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**Vol. XLI**

**2003-2004**



**THE INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR ENGLISH STUDIES**

# Indian Journal of English Studies

Chief Editor: Dr. R.K. Dhawan

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## Editorial

R.K. DHAWAN

Literature has a unique quality; it transcends all barriers of time and space. The manner in which it treats a particular theme and invests it with a universal meaning binds the strangest of the people and remotest of the places. This observation is true of contemporary literature written the world over, including women's writing in India which is growing steadily in its popularity. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women's writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle impersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have remained alien ideas, the marital bliss and the women's role at home is a central focus. It is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. Writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande have made a tremendous contribution in this respect.

Manju Kapur has just joined the growing number of Indian women writers on whom the image of the suffering but stoic woman eventually breaking traditional boundaries has had a significant impact. Kapur's debut novel *Difficult Daughters* was a successful attempt in this context, and her recently published *A Married Woman* reinforces this point of view. Her new novel is essentially a woman's novel for women at large. Astha, the protagonist, a young woman brought up in Delhi, is a typical middle-class person. She succumbs to her parents finding her husband in a traditionally arranged manner. Within the bounds of marriage, she discovers a latent sexuality which is driven by love and passion and her desire is to assert her individualism. This theme of lesbianism is innovative in Indian fiction, though it was earlier handled by some writers including Shobha De and Namita Gokhale.

The theme of woman's identity has indeed been an important subject of contemporary Indian writing. The recently published Partition literature, especially by women writers, stands a testimony to this effect. There has been a revival of interest in Amrita Pritam's classic novel *Pinjar* which has been made into a film. The movie has been well acclaimed by the audience, mainly because of the role of the female protagonist. The novel depicts the Partition scenario when women went through many of the experiences that the protagonist goes through in the story. Indian history has not really recorded the pain and suffering of the women who were used as pawns in the vendetta game during Partition. Abduction and rape were only the beginning of these women's trauma. It is in fiction, like the novel *Pinjar*, that we find life and literature brought so close.

Apart from fiction, the year has registered a remarkable growth in the area of drama. Several plays written in the regional languages have been translated into English. Those who have contributed to the present literary scene include Girish Karnad, Manjula Padmanabhan, Gurcharan Das and Mahesh Dattani. Contemporary Indian drama in English has made bold innovations and fruitful experiments in terms of both thematic concerns and technical virtuositities.

The year has witnessed a growing interest in Australian literature in India. A number of creative writers came to India; their books and lectures evoked a good response. Inez Baranay recently visited India and stayed in Pune and New Delhi to write her seventh novel, an Indo-Australian venture, entitled *Neem Dreams*. She fully absorbed Indian culture and environment and came out with this novel, reflecting her experience and knowledge of India. The story of the novel is simple: Andy, an Englishman, is a young lawyer who is seeking a cure for HIV and has heard that neem might be effective. The book seeks to give western recognition to the Indian system of treatment: yoga and ayurveda. Indo-Australian writing was further strengthened with the visit of eminent novelists—Peter Carey and Kim Scott in February 2003. Peter Carey is the internationally reputed award-winning author of numerous best-selling books including *Oscar and Lucinda*, winner of 1988 Booker Prize. His novel *The History of Kelly Gang* won the Booker Prize in 2001.

Peter Carey and Kim Scott delivered a number of lectures, highlighting Indo-Australian interaction in literary studies.

As for American Studies, MELUS, the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S., has been actively promoting multi-cultural American literature in India. It is to hold an international conference at Indo-American Center, Hyderabad, in early 2004 that would focus on the text as representation of ideological currents in culture and environment. Taking a given text as a narrative production and a socially symbolic act, it is desirable to make an attempt to analyze the subtle ways in which disciplinary discourses break down and enter the world of political agency. An ideological reading of marginalized texts involves a process of meaning-creation as a socio-historical and trans-individual process. Finally, questions may be asked as to how the study of multi-ethnic literatures of the Americas is relevant to us in India.

Of the non-Indian literatures, Canadian studies has registered a remarkable growth during the year. It is evident from the fact that Asia-Pacific International conference on Canadian literature held at Mysore University in January 2003 was a great success. Multiculturalism is a common factor between Canada and India and this is amply evident in the contemporary literature of both the countries. Several studies address the challenges of diversity that the two nations Canada and India experience in our times, either within literature or across other disciplines. We today witness that afloat on the back of multiethnic, multinational practices within and without national boundaries. Curiously, identity itself gets challenged and fractured repeatedly. This theme has been best explored in the recently-published Anita Rau Badami's novel *Hero's Walk* and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*.

In fine, the literary scene in India during the year has been quite vibrant. Indian English literature as also the new literatures have registered a remarkable growth. The current issue of the journal seeks to reflect the contemporary literary scene, and offers scholarly essays, which we hope, will evoke a lively response.

*S.B.S. College, University of Delhi*

## Human Affairs: The Species, its Potentialities and Its Literature

R.S. SHARMA

**H**umanity is passing through a very difficult time. Perhaps in no other age were the social institutions, cultural norms, beliefs, values, as well as literary themes and forms so thoroughly overturned at the same time. The 'constructions' of contemporary theory are more disheartening than its deconstructions. There is nothing like basic human nature; we cannot think in terms of origins and presence. Today we certainly need not only a Critical Quarterly, but also a Crisis Quarterly. However, when we bring the flame of science near contemporary theory, it begins to melt. And it is highly arbitrary to insulate scientific statements from the discourses of humanity (or the discourse of human sciences). In the specific context of their book *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps*, Allan and Barbara Pease have observed:

Society today is determined to believe that men and women possess exactly the same skills, aptitudes and potentials—just as science, ironically, is beginning to prove they are completely different. (xvii)

Scientifically speaking, contemporary theory's denial of original human nature (female nature, too) will appear to be implausible, although the operational meaning of 'origin' needs to be considered. It is impossible to assume a complete hiatus between nature and culture, and we cannot attribute all phenomena to the workings of environmental, social, economic and political forces. The flood of relativism must be given some empirical point of reference on the time scale. Logically speaking, we must posit something given, something species-specific, which adapts itself to the changing surroundings without losing its basic properties. A bridge certainly operates between nature and culture, and culture itself in its beginning

must have taken up the positive and negative potentials of the species as threads for further fabrication.

To be on solid ground, we must discover a period in human evolution during which our present-day human nature became crystallized under the pressure of a new set of circumstances. The zoologist Desmond Morris in his book *The Naked Ape* has sketched the stages of human development in the following words:

The forest ape that became a ground ape that became a hunting ape that became a territorial ape has become a cultural ape, and we must call a temporary halt. (15)

Morris's use of the terms 'naked ape' or 'human ape' is certainly open to question, because homo sapiens are demonstrably different from all the ape species. Morris has put forward many other controversial ideas, but most scientists now agree that the humans, owing to a cataclysmic change in the environment had to leave their paradisaical home in the trees and struggle against ground conditions with gathering and hunting as new means to their survival. This happened millions of years ago and even today hunting is a matter of intense debate.

Most of our constructive and destructive inclinations emerged and became established during the ground and hunting stages, but our deep sense of cleanliness, enshrined in all cultures, probably comes down from the forest stage. Other urges that constitute the deepest stratum of our being are peaceability (strengthened during the territorial stage) comradeship, love, compassion, artistic creativity, aesthetic perception demand for justice and equality, hatred, aggressiveness, cruelty and possessiveness.

Before I indicate how these qualities have always been the basic themes of literature, I must turn to a handicap of the species that became the source of our noblest sentiments and literary as well as artistic expression. In no other species is the young born so helpless and has such a long period of dependency. The situation of the human child is such that it calls for the most selfless care and attention (although material considerations have somewhat distorted the original and spontaneous response). Over and above this, the child, whether smiling or crying, naturally arouses most tender sentiments

of love and affection. No wonder we possess an invaluable corpus of literary output on the theme of the child in every culture—child Krishna and child Christ are two distinguished examples. The newborn is associated with divinity, innocence and irresistible charm, and Freud's claim that the human child is the most perverted and wily creature has in no way affected its cardinal position in the species. When Miranda (notice the choice of this name) regrets that she must have been a source of trouble to her father, Prospero replies that, on the contrary, she was the only support for his life and strivings:

Miranda: Alack, what trouble  
Was I then to you!

Prospero: O, cherubin  
Thou wast that did preserve me. Thou didst smile,  
Infused with a fortitude from heaven

Miranda's anxiety about her father's troubles is a sign of natural generosity. As Theodore Zeldin has observed: "it was believed that children were born selfish, but recent observation of the very young (from fourteen months) has revealed that they are capable of many different kinds of generosity, not haphazardly, but in ways appropriate to the needs of others. (*An Intimate History of Humanity*, 324)

Zeldin has also something important to say about racial prejudice:

Likewise, until the last century, scientists insisted that racial prejudice was natural, but now some studies of children have suggested that discrimination, far from being something they think up for themselves, is taught to them by adults. (324-25)

We can also not leave out another kind of potentiality which is profoundly important, namely, imagination. Imagination (primary) Coleridge had asserted is the common property of humankind, although secondary imagination, different only in degree and mode of operation, is the possession of poets only. On the other hand, in his book *The Literary Mind*, Mark Turner argues, "the literary mind is not a separate kind of mind. It is our mind. The literary mind is the fundamental mind." (v) In his book, Turner shows how the so-called

literary devices of story, projection and parable are essential prerequisites for every day life.

It should now be clear that human nature as we perceive it today took shape several million years ago and that so far it has not undergone any major reformation. It may further be added that human nature provides to literature means (imagination) as well as themes and values. But this is applicable to great literature only. In fact great literature is characterized by two distinguishing features: treatment of basic human potentialities and exposure of inhibitive social and cultural conventionalisms—the first element accounts for the perennial human appeal of great literature, which is proof against dating. We shall now briefly consider a few examples. It must, however, be noted that even a great work of literature is not exempt from the epistemes created by the dominant groups in their own interests; what a great writer clues is to rise above the discourse of power and add discordant notes or delve still deeper and express the basic urges of the human race. A great work is always polyphonic.

As a whole, Homer's *Iliad* is a text of Greek ideology, but the debates between the Greek heroes bring out the element of self-contradiction. The inhumanity involved in Agamemnon's refusal to return Chryses' daughter is followed by severe punishment imposed by Apollo on the Greek forces. Man's zest for bloodshed and cruelty is embodied in Greek chieftains. It is worthwhile to recall that Coleridge observed that Homer's heroes live in hell. When Achilles' cruelty reaches its peak in dishonouring Hector's corpse, Zeus becomes angry and sends Thetis to her son. In Thetis's speech maternal care and the stern message are combined:

My child, how long will you go on eating your heart out in sorrow and lamentation, and remember neither your food nor going to bed? It is a good thing even to be with a woman in love. For you will not be with me long, but already death and powerful destiny stand closely above you. But listen hard to me, for I come from Zeus with a message. He says that the gods frown upon you, that beyond all other immortals he himself is angered that in your heart's madness you hold Hector beside the curved ships and did not redeem him. (Book XXIV, trans. Richmond Lattimore)

The most moving scene between Hector and Andromache is a jewel in world literature.

The story of how poetry burst out of Valmiki's heart is highly symbolic. As he was watching a curlew couple engaged in mating, a fowler's arrow killed the male; the female gave out piteous cries of lamentation. This act of cruelty disturbed the sage's calm mind so much that he involuntarily pronounced a curse on the fowler. The sage's utterance came out in the form of self-composed verse:

maa nishaad pratishtam tvam agamah shasvati samaah  
yatkraunch mithunadekam avadhecha kamamohitam.

(Balakanda 11, 15)

O fowler, may you not get (society's) regard for many years to come, since you have killed one of a curlew couple, who was in the midst of love-infatuation.

