaten tradition," allows anger to be toned down by underlying compassion, for the Mother too may be "lame in widowhood, by guilt bied white." ("Mother") Her poems related to father are full of Electral admiration and awe, reminiscent of Plath and Sexton. The daughter's keen awareness of his death-wish for her future achievement is poignantly expressed thus:

> I hung on to your words, father,
> and was thrown on anvils.
> How will I know your wish was realised?
> Will you send a sign someday, and set me free. "Father"

So, unlike Plath and Sexton, who finally are "through" with father fixation, Jain becomes a willing captive. Jain's relationship with her grown-up daughter calls to mind the nostalgia of Sexton. Jain has to surrender reluctantly all her claims, "One by one I lay to rest/what in you was mine." To sumup then, Jain expresses the dilemma of her American education, Indian tradition, and restless self with little of metaphor and even less of myth. Yet what one still wishes in her is broadening the range of her emotion to universal predicament as Plath does by identifying herself with the tortured Jews, and Lowell and Sexton do likewise by their identification with the victims of Vietnam.

Eunice de Souza is, like Sunita Jain, a consummate craftsman. Like Ezekiel and Kamala Das, she has to confront the conflicting claims of several strains of personal background. The elements of Goan life and Catholic religion are balanced with western intellectual make-up. There is an intimacy and immediacy of experience expressed, not with self-engrossment, but with a disarming detachment. There is a mocking quality in her, which enables her to poke fun on her fellow Christians as if she has "dipped her pen in acid."[10] There is a fiercely honest hunt for identity "as a unique autonomous person—not simply Goan, Catholic, or even woman."[11] Sexton-like, she wants to avoid the early humiliating awareness of being an unwanted

daughter:

> I have heard it said
> my parents wanted a boy
> I've done my best to qualify
> I hid the bloodstains
> of my clothes
> and let my breasts sag . . . [12]

Her poem, "Forgive Me, Mother," is a typical combination of Plath and Sexton in vindicating her anger against the mother. She wants forgiveness from mother because "In dreams/I hack you." Thus, the poems of Eunice de Souza work as "acid-etchings on a metal plate!"[13]

There are three more Indian confessionals to be considered, all less important than those described above, because they are the fence-sitters still to open-up fully. The poems of Mamta Kalia are less biting than those of Eunice de Souza. Still, her gaiety of feeling and gusto of expression fail to hide her "spiky wit."[14] In the hectic life of a beloved, service woman, and housewife, nothing seems to happen "except two children/and two miscarriages" ("sheer Good Luck"). There is then the regret for the failure of her father:

> I wish you had guts, Papa,
> To smuggle eighty thousand watches at a stroke,
> And I'd proudly say, "My father's in
> import-export business you know." "Tribute to Papa"

And finally there is anger against Robert Frost's "After Apple-Picking," for Kalia cannot think of apples in the age of galloping price-rise when "whatever we save we keep for beer/ And contraceptives."

Gauri Deshpande does not have the same satisfaction in love as Mamta Kalia; she is like Kamala Das, fierce in her frustration and anger. There is a great deal of "blood and sweat and clenched fist," giving the impression that the "Lady doth lash too much."[15] The same retaliatory lashing is found in Shree Devi Singh as well, when she writes:

> I was mauled once in a deep green bed
> By canines. (He called himself a tiger)

But my teeth proved sharper.
I use his skin as a rug now. "The Sky My Land"

But this anger is not always shot like a bullet; sometimes humour and irony tone it down:

The silver aircraft roared away into the night with you.
My love being excess baggage, were left
At the airport. "Santa Cruz"

Concluding this exploratory essay, it can be said then that except Nissim Ezekiel, and to some extent Kamala Das, Sunita Jain, and Eunice de Souza, the rest of the Indian confessionals are still groping for their true form – they take confession in a literal rather than specific poetic sense. K. Ayyappa Paniker has generalised the whole issue by pointing out the Indian confessional response as a "desire to catch-up with the West."[16] It does not apply to Ezekiel, and even in the case of Sunita Jain and Eunice de Souza, the conscious choice is followed by sincere compulsion. In Kamala Das, sincerity is there, but it is either misplaced or unidimensional. The Indian confessionals, except Ezekiel, will write better if they ponder over Alam Williamson, a contemporary poet-critic of America, when he points out that "the thoroughgoing yet critical self-absorption . . . finally allows one to stand a little apart from the self, to see it as an entity among entities."[17]

NOTES

1. John O. Perry, "Multiculturality and Western Critical Perspectives: Problems for Indian English Poetry," *The Indian Journal of English Studies*, 1988, p. 17.
2. Quoted from the epigraph of Anne Sexton's first book of poems, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1960).
3. M.L. Rosenthal, *The New Poets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 79.
4. K.N. Daruwalla, *Two Decades of Indian Poetry*: 1960-1980 (New

Delhi: Vikas, 1980), p. 57.

5. R. Raphael, "Kamala Das: The Pity of It," *Indian Literature*, May-June 1979, p. 134.
6. Sylvia Plath, *The Poet Speaks*, ed. Peter Orr (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 169.
7. A bunch of eight poems published in the *Indian Literature*, March-April, 1985, pp. 45-49.
8. Omprakash Grewal, "The Poetry of Kamala Das: A Critical Assessment" in *Indian Writing in English*, ed. K.N. Sinha (New Delhi: Heritage, 1979), p. 131.
9. John Anderson, Introduction to *Find Me with Rain* by Anderson and Jain (New Delhi: Amrit, 1984), p. 2.
10. K.R.S. Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1985, rpt.), p. 727.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Daruwalla, *Two Decades of Indian Poetry*, p. 49.
14. Eunice de Souza in *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English*, ed. Peeradina (Madras: Macmillan, 1977, rpt.), p. 84.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
16. "From the 'Tranquillized Fifties' to the Turbulent Sixties: A Note on Changes in American Poetry," *Indian Journal of American Studies*, July 1984, p. 27.
17. *Introspection and Contemporary Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 6.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Comparative Indian Literature: Some Perspectives **by Indra Nath Choudhuri. New Delhi: Sterling, 266 pp. Rs. 250.**

Being more than a century old, Comparative Literature is already a well-established and well-researched academic discipline in Europe, America, Canada and Australia. The erstwhile U.S.S.R. and other East-European countries too had a well-defined school of comparative literature. India started its journey late on this road though the concept has been quite familiar to our scholars and creative writers for a long time. But as a distinct academic discipline, comparative literature studies in our country started only in 1956 when a full-fledged department was established in Jadavpur University, Calcutta. Now several universities such as Delhi, Bombay, A.M.U., Telugu, South Gujarat, Madurai, Calicut, Sri Krishnadevaraya and several others offer comparative literature at M.A., M.Phil and Ph.D. levels. The focus and orientation of this discipline are also undergoing a much desired change. From Euro-centric and American models and canons of Comparative Literature, Indian scholars are now adopting a more indigenous approach as a consequence of which Comparative Indian Literature is also acquiring an identity of its own. In fact, with its rich heritage of ancient literature and a multilingual and multidimensional socio-cultural ethos, India has a fertile soil for the luxuriant growth and development of the plant of Comparative Indian Literature into a large and voluminous shady tree in the years to come. It is a happy situation that enthusiasm for Comparative Literature among our scholars has resulted in the publication of a good number of books on the subject which are very useful for the students and teachers alike. The present volume by Dr. I.N. Choudhuri is a welcome addition to this list.

Aptly titled *Comparative Indian Literature: Some Perspectives*, this book incorporates twenty-two scholarly essays that present an in-

depth study of diverse aspects of comparative literature. The main focus and stance of these essays centre round Indian Literature in the main and that makes the book all the more valuable. The first nine essays of the collection not only define and analyse the theoretical parameters of comparative literature, but some of these also deal meaningfully with such complex literary phenomena as Cultural Relativism, Post-Modernism, Structuralism etc. as relevant to the study of Indian Literature. The next six essays offer a critical perspective on comparative theatre encompassing as they do such diverse topics as Theory of Rasa and Brecht's Verfremdung, Historical consciousness in the Indian theatre, Structural approach to the study of *Mricchakatika* and *Shakuntlam* especially in the context of modern aesthetics and western dramaturgy, and an analogical study of traditional Indian theatre and Kabuki. The remaining seven essays are devoted mainly to examining the role of some germinal thinkers and creative writers in enriching Indian Literature from an interdisciplinary standpoint. Two of these also analyse the role of Jawahar Lal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi in the development of Indian languages. A close study of the integrated vision and multi-splendoured creative genius of Rabindra Nath Tagore as reflected in his numerous creative and critical writings, paintings and musical compositions, has been attempted in the last few essays. Though these twenty two essays presented as research papers at various national and international seminars in India and abroad touch upon a wide variety of subjects relating to comparative study of literature, they do bring out effectively the essentials and Indianness of Indian Literature as a whole and thus display an underlying unity of approach on the part of the writer. It is hoped that the book will make a definite and valuable contribution in promoting the study of Comparative Literature in general and comparative Indian literature in particular in the country.