Valmiki himself explained that what came out of his mouth in a moment of grief could not be other than rhythmically musical verse (Balakanda 11, 18).

The chief Rasa in Valmiki's *Ramayana* is karuna, and pathos as a deep-rooted sense of alienation is a basic condition of human life. According to Bhavabhuti karuna is a fundamental aesthetic emotion which manifests itself in literature in many variations on the basis of different means.

At a lower level, *Ramayana* is highly polyphonic; we can clearly perceive the clash of voices and exposure of human weakness. For example in Ayodhyakanda, Ch. XXI, Lakshman is moved by the anguish of Kaushalya and protests against the arbitrary decision of the king: "Elder mother, I also do not like that Rama should renounce the throne and go to the forest. At this moment, the king is under the influence of a woman's word. His nature has become inverted, he is old and drawn along by carnal desires: instigated by lustfulness what is it that he cannot utter?" (Ayodhyakanda, XXI, 2-3)

Fascination with Nature's beauty in its various aspects and variegated details has been a prominent hobby of the species since time immemorial. Even the postmodern condition of urban living has not been able to phase it out:

Very old are the woods;  
 And the buds that break  
 Out of the Brier's boughs,  
 When March winds wake,  
 So old with their beauty are—  
 Oh, no man knows  
 Through what wild centuries  
 Roves back the rose.

Although the above poem by Walter de la Mare is titled 'All That's Past,' it is not actually so, because the last line of the poem refers to amaranth, a mythical undying flower. We are well aware of Wordsworth's delight in Nature, Shelley's delicate perception of love, beauty and power in Nature and Keats's supreme poetry in "Ode to Autumn."

Kalidasa is a poet of Nature par excellence. As C.R. Devadhar has noted in *Works of Kalidasa*, "he was a widely travelled man and was a close observer of nature." (vi) A scholar quoted by Devadhar observes: "Rarely has a man walked our earth who observed the phenomena of living nature as accurately as he, though his accuracy was that of a poet, not that of a scientist." (vii)

Descriptions of Nature's charm and beauty accompanied by most appropriate similes are widespread in Kalidasa's works and we should be content with his incomparable pen-painting of the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna at Prayaga, for the verses combine the best of Nature, learning and courtly opulence:

Behold, O fair one of flawless limbs, how the Ganges with its stream cleft by the Yamuna gleams here like a necklet of pearls interwoven with sapphires that cover it with their splendour, there like a garland of white-lilies, set in the intervals with blue lotuses; here like a row of birds that love the Manasa lake interspersed with dark-winged swans; now like sandal-paintings on the earth with ornamental leaves in dark aloes; now like moonlight chequered with darkness underneath the shades; now like a patch of white autumn clouds, where through the interstices the (blue of the) sky, peeps out and in places like Siva's body smeared with the ungent of ashes, and girt with black snakes for ornaments. (Raghuvansha xiii, 54-57, trans. Devadhar)

Sexual love, as emotion and activity, is inalienable from the human species; this feature of human life was tremendously strengthened and developed during the hunting stage when the daylong separation necessitated extra amorous effort including sexual smartness and self-decoration, especially by the females. Later on the subject was developed into erotica through cultural sophistication.

Kalidasa is an unrivalled poet of this theme and he anticipates many recent developments in this field. He may or may not have read Vatsyayana, but he certainly had behind him a well-developed erotic tradition.

He rejoices in the charm of the unadorned female body through the portrayal of Shakuntala and Parvati, he speaks of the irresistible attraction of bared thighs (to one who already knows the taste) of sweet odour emanating from women's bodies; he describes couples engaged in lovemaking. The eighth chapter of *Kumarasambhava* deals quite explicitly with the lovemaking of Siva and Parvati. He deals with union in love and also separation and longing (*Meghadutam*).

Kalidasa is one of the greatest poets who achieve unassailable position in epic and drama. In matters of art he leaves Shakespeare miles behind, but where the matters of heart are involved, Shakespeare is much ahead of him. Shakespeare explored the most basic elements of human nature and exposed the pernicious and ossified beliefs and practices of human society. These contributions combined with natural artistry make him a universal figure and 'our contemporary' in every age.

Insofar as Shakespeare's continuous appeal is concerned, Shakespearean criticism is not a good guide: it has been changing according to the zeitgeist of different periods. A surer basis for our appraisal could be the overall popular response across the centuries. In this process many works of Shakespeare have dropped out of the focus. Those that remain dwell on the basic strengths and weaknesses of mankind. Here we shall refer to some of those works that have stood the test of time.

Something like community-sense and friendship operates in the behaviour of human cells and as S. Schoenbaum in his book *Shakespeare* has observed, friendship is a universal human experience.

(106) It appears centrally in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and also figures in the sonnets and *The Merchant of Venice*. This does not mean that Shakespeare did not bow to the Elizabethan conventions of friendship literature. What matters most is his departures from the vogue. What distinguishes Henry V as a leader and commander is his sense of friendship with the soldiers and lowly sections of society: His famous speech in *King Henry V* begins, "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more."

In *King Henry IV*, Pts I and 2, Falstaff is utilized for uttering some home truths about human nature and also for exposing the pretence of honour and justice in the conventional sense. As regards humour, as Falstaff himself declares, he is not only witty in himself, "but the cause that wit is in other men" (Humourists would define man as a laughing animal).

It may be noted here that Shakespeare often makes use of clowns, fools and villains for the purpose of exposing conventional attitudes and prejudices and uttering some truths about human nature. Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* attacks the (un)Christian attitudes of the dominant group and declares the equality of men in goodness and evil: "Hath not a Jew eyes? . . . If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that." (III.ii)

The plot of *Macbeth* is centred on ambition, of *Othello* on jealousy and *Hamlet* on Oedipus complex, which according to Freud is an inescapable factor in man's life. Love in its various manifestations is the chief concern in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. It should be of special interest that, love at first sight is prominently highlighted in Shakespeare's comedies—and love at first sight is obviously not a product of culture. Destructive but ennobling passion is the staple of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the most poetic of Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare makes full use of phantasy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and phantasy is also present in his last plays collectively known as Romances—*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

At this point one may like to know that memory and phantasy—so profusely employed in postmodern literature—are special endowments to the human race—their original source lies in the ge-

netic script of the species. Other creatures have very little element of memory and projection or imagination. Bertrand Russell has observed that though hundreds of birds perish during a natural calamity, they forget it as soon as it is over and begin to sing joyfully without any planning or precaution against the recurrence.

To return to the Romances, they deal with the child's redemptive role in human life. We have already noted how the human child brings out the noble qualities (that is selfless response based on love, care and aesthetic admiration) of human nature. Secondly, it may be argued that both revenge and forgiveness (the other theme in the Romances) are both rooted in human psyche. Therefore Prospero's final conclusion that "the rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance," may be regarded as potentially present in human nature itself.

### *Varanasi*

## Understanding Postmodernism with Reference to Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard

SUSHILA SINGH

Postmodernism is a vexing term and so are postmodern, postmodernist and postmodernity. Since the late 1950s, postmodernism has been applied at different levels of conceptual abstraction. It refers to a complex set of anti-modernist artistic strategies which emerged in the 1950s, and developed momentum in the course of the 1960s. Because it was used for totally opposed practices in different disciplines, the term became problematic right from the beginning.

The art critic Clement Greenberg defined modernism in terms of wholly autonomous aesthetic, of a radically anti-representational self-reflexivity. For him, it meant that each artistic discipline sought to free itself from all extraneous influence. From this anti-representational, formalist point of view, postmodernism gives up on this project of self-discovery and is a kind of taking a back step to return to pictorial narrative, to representational practices. For example, postmodern architecture turns away from self-absorbed and technocratic purism and turns to the vernacular and to history, thus reintroducing the humanizing narrative element.

For many American literary critics in the 1960s and early 1970s, postmodernism is a move away from narrative, from representation. It is turning towards self-reflexiveness in the so-called metafiction of the period; as represented in the writings of Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, the surfictionists and the *nouveau romanciers*. It is a move towards radical aesthetic autonomy, towards pure formalism. In dance, the term postmodern has been applied both to an early movement toward functionality, purity, and self-reflexivity, "analytic postmodern dance" (Banes

1985: 81) and to a later "rekindling of interest in narrative structures" (91). Film presents its own specific problems—of periodization, for instance. In photography, 'content' is associated with realism and modernism, and the shift is the other way again.

Depending on the artistic discipline, then, postmodernism is either a radicalization of the self-reflexive moment within modernism, a turning away from narrative and representation, or an explicit return to narrative and representation. At times it is both. Also, there are postmodernisms that do not fit this neat binary categorization. Yet, there is a common denominator. In their own way, they all seek to transcend what they see as the self-imposed limitations of modernism. In its search for autonomy and purity or for timeless, representational, truth experience has been subjected to unacceptable intellectualizations and reductions. The attempt to transcend modernism follows two main strategies: The first is to question modernism's premises and its procedures from within the realm of art. Those who break more radically with modernism attack art and seek to undermine the idea of art itself: art as institution, its self-sufficiency and autonomy is a self-imposed exile. It means that art willingly accepts its impotence, it accedes to its own neutralization and depoliticization.

At a second level, postmodernism has been defined as the 'attitude' of the 1960s counterculture, or as 'new sensibility' of the 1960s social and artistic avant-garde. This new sensibility is eclectic, radically democratic. It rejects what it sees as the exclusivist and repressive character of liberal humanism. The avant-garde attack on art as institution is broadened and raised to socio-political level. Such an early politicized form of postmodernism was first identified in the mid-Sixties by Leslie Fiedler and other critics.

In the course of the 1970s, postmodernism was gradually drawn into a poststructuralist orbit. Poststructuralism can be understood as any of various theories or methods of analysis, including deconstruction and some psychoanalytic theories that deny the validity of structuralism's method of binary opposition and maintain that meaning and intellectual categories are shifting and unstable. Initially, postmodernism was associated with the deconstructionist practices that took their inspiration from the poststructuralism of

Barthes and Derrida. Later, it drew on Michel Foucault, on Jacques Lacan's revisions of Freud and on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The translation of Jean-François Lyotard's *La condition postmoderne* (1984; original edition 1979), in which a prominent post-structuralist adopted the term postmodern, seemed to many to signal a fully-fledged merger between an originally American postmodernism and French poststructuralism. This postmodernism rejects the empirical idea that language can represent reality, that the world is accessible through language because its objects are mirrored in the language that people use. It follows the poststructuralist idea that language constitutes, rather than reflects, the world. Therefore, knowledge is always distorted by language, by the historical circumstances and the specific environment in which it arises. The postmodern subject is, thus, largely "other-determined."

There are two moments within this poststructuralist postmodernism. The first belongs to the later 1970s and the early 1980s. It derives from Barthes and Derrida. It is linguistically textual in its orientation. This Derridean deconstructionist postmodernism largely limited itself to texts and intertexts. It believed that attacking representation was in itself an important political act. It was content to celebrate the so-called death of the subject and thus of the author. It did not realize that it had paradoxically made questions of subjectivity and authorship all the more relevant.

If representations do not and cannot represent the world, then inevitably all representations are political, in that they cannot help reflecting the ideological frameworks within which they arise. In the absence of transcendent truth it matters, more than ever, who is speaking (or writing), and why, and to whom. Deconstructionist postmodernism largely ignored these and other political questions. As a result, its textual, self-reflexive orientation rapidly lost its attraction.

Derived from Foucault and Lacan, the other moment belongs to the 1980s. Foucault's influence materializes almost imperceptibly and becomes pervasive. This moment assumes a reality of textuality and signs, of representations that do not represent. The emphasis is on the workings of power, and the constitution of the subject. From the perspective of this postmodernism, knowledge is inevitably

bound up with power, and thus becomes suspect. It attempts to expose the politics in representations and to undo institutionalized hierarchies. It works against the hegemony of a single discursive system and flourishes advocacy of difference, pluriformity, and multiplicity.