Delhi University **D.K. PABBY**

***Aspects of Twentieth Century Criticism* by Bijay Kumar Das. New Delhi: Atlantic, 89pp. Rs. 100.**

Aspects of Twentieth Century Criticism consists of two parts. In part I, Dr. Das outlines the growth of literary criticism in twentieth century. In the introductory chapter he makes an assessment of Eliot, Richards and Leavis as critics whom he considers as pioneers of twentieth century criticism. Chapter II deals with the trends in modern criticism. This chapter is highly informative.

Chapter III titled "Basic Tenets of New Criticism" is well written. It has lucidity of style and clarity of expression. The opening lines make a fine reading: "'New criticism is no more new' and yet it remains as one of the most influential critical methods of our century. Variously known as formalistic, textual and ontological criticism, New criticism has brilliant practitioners both in America and in England such as John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, R.P. Blackmur, Allen Tate and William Empson. The major critics whose theory and practice paved the way for the New Criticism are T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards. The origin of the new criticism can be further traced back to a lecture 'The New Criticism' delivered by Joee Elias Spingarn in 1910."

After analysing the traits of New Criticism, Dr. Das aptly sums up the validity of this body of criticism in the following words: "The validity of the New criticism lies in the fact that it takes the poem as a work of art, a structure having an independent existence. Biographical and sociological approaches to the poem are not favoured by the New Critics. A poem is not meant to be paraphrased. But the New Critics do not bother about influences on the poem nor do they relate it to any tradition. This to my mind is a serious lapse. If 'no poet or artist has complete meaning alone,' the same can be said about all great poems. Great works of art cannot be appreciated alone. Moreover, subjective poetry, romantic poetry and a good deal of major classical works cannot be studied in isolation. Minor poems, and some metaphysical poems as well as some modern poems may be studied in isolation as independent works of art. Even then, there is the risk. Take the case of *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* of T.S. Eliot and *The Tower Volume* of W.B.Yeats. Can we read these poems correctly and profitably without taking the influences and poetic tradition into consideration. However, in its attitude to language the New Criticism has anticipated both structuralism and

deconstruction of the recent decades. The critical 'monism' of the New Critics has its validity, though in a limited sense. However, it is to the credit of the New Critics that they have taken away the importance from the author and given it to the text. The printed page 'the text' is the centre not the author nor the reader. This is the premise of the New Criticism." (24-25)

The next chapter "Structuralism: A Note" though well-written is sketchy. In the next two chapters "The Theory of Deconstruction: An Appraisal," and "The Validity of Reader-Response Criticism" Dr. Das makes an attempt to explain the latest schools of criticism in a simple and lucid way. He also candidly acknowledges his borrowings from other critics both Indian and Foreign.

Part II contains the analysis of some seminal essays. Chapter VII analyses Derrida's essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Science" in a very clear way that would prove useful to any student of literature. In the subsequent chapters he analyses Eliot's 'Theory of objective correlative,' Richards' 'Imagination' and 'Metaphor,' Cleanth Brooks' 'The language of paradox' and Ransom's "A Note on Ontology." Analysis of the individual essays is highly useful to scholars and researchers in the field.

Dr. Das has done a good job by making a comparative study of T.S. Eliot's and Sri Aurobindo's views of poets and poetry. This is a welcome beginning.

Dr. Das's book is well written. Though limited in scope (for it has left out myth criticism, Chicago school of criticism, psycho-analytic criticism), it would be of immense help to those who seek an introduction to literary criticism of our time.

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Abbreviations

CQ	*Commonwealth Quarterly*
CR	*Commonwealth Review*
BLR	*Bombay Literary Review*
IJAL	*Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics*
IJES	*Indian Journal of English Studies*
IRES	*Indian Review of English Studies*
JAL	*Journal of Australian Literature*
JCL	*Journal of Commonwealth Literature*
JIWE	*Journal of Indian Writing in English*
JLS	*Journal of Literary Studies*
KJES	*Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*
KUJES	*Kanpur University Journal of English Studies*
LC	*Literary Criterion*
PURB	*Punjab University Research Bulletin*

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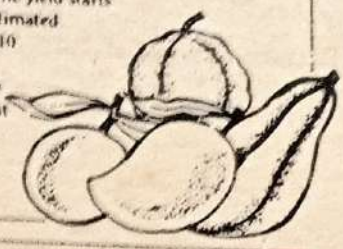

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