Drawing on the later Foucault's interest in the subject, it more generally investigates the ways in which human beings are constituted and reconstituted by discourses, that is, by language and recognize themselves as subjects. This Foucauldian postmodernism in the 1980s had a far reaching democratizing influence within cultural institutions and in the humanities at large. It is this redefinition of the postmodern during the 1980s that enabled the close links with feminism and multiculturalism.

On this second level, there are some problems. On the political left, some commentators distinguish between a 'good' deconstructionism, which they refuse to call postmodern, and a 'bad' version, which they contemptuously label 'postmodern.' Christopher Norris, convinced of the political correctness of Paul de Man and Derrida, sees their work within a politically constructive framework, as engaged in the necessary process of erasing the old, harmful intellectual structures of liberal humanism in order to make room for new ones. For Norris and many others on the left, postmodernism, rather idiosyncratically defined, is thus merely intellectual.

In the later 1970s, a broad complex of deconstructionist/ post-structuralist practices became firmly associated with postmodernism. In some artistic disciplines, practice and theoretical argument became indistinguishable. These practices made themselves felt first in the field of literary criticism and then in adjacent fields. This proliferation of the postmodern in other disciplines is responsible for the frequent use of its terminology outside its original core area, the humanities. It is not that the world that is postmodern, it is the perspective from which the world is seen is postmodern.

At yet another level, one can argue that the world has become postmodern, or entered a new historical era of postmodernity. This restricts itself in practice to developments in the United States of America, Western Europe and tacitly assumes that the rest of the world will have to follow suit. To some critics, postmodernity is still

limited to certain areas of contemporary culture or to certain socio-logically definable groups within the western world. A key factor in this interpretation of postmodernism as the superstructure of the current socio-economic order is the ever-increasing penetration of capitalism into day-to-day existence, or, the ever-increasing commodification of both the public and the private. Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard feel that this onslaught has managed to obliterate the classical Marxist distinction between the economic and the cultural. Industrial production has given way to Baudrillard's 'semi-urgy': the sinister production of signs.

Postmodernism, thus, means and has meant different things to different people at different conceptual levels, rising from humble literary critical origins in the 1950s to a level of global conceptualization in the 1980s. The common denominator is a crisis in representation: a deeply felt loss of faith in the ability to represent the real, in the widest sense. This has far-reaching consequences. Some seem debilitating. As transcendent truth seems forever out of reach, hermeneutics is required to replace the former aspirations to objectivity. Marxists like Jameson find it hard to accept because it undermines the conceptual basis of Marxist politics. Some are positively enabling. Still other effects have changed the map of the humanities. Representations have been endowed with an almost material status. Culture has become a major constitutive power in its own right. For many theorists, signs are the most important constitutive element in the contemporary world. In the wake of Foucault, postmodernism has with increasing frequency visited the past in order to illuminate the present.

Postmodernism is both utopian and dystopian at the same time in its approach to knowledge. Only a ripple of the 1950s, postmodernism turned in the course of the 1980s into a tidal wave. The increase of the term's frequency is not matched by a similar increase in the intelligence with which it is used. Frank Kermode, Terry Eagleton and a host of others have offered at first dismissive, later, more alarmed commentary. The left made up for its initial slowness in no uncertain terms.

Postmodernism has been an unstable concept. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000) defines the

term: postmodernism is of or relating to art, architecture, or literature that reacts against earlier modernist principles, as by reintroducing traditional or classical elements of style or by carrying modernist styles or practices to extremes.

As an additional complication, postmodernism would actively seem to follow the utopian strain in contemporary culture, attaching itself to new utopias as these are formulated. In 1981, Andreas Huyssen very perceptively spoke of "the temporal imagination of postmodernism, the unshaken confidence of being at the edge of history which characterizes the whole trajectory of American postmodernism since the 1960s" (Huyssen 1981: 30). In his view, being at the edge of history in 1981, implies a total rejection of the past.

By 1986, within five years after the publication of Huyssen's article, postmodernism remade itself by its explosively increasing interest in feminism, multiculturalism, and whatever had been marginalized by mainstream culture. Refocussing on the politics of representation, postmodernism became thoroughly politicized.

Postmodernism presents insoluble contradictions and paradoxes. One traditional aporia (undecidable) presents itself right at the outset: where should one place the beginning of a history of the debate on postmodernism." It is further problematized; the first stage of the debate antedates the actual introduction of the term(s) in question. Susan Sontag never used the term 'postmodern' or 'postmodernism,' yet the art and the sensibility that she discussed were widely called postmodern by the late 1970s. The same is true for the criticism that Ihab Hassan introduced in his "The Dismemberment of Orpheus" (1963) and then further developed in the course of the 1960s in such essays as "The Literature of Silence" (1967). The literature he discusses is not necessarily postmodern but the intellectual frame of reference he uses is postmodern.

Other arts like architecture and visual arts present the same problem of locating the origins and determining the scope of the debate. Only the bold critics like Leslie Fiedler truly adopted the term before the early 1970s. All through the 1970s, critics openly recognized and welcomed postmodern but still resisted it, very often they were unaware of the term. In 1980, Linda Hutcheon, later an important theorist of postmodernism, still preferred 'narcissistic' to

'postmodernist' because the latter term seemed to her "a very limiting label for such a broad contemporary phenomenon as metafiction" (Hutcheon 1980: 3).

For many American critics, French poststructuralism and its American deconstructionist offshoot are practically identical with postmodernism. For many British critics, there is a marked difference between Derridean poststructuralism which they find radically cognitive and thus politically constructive, and postmodernism which they scorn as reactionary or even nihilistic.

Only in the late 1970s, poststructuralism was actually brought to bear upon postmodern art. There was a brief period in the early 1980s when a particularly vociferous version of postmodernism seemed identical with Derridean poststructuralism. But questions of subjectivity and authorship feature prominently on the postmodern agenda. It suggests a substantial distance between postmodernism and poststructuralism. As Meaghan Morris points out, the work of Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari, and others can "only be part of a debate about postmodernism when 'effectively situated' in relation to it by subsequent commentary and citation" (Morris 1993: 378). But then they are not the *theorists* of postmodern. Jean-François Lyotard is the only poststructuralist who played a major role in theorizing the postmodern.

The debate on postmodernism has its origins in American literary and cultural criticism. Charles Jencks, who since 1975 has indefatigably theorized postmodern architecture, acknowledges the literary debate as his source. He declares that Ihab Hassan has both 'christened' and 'provided a pedigree' for postmodernism (Jencks 1987: 18). Lyotard also mentions Hassan's work as his immediate source. The initial confusions surrounding the debate on postmodernism have everything to do with its origins in the American critical scene with American criticism's specific and narrow idea of modernism.

For approaching postmodernism, it is important to discuss Jürgen Habermas. It is not that Habermas is important as a theorist of the postmodern, but because his philosophical project provides a constant and formidable background of which all postmodern theorizing has to take cognizance. The avant-gardist left kept its distance

from the movement. Jürgen Habermas entered that vacuum. The publication of his Adorno lecture in *New German Critique* in 1980 was a trail-blazer. He offers a close account of modernity and modernism and what suffers from a left-liberal perspective.

Habermas thought that the Enlightenment (the emancipatory project of modernity) must not be abandoned. He did not see a monolithic rationality as the only cause of the ills of modernity. He is wary of "the snares of Western logocentrism" (1985: 196) but insists that for political reasons, rationality cannot be dispensed with. "His problem is to define and to argue the plausibility of a rationality that distinguishes itself from the rationality denounced by the poststructuralists and that is not transcendent in the sense that it is foundationalist, but yet transcends the limitations of time and place." Without such a rationality, emancipatory or leftist politics becomes an illusion.

There are obstacles in Habermas's "communicative reason." The first one is the problem of the three 'cultural value spheres' of Max Weber: the theoretical (science), the practical (morality), and the aesthetic (art). To connect these rationality complexes, and to counter the 'colonization' of the life-world by instrumental rationality, Habermas develops his concept of 'communicative reason' or 'communicative rationality.' His *The Theory of Communicative Action* argues that the structure of language itself, its procedural rationality, offers us the means to arrive at a form of communication that is not strategic. Language serves towards perfecting itself, of creating absolutely unimpeded communication. In this imagined 'ideal speech situation' communication will 'no longer be distorted,' as Christopher Norris puts it, "by effects of power, self-interest or ignorance" (Norris 1985: 149). As Thomas Docherty says, in Habermas "Marxism has taken the linguistic turn." (Docherty 1993: 3) Thus Habermas moves towards a philosophy of intersubjectivity, that is, of communication and consensus. The desirability of an intersubjectivistic consensus built upon communicative reason marks his distance from the deconstructionist avant-gardists. Richard Rorty explains it: "Abandoning a standpoint which is, if not transcendental, at least 'unrealistic,' seems to Habermas to betray the

social hopes which have been central to liberal politics" (Rorty 1985: 162).

"Modernity versus postmodernity" is the title of Habermas's Adorno lecture of 1980. Presenting an analysis of (aesthetic) modernism, he (1) defends modernism against 'neo-conservative detractors; (2) gives an explanation for the 'failure' of the surrealist revolt; (3) ends with an overview of anti-modernists and their positions (old conservatives/young conservatives/neo-conservatives).

Habermas brought a new intellectual dimension to the debate. His 'intervention' had the welcome effect of widening the intellectual and historical scope of the debate and of substantially adding to its depth. He cleared the way for the serious engagement of the traditional left with the postmodern. But the postmodern is only marginally present in Habermas. His lecture locates the spirit of modernism exclusively in the avant-garde and its nineteenth-century precursors:

The spirit and discipline of aesthetic modernity assumed clear contours in the work of Baudelaire. Modernity then unfolded in various avant-garde movements, and finally reached its climax in the Café Voltaire of the Dadaists (1981: 4).

After noting the recent revival of this avant-gardist impulse in the art of the 1960, Habermas defends it against the accusations of 'hedonistic motives' levelled against it by Daniel Bell. He argues that the avant-garde tried to bridge the gulf between art and everyday life. But the avant-gardist revolt failed:

When the containers of an autonomously developed cultural sphere are shattered, the contents get dispersed. Nothing remains from a desublimated meaning or a destructured form; an emancipatory effect does not follow. (Habermas 1981: 10)

Habermas distinguishes between three different conservative positions: the 'pre modernism' of the 'old conservatives' (F.R. Leavis), the 'anti-modernism' of the 'young conservatives' (Foucault, Derrida), and the 'postmodernism' of the 'neo-conservatives' (Daniel Bell, others). In 1981, Habermas's historical positioning of the post-structuralist enterprise and his reading of poststructuralism as an anti-progressive force did not make much of an impression. But his

essay showed how what was left of the project of modernity was endangered. It also suggested that an engagement with the forces of anti-modernism was a moral duty for those who wished to save that project from oblivion. It provided an old-fashioned norm against which other efforts to define the postmodern or to develop a post-modern politics could be measured.

Jean-François Lyotard's role in the debate on the postmodern has its beginning in 1984 when *La Condition postmoderne* of 1979 appeared in English. In his earlier work, he is more postmodern than in his later works. (*Discourse, figure* 1971; *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* 1973; *Economie Libidinale* 1974). Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* is not so much a study of postmodernity, but a study of postmodern knowledge. Lyotard puts in his preface, "the condition of knowledge in the most highly 'developed societies' (Lyotard 1984: xxiii). His remarks on late twentieth-century social developments follow mostly the familiar scenario in which information replaces the manufacture of material goods as a central concern in the most advanced economies. This "computerization of society" (67) will affect the nature of our knowledge. Lyotard predicts that "the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language" (4). Knowledge has become "an informational commodity." In Lyotard's account of modernity, instrumental rationality has come to dominate other forms of reason. The socio-political aspects of knowledge under the regime of postmodernity are not to be confused with postmodern knowledge.

Lyotard's point of departure is the demise of what he terms 'metanarratives': "simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity towards metanarratives." (xxiv) Those metanarratives or 'grand' narratives are, broadly speaking, the supposedly transcendent and universal truths that support and strengthen western civilization and that function to give that civilization objective legitimation, a term that Lyotard borrows from Habermas and that turns out to be *The Postmodern Condition's* key concept. Building upon the later Wittgenstein, Lyotard suggests that these metanarratives have been replaced by a great number of 'language games': from Wittgensteinian 'models of discourse,' via the discourses em-

ployed by social institutions and professions, to full-scale or little narratives (*petit recits*). Narrative language games can even underpin whole cultures but can have only limited social and historical validity, or, in Lyotard's terms, legitimation, even if to those who live inside them they seem inevitable and natural:

Narratives. . . . Define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do. (23)

Lyotard knows that practically all metanarratives have since long been unmasked as fictions. But modern science has successfully managed to safeguard its aura of transcendence. It has done so, Lyotard argues, by privileging the language game of 'denotation' to the exclusion of all others. But, science, too, can only find legitimation through narrative:

Scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. (29)

Lyotard's real object in *The Postmodern Condition* is to expose the legitimation of science and thus the transcendent status of scientific knowledge as belonging to the realm of narrative. There are two major versions of this 'narrative of legitimation': a political one—inherited from the French Enlightenment, and, a philosophical one—inherited from German idealism.

Lyotard argues that such legitimations have lost their power: 'Speculative or humanistic philosophy is forced to relinquish its legitimation duties.' (41) But his real target is the principle of transcendent legitimation itself. He turns to Wittgenstein for 'a kind of legitimation not based on performativity.' Non-performative, immanent legitimation is what the postmodern world is all about (41). Narrative is thus for Lyotard the inevitable source of all legitimation, value and truth.

Postmodern knowledge is now being viewed as a postmodern science. It sees itself as a language game and finds its legitimation in its own avant-gardist strategies:

Postmodern science—by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise, control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, 'fracta,' catastrophes and pragmatic paradoxes—is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical. It is changing the meaning of the word knowledge, while expressing how such a change can take place. It is producing not the known, but the unknown. And it suggests a model of legitimation that has nothing to do with maximized performance, but has as its basis difference understood as paralogy. (60)

It is this postmodern science that stands for the entire 'postmodern condition.' It seeks to be expressly anti-representational and to prevent consensus. Arguing that Habermas's promotion of consensus—'an agreement between men, defined as knowing intellects and free will ... obtains through dialogue'—is 'based on the validity of the narrative of emancipation with an ultimate consensus. For Lyotard, consensus is only a 'particular state of discussion, not its end' (65). He expects political emancipation to be realized through dissensus, not through Habermasian consensus. For him, consensus is the end of freedom and of thought. It is dissensus that allows us to experience freedom and to think and to extend our possibilities. For Habermas, emancipation follows a route that leads via temporary consensuses to an ultimate consensus. For Lyotard, emancipation depends on the perpetuation of dissensus, that is, on a permanent crisis representation, on 'an ever greater awareness of the contingent and localized—the unstable—nature of all norms for representing the world.' (Harman 1993: 163). Like the deconstructionist avant-garde, Lyotard advocates a radical anti-representationalism.

To conclude, postmodernism can be understood as a conceptual strategy or a set of strategies to cope with present day realities and human condition. The term then assumes a broad category which tries to interpret, analyze or understand the often conflictual multidimensions of life, experience, knowledge. At this level, perhaps, we can adapt to *sudeshivad* (as opposed to *kudeshivad*) as suggested by the critic Awadhesh Kumar Singh. *Sudeshivad* is not an alternative to postmodernism as offered by the critic but an identity approach in all our intellectual enterprise and thought processes.

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## Saratchandra's *Devdas* and Sanjay Bhansali's Film: A Comparative Study

GOPA RANJAN MISHRA

**D**oes Bhansali's *Devdas* merit a comparison with Saratchandra's classic? Perhaps not, but then the film just cannot be ignored. It has been screened at the Cannes Film festival; it has been declared as India's official entry for Oscar and with a 50 crore budget, it is claimed to be the most expensive film ever made in India. In this paper, I intend to make a comparison between the film and the novel that has fascinated generations of readers.

The novel opens on a scorching summer day with 10 year old Devdas, the zamindar's son, sitting in the classroom of the village school, while all other children are playing under the huge banyan tree nearby. It is recess time. Devdas has been denied the freedom to join his friends, for once he goes out, he seldom returns. He plays truant, smokes hooka in the bamboo grove, loves fishing in the pond and prefers wandering about all day. Parbati, a neighbour's daughter, often gives him company. An affectionate bond grows between them. Devdas' unruly behaviour, however, worries his father and he sends him to Calcutta to pursue his study. After years he returns to, his village, a handsome youngman with a fashionable life-style. Parbati's grandmother fancies a marriage between these two childhood friends, but the proposal is rejected outright on the ground of difference in social status. Parbati's marriage is fixed elsewhere. Desperate but full of hope and confidence that her 'Devda' will not let her go to some other man, she stealthily goes to his room in the midnight hours and proposes that he marry her but he is unable to face up to parental opposition and remains indecisive. Next day he does talk to his father but getting a very rude response, he goes away to Calcutta in utter dejection. Subsequently he writes

a letter to Parbati, regretting his inability to marry her. He also writes that he never had great love for her and that he had never thought of marrying her. But once the letter is posted he is in a different frame of mind. He realizes his love for Parbati. He rushes to the village, meets her at the ghat, apologises and expresses his desire to marry her. But it is a different Parbati that he sees. She blurts out: "I have no faith in you. The man I am going to—he is wealthy, wise—calm and patient. He is a religious man. My parents want the best for me; so they would never have me fall into the hands of some one as ruthless, reckless and unwise as you. Now, please let me go."<sup>1</sup> Thus she rejects him in a haughty way and departs. And the story takes a tragic turn because of very commonplace things, as we see—Devdas' indecision and Parbati's arrogance at wrong places.

But that spells unmitigated suffering for both. Parbati marries an elderly widower, Bhubanmohan Choudhury, whose children are of her age. In the company of an obviously guilt-ridden man who behaves more as a father than a husband, Parbati suffers the burden of her youth. There is ample evidence in the text which indicates that she leads a sexless life. As for Devdas, he goes away to Calcutta, stays in a mess where he comes in contact with one Chunilal who initiates him into the world of alcohol and Chandramukhi. In spite of his initial abhorrence for these things, Devdas becomes an addict and develops a liking for the courtesan. His attempt to drown his sorrow in drinks proves futile, since the thought of Parbati haunts him relentlessly. The book ends with Devdas on the point of death, setting out on a painful journey in a bullock-cart to keep his promise—to go to Parbati's place at least once before he dies. He does reach his destination but it is well past midnight and he has lost his voice. There is not a soul in sight and the zamindar's house lies in deep slumber.

The cartman does not know what to do with this dying man whose lips quiver but can't say a word. He lays a makeshift bed on the stone platform that runs round the peepul tree, moves his unusual passenger from the cart and on to the bed. The next day in the morning, Devdas struggles for a couple of hours, tears rolling down

his cheeks, and closes his eyes forever, looking for a familiar face but seeing only strangers.

So here is a character who, frustrated in love, takes to drink, goes to a prostitute and ruins his life. He is quite unhero like—uncertain in his actions and maudlin in his responses. He is ineffectual, weak-willed and is in a perpetually melancholic state. Sometimes he is described as an emasculate, sadomasochist persona. But can we deny the fact that his presence looms large over the narrative. Parvati considers him a paragon among men despite all his faults. Chandramukhi, too, finds him infinitely charming. 'There isn't a woman on earth who would deny herself this heaven,' she says of his company. While trying to explain Devdas' endless appeal to readers and moviegoers, Sheila Vesuna says, "Men see an extension of themselves in this tragedy king, while women long to be loved by men like him—which is why, perhaps, Devdas is the most filmed character in the Indian film industry."<sup>2</sup>

In the book *So Many Cinemas*, film historian B.D. Garga says, "Devdas is a tragic anti-hero, torn by inner conflict and a driving passion. There is no heroic dimension to his character. What moves us are his weaknesses, his humanness which comes across sharply in his relationship with his family, with Chandramukhi and Dharamdas, his faithful servant."<sup>3</sup>

Now let us have a look at Bhansali's film. He concedes that he has taken liberties with the original story, perhaps to make it appealing to modern masses, even while retaining the Bengali ethos and ambience. He says: "I had to make the film differently from the way P.C. Barua and Bimal Roy had made it. They struck very close to the novel. I feel that a director should have the liberty of interpreting a novel the way he wants to. . . . I am very convinced about the few liberties I have taken. The soul of Devdas remains the same and the storyline remains the same. So I don't think it should really offend audiences."<sup>4</sup>

I do admit, film-making is a different medium and an innovative director, while adapting a novel, can create his own structure and transform what is purely verbal into an essentially visual form. In the name of being faithful to the original, he need not slavishly translate one medium into another. At places he can do a bit of

“transcreation” as long as his rendering does not affect the spirit of the work. But does Bhansali make a right claim? There are so many changes in the story line and so many new constructions incorporated into the film, that any sensitive reader of Saratchandra’s novel will be inclined to disagree with Bhansali. I would like to state here some obvious departures from the text.

The first twenty-five pages of the book deal with the childhood of Devdas and Parbati. The readers get to know in detail about the nature of their relationship. They quarrel and fight but they obviously take delight in staying together. The boy is authoritative but affectionate, generous and forgiving. And the girl is submissive but she has her moments of obstinacy and arrogance. They take their claim over each other for granted and this attitude continues till almost the end of the book. Besides, the description of this childhood period makes the readers get more attached to the characters and contributes to the greater intensity of the tragedy in the end. The film excludes this important period and begins with Devdas returning from Oxford (it is Calcutta in the original) after ten years and when he meets Parbati, they engage in unconvincing rhetorics. Their talks sound like empty declaration of love for each other, devoid of feeling. In the novel the scene is different. The long lapse of time, prolonged separation and the advent of early youth make them behave in a very restrained manner, each feeling a bit shy in other’s presence. Very few words are spoken.

Sreejata Guha points out a number of deviations from the text in her introduction to the novel. In the film Parbati and Devdas’ love for each other is declared and manifest; it is only parental opposition that thwarts it, not indecision. Family intrigue holds centre stage. Devdas is disinherited because of the scheming of his sister-in-law, and Parbati’s villainous son-in-law reveals her liaison with Devdas to her husband. Bhansali’s most significant departure from Saratchandra is to have Parbati and Chandramukhi meet and later on dance together. As we know in the novel they do not meet even once, and that contributes to the intensity of the tragedy. Devdas and Chunnilal are presented as friends and classmates in Oxford whereas in the book there is considerable age-gap between the two—Chunni has been in Calcutta for a number of years failing to

clear his B.A. exam. for the eighth time and so his initiating Devdas to drinks and the courtesan looks quite convincing. unlike in the film. There are numerous other constructions in the film for instance the scene where Devdas catches hold of a Pundit and asks to have his own last rites done. Such a scene is certainly not in keeping with the character in the book.

It seems Bhansali has overlooked the subtleties in the book. Saratchandra has drawn all the characters with rare insight. Even a man like Bhuban Choudhury, Parbati's husband, who would have been nothing short of a villain in the hands of a lesser artist, wins our sympathy to some extent. He tells Parbati how his mansion once bubbled with life—the children, the wife, all the people, the fun and laughter ringing in the house. And then one day it was all gone. The sons went away to Calcutta and the daughter to her in-laws and how the roaring house became a lonely graveyard—empty, blank, devoid of a woman's touch. Then tenderly taking Parbati's face in his hands, he gazes into it for a long time. A sigh escapes his lips:

'Oh, no, I didn't do the right thing.'

'Which thing?'

'I was just thinking—with your beauty and youth, you haven't come to the right place.'

Such an important scene that projects Bhuban Choudhury as a repentant husband is not there in the film.

And in the last tragic journey the bullock-cart has been rather thoughtlessly replaced by a horse-drawn coach. The slow-moving cart, the mounting anxiety of Devdas and his desperate request to the cartman to make it quick and his anguished utterance 'will this road never end?'—all these lose much of their significance with faster moving coach.

The opening scenes of the film make Bhansali's intention clear: he is out to present before his audience a visual extravaganza. The picture begins with a grand, palatial building with men and women hurrying about, making elaborate preparations to welcome Devdas who is returning home after 10 years. His mother is eager, restless and almost uncontrollably excited. But then the camera seems to focus as much on the glittering, expensive sets as human emotions.

The sets, the scenes the words spoken remind one of the scene in K. Asif's *Moghul-e-Azam* where Queen Jodhabai is anxiously waiting for the arrival of Prince Salim who had been away from the luxury of the palace for years. But while Asif's masterpiece is a costume-drama and is intended to evoke fabulous Moghul grandeur and thus the gorgeous setting is justified, Bhansali's film ends up in making a crude, ostentatious exhibition of wealth.

Before I conclude I would like to mention one interesting thing about the making of a film. When Dev Anand met R.K. Narayan and expressed his desire to make a film on his famous novel *The Guide* the latter gave his consent on one condition—that the film should be faithful to the story and that there should not be any misrepresentation of facts. In the novel, Marco, an unworldly scholar, sets about exploring a cave with ancient sculptures in it. Sincere and dedicated, he gets so engrossed in his work that it never occurs to him that his young wife is neglected in the process. Raju, a tourist guide, while helping Marco in his work, develops an affair with Rosie, spots a dancing talent in her and succeeds in making her a famous dancer. Now the producer faced a problem while preparing the script. Indian audience (in the Sixties) would not accept the heroine engaged in extra-marital relationship just because she leads a lonely life at home and so to justify her amorous advances towards the guide and win the audience's sympathy, her husband is presented in an unfavourable way. Thus Marco is seen not merely lost in exploring the cave, but, away from his languishing wife, taking to drinks and womanizing. Barring this the film is very well made. When Narayan came out of the theatre after the premier show and was asked by the reporters to give his comment on the film, he said in his characteristic way 'The misguided guide.' I wonder what would Saratchandra say if he were alive today and saw Bhansali's film.

At last I would like to raise one question—that is to what extent a filmmaker should be allowed to take liberty with a text, particularly an established classic like *Devdas*. These days when television-viewing has been steadily rising and reading habit has considerably declined, Bhansali's film, I should say, has done grave injustice, especially to the younger generation of movie-goers (when he

had an opportunity to take them closer to the text) by presenting a powerful story in a distorted manner.

## NOTES

1. Saratchandra Chatterjee, *Devdas*, trans. Sreejata Guha (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2002), p. 47.
2. Sheila Vesuna "The eternal lover: Will Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas* lure masses?," *The Week*, July 2002, p. 66.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
4. Ravi Ranjan "Tale of Consuming Passion Retold," *Rashtriya Sahara*, July 2002, p. 78.

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## Voice of the Oppressed in Translation

T.S. CHANDRA MOULI and B.B. SAROJINI

**P**oetry is a very potent weapon. It has both creative and destructive powers. Once it was viewed as a means of educating and edifying people. Over the centuries poetry which is socially relevant has survived. In the 20th century, poets assumed a new role of reformers and attempted to bring forth a radical change in the suffocating situation in which they found themselves.

Today poetry is regarded and employed as a means to refresh and reform. Post-world war scenario in India was influenced by radical humanism, left oriented ideologies as elsewhere in the world. Many liberation struggles all over the world to emancipate nations from colonial regimes created a new fervour of patriotism, national pride and incomparable, high self-esteem.

Emergence of new nations on the global political map also served to trigger frenzied efforts to secure equality of opportunity, social justice and self-assertion. The youth in India yearned for a change in the social set-up. What happened to Telugu poetry in particular can be extended to other speech communities and their poetry. The urge for democratic approach in all walks of life surely and certainly paved the way for more issue-based endeavours.

Gurajada Appa Rao and Sri Sri ushered in an era of new aspirations and new thought process. Gurajada simplified Telugu versification and created a new social awareness through his works. Sri Sri strode upon the Telugu poetic arena like a colossus. His revolutionary approach has virtually brought a revolution in Telugu poetry. He championed the cause of the underdog, the oppressed, and suppressed for centuries. He made it clear that nothing is insignificant in the world and nothing is unworthy of inspiring a poet. He was a legend in his lifetime and led the progressive poets relentlessly fighting for social justice.

Naxalbari movement in Bengal had its ramifications in many parts of the country, more so in Andhra Pradesh. Inspired by Mao's 'Red book' and its tenets, some poets formed 'virasam' or organization of revolutionary poets. They preached violence and justified violent means to secure social justice. This article proposes to throw light on what happened subsequently.

Marxist ideology made way to different movements in Telugu poetry. Feminist, Dalit and Muslim minority poets have left indelible mark through their works. By 1980, feminist poetry has established itself as an ideology and a philosophy. Considered a dream, a desire, a yearning for change, feminist poetry sounded a death kill to male chauvinism. Themes, hitherto considered taboo, have been deliberately chosen and presented from a pessimist perspective.

A forceful demand was made to understand their problems earnestly. At no point of time the woman poets craved for sympathy from men. The volume 'Neeli Meghalu' published in 1993 challenged male domination through the centuries. "Childhood, birth, growing up, marriage" and other related issues were highlighted in their poetry.

Feminist poetry certainly reflects and represents the unending sad saga of Indian womanhood. "What women have gone through as second rate citizens in the past, what they are facing today, what women should achieve in the future are all dealt with in the volume "neeli meghalu." (Sila Lolitha 2002)

While there were some misgivings about the themes chosen by women to ventilate their suppressed feelings and bottled emotions, there were discerning critics and appreciative readers who extended whole-hearted support to the endeavours of feminist poets.

Revathi Devi, Jaya Prabha, Kondepudi Nirmala, Ghantasala Nirmala, Volga, A. Rajani, Sila Lolitha are some of the reputed poets championing the cause of the oppressed women.

The 90s marked the emergence of Dalit poetry. It was a protest against the social oppression, a revolt against traditional stratification and a demand for due recognition of their rights and aspirations. Dalit poetry sophisticates philosophy. Earlier also poets like Jashua and Boyi Bhimanna who themselves were Dalits created awareness about the pathetic plight of the downtrodden through

their poetry. Understanding and responsive poets like Karunasri, who was a Brahmin, have expressed their shock at the ill-treatment meted out to the socially oppressed classes through their poetry. ("Pakipilla" "Apartheid")

The new Dalit poets were vocal and vociferously demanded immediate redressal of their grievances. Their tone, aspirations, techniques employed in fact gave birth to a new idiom in Telugu poetry. Like Mohamed Ali, the renowned boxer, they stung like a bee and danced like a butterfly. Relentless punches flattened faces, busted jaws, blackened eyes, smashed ears. "Dalit poetry or what passed off as one in the early years was mostly abusive against the social system which denied their basic human dignity. The 'leit motif' was visceral hatred for the upper caste which was perceived as an oppressor." (I Patanjali 2002)

The border-line which ought to separate Dalit politics from Dalit poetry was getting hazy and thin. As the virulent sandstorm settled, and the smog cleared, there appeared on the firmament a few bright (literal and figurative) stars shining brightly. Yendluri Sudhakar is undoubtedly a bright star in the company of Sikhamani, Siva Sagar, Satish Chander, Teresh Baby, Nagesh Babu and others.

Sudhakar's poems 'Gurkha,' 'Darky,' 'Footprints of history' testify to his remarkable talent expressed in a different and defiant manner. His poem "I am the foreword to tomorrow's history" sums up Dalits' aspirations for a brighter future and social justice.

The next phase in Telugu poetry is marked by the evolution of Muslim minority poetry. Initially backward class Muslim converts identified themselves with the Dalits. They started reflecting on their own specific social concerns. They have now established an identity of their own.

Hurt feelings and an emotional outburst accompanied by hurling abuses at the supposed adversaries marked earlier phase of Muslim minority poetry. Subsequently, there emerged a path of their own, an expression reflecting their concerns and a desire for recognition as human beings first and foremost and an uninhibited desire to be accepted as fellow citizens. Yakoob, Khaza Mohiuddin, Afsar, Mahejabeen, Khasim and others are among the prominent Muslim minority poets.

you may not believe me  
 But no body gives expression to our suffering . . .  
 Festivals for us only mean rice with pickle,  
 biryani, talavs, pulavs, sher khurmas are for you. . . .  
 wonder of wonders—the language we know is not ours,  
 I believe

The language which is supposed to be ours, we don't know. In the end we are caught in a difficult situation of not having a mother-tongue. We have been excommunicated for speaking in Telugu. "Hey, you speak good Telugu being a Mussalman!"

A curious dilemma whether to laugh or to cry.  
 When all said and done our dreams are Telugu,  
 Our tears are Telugu.  
 Whether we ask for food when hungry,  
 whether we cry out in distress,  
 the expression of all our feelings is Telugu.  
 When we are asked to perform namaz  
 We were dazed not knowing what to do.  
 We were startled listening to the azas,  
 We could only look for the ragas in the sound of the suras.  
 When we were asked to pray in the language we didn't know  
 We even lost the pleasure of praying.  
 You may not believe me  
 but nobody gives expression to our suffering.

"Avval Kalma" Yakub, trans. M. Sridhar and Alladi Uma

The above extract throws light on the techniques adopted by the translators. Urdu words used in Telugu text are retained for lending authenticity and English equivalents are discarded. This is done to make the rendered text more interesting, and perhaps, to demonstrate that culture specifics are untranslatable and need not be necessarily translated. Elaborate footnotes provided make the translation more meaningful and purposeful.

Translators interested and involved in translating Telugu poetry into English have ignored social stratifications and temporal ideological differences. It is heartening to note that a majority of the translators are not dalits nor do they belong to Muslim minority sections. Yet they deemed it their bounden duty to depict different

trends of modern Telugu poetry and reflect through their translations the genuine concerns, aspirations and legitimate demands of respective poets without fear or favour.

The translated texts faithfully represent the cultural import of the original poems in Telugu. The ethos, myths and at times the mystic experiences of the Telugu poems are very well brought out in the translated texts.

Sahitya Akademi periodically publishes regional language literature in English translation. Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar, reputed and gifted translators, have collaborated with Sahitya Akademi in bringing out anthologies of Telugu poetry in English translation published in *Indian Literature* from time to time. A few anthologies, by other translators like V.V.B. Rama Rao, S.S. Prabhakara Rao, D. Kesara Rao, V. Panduranga Rao, Amarendra among others have enriched literature in translation with special reference to Telugu poetry rendered into English.

It is fervently hoped that translation activity will go on unendingly forging national integration and fostering fraternity among Indians and it is translated texts alone that will ultimately enlighten us to realize that the problems reflected by the voice of the oppressed are not restricted to one region or religion but are pan Indian.

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# The Magi of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot: A Comparative Study

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W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, the two leading poets of the 20th century, dealt with the theme of the Magi in their poems "The Magi"<sup>1</sup> and "Journey of the Magi"<sup>2</sup> respectively. Although both of them are hailed as modern poets, their conception and vision of the Magi experience is characteristic of their individual character, intellectual background and poetic talent. It would, therefore, be interesting to place the two poems side by side and examine them critically in their separate perspectives. Yeats wrote "The Magi" on 20 September 1913 and it was included in his collection of poems *Responsibilities* published in 1914. This collection represents the poet's responsibilities to his ancestors, society and art.<sup>3</sup> The poem "The Magi" was placed under the category of supernatural models because it is a visionary poem and it symbolizes that the birth of Christ is only a partial revelation.

T.S. Eliot wrote the poem "Journey of the Magi" in 1927 at the age of 39 after he was baptized and confirmed in the Church of England. The poem was originally written under the title 'Ariel Poems' as a Christmas Card published by Faber and Faber.

The Magi were the wise kings of the East, traditionally three in number, who travelled to Bethlehem to pay homage to the infant Christ. According to Matthew (2: 1-11), when Jesus was born, these wise men came to Jerusalem and asked king Herod about the birthplace of Christ because they had seen a star in the East, and came to worship him. Herod sent them to Bethlehem and requested them to tell him the exact place of Christ's birth on their return. The three wise men were guided by the star they had seen in the East on their journey to the birthplace of Christ. On reaching their destination, the three wise men saw Christ, worshipped him and were filled with

joy. Then they presented him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They had a dream that God wanted them not to return to Herod, so they went back to their respective countries by a different route.

There is a great controversy regarding true identity of the three wisemen (or kings) who performed an arduous journey to worship the infant Christ. The Magi of the ancient Persia were a powerful priestly caste, respected for their religious knowledge. They were also thought to be magicians and soothsayers.

According to the New English Bible, they were astrologers rather than wise men. The East does not refer to a definite country or place: it may represent Mesopotamia, Persia, Arabia or Babylon. The wise men are venerated as patrons of travellers. Sixth January, the feast of Epiphany, commemorates the first manifestation of Christ in the persons of wise men.

The journey performed by the Magi, as told by Andrews in his nativity sermon of 1622 must have been arduous and painful. He lays emphasis on the agony and suffering that they underwent in their quest to see the spiritual vision in the birth of the infant Christ. The sight of revelation baffled and perplexed them and they did not find any wisdom or satisfaction: "No sight to comfort them, nor a word for which they any whit the wiser; Nothing worth their travel—Well, they will take Him as they find Him, and all this notwithstanding, worship Him for all that."<sup>4</sup>

Both Yeats and Eliot wrote their poems on the theme of the Magi but their delineations are different. The former titled his poem "The Magi," whereas the latter named his poem "Journey of the Magi." The difference between the two poems lies in philosophical thinking and sensibility of the two poets.

In "The Magi," Yeats visualizes the three wise men of the East in their stiff painted clothes as pale and dissatisfied even after seeing the vision of Christ's birth. Their faces are blurred and appear and disappear like a stone on which all the traces of recognition have been effaced by rain. They are not satisfied by the revelation because it is not final. Their eyes are still fixed to see the uncontrollable mystery of another age, which will spring from the union of a beast and a man.<sup>5</sup>

Yeats did not believe in the Christian concept of time and evolved a unique view of the movement of time and history. The Greek civilization was the first and primary civilization to have come into being out of the union of the divine swan and a Greek beauty Leda. Two eggs of Leda gave birth to war and love; Castor and Polux from the one and Helen and Clytemnestra from the other.

Next was born the Christian civilization when Dove descended on the Virgin Mary. Yeats thought that the 20th century Christian civilization would come to an end and in its place, a new era antithetical to it, would be born. Yeats believed that the wheel of time moves in a cyclic order, not in a straight line. The movement of history is represented by two interlocking cones or gyres whirling perpetually. The gyres symbolize the various phases of civilization. History passes through 26 phases or gyres and each gyre comprises 2000 years; which can be divided into two equal parts of 1000 years each. The progress of each gyre or phase is the growth, rise and decline of its strength paving way for the birth of its antithetical gyre, which will replace it after its death.<sup>6</sup>

Now it is clear from Yeats's theory of gyres that the Christian civilization is on the brink of destruction and a new revelation symbolizing a new civilization, antithetical in nature, is in the offing. The Magi or the three wise men, who performed an arduous and painful journey to Bethlehem to pay homage to the infant Christ, did not find any solace or spiritual peace after seeing the vision of the birth of Christ because it was only a partial revelation. They are still waiting to see another revelation, which may probably occur at the close of the 20th century, marking the end of the Christian era.

The last line of the poem "the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor" is most significant as it contains Yeats's mystical doctrine of revelation or incarnation, born of the union of a beast and a human. The beast is a favourite mystical symbol of Yeats and has been used by him to evoke a vision or revelation and also as a form for the completion of one gyre and destructive birth of an antithetical civilization.

As already stated, the Greek civilization was born out of the union of the divine swan and Leda; the Christian civilization came into being when the dove descended on Virgin Mary and the rough

beast—a shape with the lion body and the head of a man slouches towards Bethlehem to destroy the Christian civilization and give birth to another revelation, which the three Magi were eager to see. John Unterecker very aptly remarks: "Yeats, carefully vague, manages to hint the end of all while explicitly prophesying the reversal of world's gyre, the birth of a new violent bestial anti-civilization in the destruction of the two-thousand year Christian cycle. His rough beast compounded from Christ's Matthew 24 prediction of his future return and St. John's vision of the coming of antichrist, the beast of the Apocalypse gives a double meaning to the 'revelation' that is at hand." (165) V. Rai also dwells at length upon the mystical significance of the beast symbol in *The Poetry of W.B. Yeats*. (165)

So, the Magi of Yeats, 'the pale unsatisfied ones,' appearing and disappearing "in the blue depth of the sky" with their mistlike faces, curious to see "the uncontrollable mystery" of another revelation, are symbols of the cyclical movement of history and the wheel of time. "The Magi" embodies Yeats's philosophical concept of time—the wheel of time or gyres perpetually moving in a cyclic order alternating destructive birth of anti-civilizations and contrasts the flux of life with fixity. The three wisemen or the Magi do not derive any satisfaction or spiritual solace after seeing the revelation of Christ's birth. They are unsatisfied and hopeful to see another revelation or vision "the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor," once more. They see this mystery or revelation "a vast image," "a shape with a lion body and head of a man" in "The Second Coming."

"The Second Coming," along with "The Magi" and "Leda and the Swan" belongs to "a small group of 'Annunciation' poems in Yeats's oeuvre celebrating objective or subjective incarnations."<sup>7</sup>

"The Second Coming" is the extension of the theme of "The Magi," which again finds expression in "Leda and the Swan." Yeats wrote "The Second Coming" in January 1919 and "Leda and the Swan" in June 1924. Thus, the natural sequence would be "Leda and the Swan" first and then "The Magi" and next to it "The Second Coming" in order to observe the chronological order of the themes but probably owing to his concept of time and history as cyclical movement of gyres, Yeats reversed it and to ensure the recurrence

tagonist after his return—his perplexed questioning, his sense of alienation arising from the negation of old beliefs, his inability to comprehend the mystery of the incarnation fully and his longing for death and release.<sup>12</sup>

“Journey of the Magi” symbolizes penance, prayer, penitence, worship, preparation of the soul of face Christ (God) and realize the significance of His mystery. The soul passes through various stages of purification for its spiritual birth. Williamson explains: “The Ariel poems, named for the series in which they appeared, were published between 1927 and 1930; only “Marina” appeared after the publication of “Ash Wednesday.” They all explore new experience or extend an experience already begun. It pays to notice the subjects that owe now significant to Eliot: in the Bible the story of the Magi, the story of Simeon in Dante, the deflection of the will from God; in Shakespeare, the recovery of Marina. They make another story in themselves, which Donne might have called a progress of the soul.”<sup>13</sup>

The Magi saw the revelation, affirmed their faith in Christ and Christianity but they are still wavering between the old beliefs and the new dispensation. The death is the death of old belief and the birth is the birth of Christ as well as the spiritual rebirth of the soul.

“The Journey of the Magi” is one monologue of a man, who has made his own choice, who has achieved belief in the incarnation, but who is still part of that life which the Redeemer came to sweep away.

As against this, W.B. Yeats sees a vision of the Magi, the image appears on the screen of his mind. It arises from the depth of his mind and is probably a shared experience of the race something Jungian. Yeats assigns his own philosophy of history to them. They are suspicious of the Christian view that the birth of Christ is the final revelation and that nothing more remains to be looked forward to. The poem vaguely anticipates the next antithetical stage of the human

In Eliot’s poem, it is one of the Magi in his old age, who remembers the extraordinary experience. The accent is laid on suffering and the miracle of Epiphany. The journey was as painful as

death and it was marked by recalcitrant urges of animal and man as well as sensual desire.

After seeing the vision, which is a miracle outside the course of history, the reborn Magus feels alienated from the world:

We return to our places, these kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their Gods. (104)

Eliot's theme involves the agony of the Christian soul as an inalienable element of Christian Sadhana. The mystery of suffering is difficult to grasp and explain:

All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
And I would do it again, but set down,  
This, set down  
This were we led all that way for  
Birth or death? (104)

He is puzzled that:

This Birth was  
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death our death. (104)

As Grover Smith has observed, although in the literal circumstances, the old man's will cannot be fixed upon mystical experience "he corresponds symbolically to the seeker as described by Saint John of the Cross in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*."<sup>14</sup> In Hugh Kenner's view, the poem shares the theme of "Sweeney Agonistes": "The impact of an experience, which has rendered quotidian pleasures meaningless, and protracted life, a preliminary to death or rather it is "Sweeney's 'theme baptized.'"<sup>15</sup> According to Elizabeth Drew, the poem's conclusion has a basic ambiguity.<sup>16</sup> D.E.S. Maxwell perceives a connection between Eliot's personal struggle for faith and the hardships and temptations faced by the Magi: "This new background is used so that Eliot may relate his own experience of the pangs of growing faith to a specific objective narrative from the history of that faith."<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

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## Mystical and Transcendental Flights in William Blake and Sri Aurobindo

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In the mystical poetry written in all languages of the world, there are some common characteristics—the longing for afar, reaching for the inaccessible, searching for the ideal heart's compassion and the desire to know the unknown, for instance, which can be traced in many passages written by English Romantic poets, especially Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley and any Indian poet including Rabindranath, Kabir, Lalan Fakir and, of course, Sri Aurobindo. Blake's "O I am nothing when I enter into judgement with thee! /If thou withdraw thy breath, I die and vanish into Hades"; Wordsworth's "the light that never was on sea and earth."

Shelley's "the desire of the moth for the star and night for the morrow" and his "We look before and after/And pine for what is not," for instance, have mystical gleams which is not very different from many of Indian poets' mystical utterances. According to Hindu mystics, it is a spiritual quest for the hidden truth and wisdom leading to an experience, which is 'revelatory and intimate,' though the utterance it finds is 'veiled by the image not thoroughly revealed.'<sup>1</sup> In Sri Aurobindo's "life," we discover such a quest:

Mystic Miracle, Daughter of Delight,  
Life, thou ecstasy,  
Let the radius of thy flight  
Be eternity

We also remember here the mystical fervour of Blake, what to say of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, with all its Romantic intensity that shines through the classical structure of his work Jerusalem—an example of transmutation:

I rest not my great task!  
To open the Eternal worlds, to open the immortal Eyes

years old he had already seen visions, had dreamed dreams, had known (and reported in terror) the face of God at his attic window. By his fourteenth year he had written that perfect little poem *Song*, the first stanza of which begins thus:

How sweet I roamed from field to field,  
And tasted all the summer's pride,  
Till I the Prince of Love behold,  
Who in the Sunny beam did glide!

It is said that during the years as apprentice to James Basire, engraver to the Society of Antiquaries Blake was set drawing, day-long, the stone memorials of the tombs in (lie Gothic twilight of Westminster Abbey. "In the end the sculptured figures (because of the familiarity to the lad) came to have life; they lived and spoke, Christ came and talked with the apprentice boy artist and in this hallowed place angels emerged from the shadows and whispered mysteries." (86) For Blake the vision was real and he fused the two worlds (the Real and the Unreal) with characteristic ease. Of his inspiration, Blake said, "I write when commanded by the spirits and the moment I have written I see the words fly about the room in all directions." (90) In fact, Blake's visions were spontaneous projections from his mind of ideas or forms or words.

At least so far as Sri Aurobindo's poems are concerned his divine transformation, spiritual attainment is an unprecedented evolution resulting in the gradual development of his poetic surge along with seerhood. Eventually, it will not be very wise to investigate spiritualism and transcendentalism in his early poems in which mostly romantic feelings and emotions, patriotism and the homage to the sublime take their forms. But his search for Truth, God and the Sole Reality is the greatest trend even in his youthful exuberance. This has, perhaps, led him to write a number of mystic poems, in spite of his later spiritual achievement. The poems like *Revelation*, *The Blue Bird*, *The Inner Sovereign*, *Liberation*, *Immortality*, *Epiphany*, *Shiva*, *Surrender*, *Because thou Art* (all included in his *Collected Poems*) set the evolutionary process, which got the fruition later, thus paving the way for rhythmic insight into values and significant possibilities in his epic poem *Savitri*.

Above mind's twilight and life's Star-led night  
There gleamed the dawn of a spiritual day.

### III

A close observation of Blake's growth as a poet helps us reaching the conclusion that intermediately between the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*, Blake began the series of mythological writings (his indebtedness to Hindu mythology notwithstanding), which were to culminate in *Jerusalem*. The earlier set dimly foreshadowed by *The Passions*, consists of three works—*Tiriel*, *Thel* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which, characterized by little or no symbolism though, may be regarded as the precursors of the prophetic Books proper. *The Four Zoas*, the longest as well as the most significant of his works, forms rather a link between the earlier and the later prophetic Books, indicating as it does, in his successive revisions and additions the beginning of a new set of transcendental and mystical ideas and symbols, which we find fully developed in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Eventually after all, Blake's late prophecies are as profound in their poetic structures as they are in their thematic ones. They possess, however, both epic and prophetic structures.<sup>6</sup> The epic structure, as it appears, is largely illusory, that Blake uses it only as a superficial organizing device and so undermines it by the simultaneity of events that comprise it, that it ceases to function in any recognizably 'epic' manner.

In *Milton* we come across a living man struggling to comprehend the old heaven and the new. Each of the two books of the poem offers a range of perspectives on its central action from Eden to Ulro and from remembered past to foretold future. But in each all perspectives focus on a single instant, the instant of the purgation and union of Milton and Ololon, the instant in which past and future are joined in the abolition of time. The instant of Milton and Ololon's descents is the culmination—a kind of visionary moment.

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery  
Is equal in its period and value to Six Thousand years,  
For in this Period the Poet's work is Done: and all the Great  
Events of Time start forth and are conceived in such a Period  
Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery. (28: 62-29: 3)

in their circles faster and faster.

Further, in his 'Notes' on *Shiva*, Sri Aurobindo explains and elaborates the creative process. As for his assertion, "this creative Inconscient also is Shiva creating here life in matter out of an apparently inconscient material trance as also he creates all the worlds (not the material only) from a superconscient trance. The reality is a supreme consciousness . . . it is the infinity out of which comes the revealing Flame." (III-IV) In the concluding part of the poem the tone remains meditative, subtle and also mystical.

This was the closed mute and burning source  
whence were formed the words and  
their star dance;  
Life sprang a self-rapt inconscient Force,  
Love, a blazing seed, from that flame-trance.

However, in *Savitri*, we have an image of a woman devoted to her husband who confronts the God of Death and defeats him in his own dark chamber. In fact, the image of the woman conquering death suggests the vision of the triumph of love over death. The legend of Savitri, for that matter, is treated as a symbol of Life Divine and, in this sense, Savitri proves to be a symbolic character, she stands for the nature of individual person as well as for the nature of cosmic spirit that guides and controls the stages of spiritual evolution.

She was no more herself but all the world  
Out of the infinitudes all came to her  
Into the infinitudes sentient she spread  
Infinity was her own natural home  
She was the single self of all these selves  
She was in them and they woke all in her.

Once the psychic being of Savitri identifies her soul, she experiences All-Negating as well as All-Pervading consciousness of the Divine. So she achieves, what Sri Aurobindo calls "psychicisation . . . the first and foremost step of the Integral Yoga, for it alone can transform the physical being into agnostic being."<sup>10</sup>

But for such vast spiritual change to be,

Out of the mystic cavern in man's heart  
The heavenly Psyche must put off her veil,  
And step into common nature's crowded rooms  
And stand uncovered in that nature's front  
And rule its thoughts and fill the body and life  
Obedient to a high command she sat:  
Time, life and death were passing incidents  
Obstructing with their transient view her sight,  
Her sight that must break through and liberate the god  
Imprisoned in the visionless mortal man.

Inevitably, in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo records his inspiration, revelation, intuitive judgement and intuitive reasoning thus expounding his philosophy—the stairway of ascension on to the supramental light from the unfathomable Darkness of the Inconscience, descent of supramental force and consciousness for the divine transformation of all mankind and earth-consciousness. The seer-poet confesses thus: "I am an obstinate mystic."<sup>11</sup> He, therefore, consciously predicts: 'All can be done if the God touch is there' (*Savita*). We do find another example with similar import in the poem *The Infinite Adventure*, when the visionary-poet asserts: "An unseen Hand controls my rudder." He concludes the poem with the assertion:

I shall be merged in the lonely and unique  
And wake into a sudden blaze of God,  
The marvel and rapture of the Apocalypse.

V

A close survey of Blake and Sri Aurobindo's poetry leads us to the conclusion that in both of them, from time to time, a luminous background breaks through, leading to an encounter between the ego and the non-ego, and thus, to illumination. Inevitably, everything and everyone in the world at that point of time becomes a symbol and the part of the luminous. Therefore, there is no drift towards prosaic sermonizing (as we do find in most of Milton and even, for the most part, Donne and the other Metaphysicals) or, the use of devotional or theological language (as in the early Wordsworth and Shelley and later Tagore) to treat the lofty theme. Though there are traces of spiritual philosophizing in Blake and Sri

Aurobindo's lyrics, let us not take them as instances of religious pantheism, for they speak of mature mysticism, which connotes a continuous creative process within the poetic self. Both Blake and Sri Aurobindo, then, champion the cause of an even acceptance of God's workings within and around them and, therefore, the inspiration in their poetry comes from, to use Sri Aurobindo's phrase, 'Overhead planes.' In "Invocation" to "Milton," Blake writes:

From out the Portals of my Brain,  
Where by your ministry  
The Eternal Great Humanity Divine  
Planted his paradise.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo writes in "The Golden Light":

Thy golden light came down into my brain  
And thy gray rooms of mind sun-touched became  
A bright reply to wisdom's occult plane  
A calm illumination and a flame,  
Thy golden light came down into my throat,  
And all my speech is now a tune divine,  
A poem-song of thee my single note,  
My words are drunk with the Immortal's wine.  
Thy golden light came down into my heart  
Smiling my life with thy eternity,  
Now has it grown a temple where thou art  
And all its passions point towards only thee.  
Thy golden light came down into my feet;  
My earth is now thy playfield and thy seat.

## NOTES

1. See Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972), pp. 353-55.
2. Qtd. George Godwin, *The Great Mystics* (London: Watts, 1945), pp. 86-87.
3. William Blake, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 697.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1953), p. 281.
5. N.K. Gupta, *Poets and Mystics* (Madras: Sri Aurobindo Library, 1951), p. 21.

6. Irena Taylor, "Say First! What Mov'd Blake? Blake's Comus Designs and Milton," *Blake's Sublime Allegory: Essays on The Four Zoas, Milton, Jerusalem*, ed. Stuart Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich Jr. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), p. 49.
7. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters* (Third Series, 1949) p. 18.
8. 'Notes,' *Six Poems* (Chandernagore: Rameshwar, 1934), p. II.
9. D.S. Mishra, *Poetry and Philosophy in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri* (New Delhi: Harman, 1989), p. 65.
10. Sri Aurobindo, *Life, Literature, Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1967), p. 266.

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## Redefining the Insurgent Female Psyche in an Androcentric Milieu

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The finite dimension of the relationship between man and woman have been prescribed by man and not by woman. Her limits have been imposed on her by man who is ruled by the mastery-motive. She accepts it because of biosocial reasons. Very often this acceptance is not congruent with the reality that lies underneath. Modern woman prefers to exercise—her choice and break away from her traumatic experiences. A study of the man-woman relationship as portrayed in the modern literature of the East and the West shows a disruption and breakdown in the conventional expectations of female behaviour. Women are now portrayed as more assertive, more liberated in their view, and more articulate in their expression than the women of the past. Instead of downgrading the elements of suffering at the hands of her lover or husband or man, she has started asserting her substantive identity in action, not in word. Whether it is Devi of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*, or Sarita of Sashi Deshpande's *The Darks Holds No Terrors*, or Lucy of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, or Chantal of Milan Kundera's *Identity*, the women have established a coherent class structure—one of assertion of identity and defiance of male supremacy, and protest at being subordinated by man.

Devi, the American-educated heroine of *The Thousand Faces of Night* is unable to stand her husband's non-recognition of her abilities. She is married to a Regional Manager of a multinational company and she is to him just a woman—a woman to be tied down to household chores, a woman who has no right to aspire to become anybody other than a full-time housewife. He is unable to sense in her the undiscovered concern of her interests and ambitions, which she reveals in cherishing a career of her own. Mahesh needs a child

but Devi is unable to give him a descendant, When he attributes her gloom to her American education, she wonders: "Am I neurotic because I am a lazy woman who does not polish her floors every day? An aimless fool because I swallowed my hard-earned education bitter and indigestible, when he tied the *thali* round my neck?"<sup>1</sup> She feels her marriage almost a torment and asks Mahesh, her husband: "Why did you marry me?" "Whatever people married for," he replies. "Thank God, we Indians are not obsessed with love" he adds. (54-55) Ironically, it is this love that Devi seeks in her husband. She has a definite view regarding marriage: a "marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually, like a delicate but promising sapling." (49) But as Simone de Beauvoir puts it, marriage "is the destiny traditionally offered to women. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them."<sup>2</sup> Devi leaves Mahesh, unable to cope up with his attitudes, and her solitude. She runs away from home to Gopal, her neighbour's brother. But here again Gopal, the singer, does not fully comprehend her. When she becomes part of Gopal's entourage for months, his music also becomes no longer romantic or magnetic. And she defies her husband and her lover and leaves them to live in her own home by the sea. It is only the male domination, the male unwillingness to identify her individuality that leads her to this breaking of all ties with both men.

Like Devi, Maya in Sobha De's *Second Thoughts* suffers from being marginalized in her existence. She is a degree-holder in textile designing and is married to a Bombay-based Bengali bank officer. Like Devi, Maya's fate also is to be within the confines of the routines of a housewife. Ranjan, her husband, has almost alienated her from his realm, where he enjoys a strong tie with his mother. His mother is his confidante and guide and he even denies motherhood to Maya. Frustrated with the hopeless emptiness of her marriage, she ultimately falls a prey to the ruthless seduction by Nikhil, a college-going neighbour. He has actually trapped her into what she describes as "the most wonderful, the most unimaginable, the most moving experience of my life." (271) It actually pains her that Ranjan does not recognize her individuality and when he cautions her to

be wary of Bombay women she petulantly asks, "As if I'm a kid who can be so easily influenced. As if I don't have a mind of my own. As if, I lack any sense of judgment." (55) She is relegated to the background of household duties and when she tells him she has decided to join a few classes on pottery, he is taken aback and frightens her by saying that those are the places where recruitment is done for prostitution. She is depressed and feels ill at ease in her husband's presence: "Was it his smugness that froze me? Or his judgmental, supercilious attitudes that conveyed superiority over me? . . . It was no use telling myself that I was lucky compared to women married to alcoholics or wife beaters. . . . He was generally kind to me, but this kindness was the sort people reserved for the physically handicapped or the abject poor." (163) She understands that to Ranjan women "didn't have a validity of their own. He saw them only in context to men and family life." (235) She could not sublimate her desires and so when Nikhil takes her honour, she only feels a sense of enrichment. She has reached a world of transcendence. It is her way of protest, of taking revenge on Ranjan. It becomes a manifestation of her long-cherished dream. She basks in the feeling of superiority she experiences over Ranjan, because she has defied him by being an accomplice in the adultery.

Both Sarita, a medical doctor in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, and Simrit in Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* are similar victims of male aggressiveness. Sarita, who has married Manohar, the poet-teacher, leaves home unable to bear the animal-like behaviour of her husband in bed. She leaves "to sleep peacefully the night through. To wake up without pain. . . . Just to live." (27) Though she hopes to belong to the past when "it was so much easier for women . . . to accept . . . because they believed . . . there was nothing else for them. And they called that Fate," she is not in any sense a fatalist (70). She braves it out knowing fully well that Manohar's brutal treatment of her only at night is an ego-function. His ego has been scarred by her success in the profession. Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* is another victim of a selfish husband, Som. She has always felt like an obedient, domestic animal, but when she fails to rise up to Som's goals, he takes revenge on her by imposing the Consent Terms of the divorce. Som, a junior executive

in a company has been unchivalrous in making her pay taxes for the shares that would come not to her but to their son at maturity. She finds solace in Raj, a rising Member of Parliament, who is understanding and sympathetic towards her. Finding an anchor in Raj has been the outcome of her determination to meet Som on equal grounds.

The cultural phenomenon of treating woman as subordinate sex, as a need-satisfying object is empirically universal. Despite all claims to equality, the devaluation of women still exists in the world. It is a global phenomenon, irrespective of the East and the West. Lucy, the daughter of a middle-aged scholar, in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* is gang-raped by three visitors, but she keeps it a secret even from her father for some time for fear of the disgrace, the shame that has been brought to her. The agony of her traumatic experience leaves her helpless with psychological wounds, while the men leave with a sense of achievement. She does not succumb to her fate but withstands the oppression and views it as the price she has to pay for living in the Black Country. She asks her father: "But isn't there another way of looking at it. . . . What if that is the Price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it. . .

They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying?"<sup>3</sup> Her attitudinizing sustains her through the experience. Like Sarita and Simrit, Lucy also survives and in the end, much to the dismay of her father, she agrees to the proposal of marriage to Petrus, a native and helper. It is almost a deal that he has struck: "He is offering an alliance, a deal. I contribute the land, in return for which I am allowed to creep in under his wing. Otherwise, he wants to remind me, I am without protection, I am fair game." (203) Lucy has succeeded in effecting a break in the conventions of society by viewing the rape in a new light.

Milan Kundera's *Identity* is a psychological study of the subtleties of man-woman relationship. When Chantal understands that her lover Jean Marc is testing her—a test born out of destructive jealousy, she is unable to compromise with the situation. When she tells Jean Marc that "men don't turn to look at me any more," (36) he feels a jealousy which manifests in writing letters to her and creating a phantom of a man. "He was creating a phantom of a man, and

without meaning to, was thus putting Chantal, to a test that gauged her susceptibility to seduction by a man other than himself." (96) She can take this test only as an "espionage" and this "cop-like testing he was putting her through, matched nothing she knew about him." (91) She dares to discover the correspondent but she cannot forgive him immediately. She takes her revenge by planning to depart for London. Chantal had earlier left her husband when he insisted that they have a second child to forget the loss of the first. She could not rebel when her first child was alive though she felt disgust living with her husband's family. But when Jean-Marc suspects her fidelity, she rebels and leaves him though temporarily. As Beauvoir writes: "Simply from the fact that liberty in woman is still abstract and empty she can exercise it only in revolt, which is the only road open to these who have no opportunity of doing anything constructive." (639)

Clara Velde, the corporate executive in Saul Bellow's *A Theft* lives with her fourth husband, Wilder Velde, who thinks everything will be well as long as he occupies the cushions. Clara runs the household, shouldering the burden single-handedly. His superego provokes her but he cannot understand why she is so provoked. As she tells her confidante Laura Wang: "He's the overweening overlord—it's stud power that makes him so confident. He's not the type to think it out. I have to do that . . . what really settles everything, according to him, is masculine bulk."<sup>4</sup> She finds moral consolation in Teddy Register, her all-knowing lover. He is the one way left for her to give an outlet for her pent-up emotions. Her sentiment for the emerald ring gifted to her by Teddy shows her passion for her lover. She says how four husbands and three kids have not cured her of Teddy. The woman in her leaves her husband and finds solace in the lover.

The same is the case with the mistress in Philip Roth's *Deception*. The married woman comes away from her husband to the writer-lover Philip. From her conversation, we understand how she has run away even from her baby, so that she can be with her lover, a great writer. She tells him how her English husband packed her off only because she accepted the job of a guide. But she feels she is different. "I want to be myself. . . . I am not necessarily going to be married to someone."<sup>5</sup> She tells the writer-lover that her husband

behaves beautifully when she is on top of the world and annoys her when she is defenceless. She is a victim of her husband's whims but she braves her situation in an unperturbed manner registering her protest at his aggressiveness by defying him, making love with her lover.

Whether it is Anuradha of Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth* who refuses to marry because she can't be marrying everyone she loves, or Helen Bober of Malamud who resists Frank-Alpine's amorous advances because she cannot give herself unless she is really in love with the person, these women have an awareness of their individuality. Women have always been a prized possession, in fact, a commodity to be treasured. Wars have been waged for her and the epics of the East and the West are telling evidences of this. Sita was the cause of the war in *The Ramayana*, Draupadi in *The Mahabharata*, and Helen of Troy in *The Iliad*. Woman turns out to be the prize for the hero, and as Beauvoir writes, "the converted woman is at once metamorphosed into a desirable and desired subject; and the woman in love, thus slighted, is reduced to the status of ordinary clay." (672) A woman is something a man would feel proud of possessing. Sarita in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* resents the pride with which her husband treats her as a showpiece. Som in Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* keeps her physically in the room, but mentally out. He enjoys her physical presence but alienates her mentally. Unless there is a societal change, woman's condition would be as Sarita in Deshpande's novel feels: "Everything in a girl's life was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male."<sup>6</sup> This points out the naked truth that there has been no marked change in man's attitude to woman.

With the coming of Women's Lib and Feminism, the move is towards the insurgence of women in the face of the efforts of man to curb her freedom. To think that the impact of these movements has caused a radical change in the insights of women would be a conceptual error. Certainly there has been a shift in values and women have started acknowledging themselves the co-equals of men. Though the high hopes of Feminism have been washed away in the present social milieu, the relationship between man and woman becomes one of structured interdependence. But still the woman has to work for her liberation without resigning herself to her destiny.

Gender-equality still remains a myth. Man has always escaped unscathed, even when the sin is committed together, as in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. The autogenous impression of man about woman is that she is the 'second sex', but this submission by woman comes only as an emitted response because society has groomed her to act dependent. What has been left unnoticed is that the so-called feminist and liberated psyche of the modern woman has had its existence even in the past. In the epics, Sita had resisted the advances of Ravana and she had protested by vanishing into the womb of Mother Earth when she stood rejected at the end by her own protectors. Draupadi had displayed her ferocity by washing her hair in the blood of Dushasana and Penelope had rejected the wooing of her suitors in the absence of her husband. It is the male ego that has given the woman an inferior status through the ages. Man has relegated her to a second-class citizen and when she could no longer endure the suppression, has revolted, her revolt ravaging like a tempest. And Feminism is one such movement of protest. With a nostalgic fondness, the modern woman ruminates over the *ardhanarishwara* concept that guarantees an equal status for women with men because the Eternal Male Principle and the Eternal Female Principle cannot but co-exist; they have existence only in contiguity

## NOTES

1. Githa Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992), p. 74.
2. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. M.M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997), pp. 446-47.
3. J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1999), p. 158.
4. Saul Bellow, *A Theft* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 5.
5. Philip Roth, *Deception* (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 59.
6. Shashi Deshpande, *The Darks Hold No Terrors* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1980) p. 163.
7. Shobha De, *Second Thoughts* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1996).
8. Arun Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* (New Delhi: Orient, 1981).
9. Milan Kundera, *Identity*, tans. Linda Asher (London: Faber 1998).
10. Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant* (1957; Delhi: OUP, 1981).
11. Nayantara Sahgal, *The Day in Shadow* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1971).

## Henry James and Paul Bourget: Interactions on the Art of the Novel

ARUN KUMAR

Henry James's (1843-1916) *Notebooks* are an excellent record of the evolution of his work during the decade 1880-1890. He has dealt with certain stories and novels—especially *The Spoils of Poynton* and *What Maisie Knew*—which form a kind of bridge between the early and later James. He is very much at pains telling us how he caught the idea of a particular story, sometimes by mere chance and sometimes with the help of friends like Mrs. Kemble or Paul Bourget (1852-1935), and how this idea made its way into the imagination where it grew organically. Henry James, in his essay on "The Art of Fiction" (1884) says:

A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts. (88)<sup>1</sup>

The period 1880 to 1890 was a very crucial stage in the development of the novelist and the *Notebooks* throw considerable light on James's state of mind at this juncture in his life.

The friendship between Henry James and Paul Bourget had reached its climax during the years with which the *Notebooks* are mainly concerned. The *Notebooks*, however, do not give much information about this friendship; we wish they did. The friendship, as we will see, was very important for the development of both the authors who had not yet quite settled down to write in the manner that was to be characteristic of their full maturity.

Paul Bourget is, of course, not as important a figure as Henry James. Basically a critic and the prose poet of the doubts that assailed the generation of the 1880s in France, he offers a tragic example of a man who systematically got rid of his finest literary gifts as his religious and political opinions hardened. He pathetically in-

sisted that his novels were the very reverse of the thesis novel, and he never realized that his critical opinions, so often accurate and suggestive, conflicted with his work in the field of the novel and the short story. Still, in the 1890s the characteristic manner of Paul Bourget had not reached its maturity and during this period he offers the interesting spectacle of an author well on in his forties striving to renew himself.

By that time the friendship of James and Bourget was of some standing. It is difficult to say how they might have met first but it is possible that Alphonse Daudet must have provided the link. They must have met during the summer of 1884 when Bourget visited London for two months. This acquaintance soon took the shape of friendship and they moved about together in various parts of southern England and saw much of each other in London. James made it possible for Bourget to become a temporary member of the Athenaeum and introduced him to many of his friends including Edmund Gosse. At that moment Bourget had started his career as a novelist: he had already completed his first short novel, *L'irreparable* and was now writing *Cruelle Enigme*, which he was to dedicate to Henry James.

James and Bourget had much in common. They had both travelled extensively in Western Europe and took delight in recording their experiences in various essays. They were much interested in the charms of cosmopolitanism, a theme which recurs frequently in their works. In literature too they found they had common interests, common likes and dislikes and common ambitions. They both admired and adored novelists like Flaubert, Turgenev, George Eliot, Merimee and especially Balzac; and above all, they were fascinated by the technical problems involved in the composition of the novel. Their approach to the novel was in many respects similar. As Bourget remarked in his Preface to *Cruelle Enigme*, the two writers were united in upholding the principle that one should see in the novel a method for giving "*une impression de la vie*." It was no mere coincidence that James in his essay, "The Art of Fiction" said:

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: That to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no inten-

sity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. (83)

Later both were to stress more and more the need for maintaining the 'point of view' in composition to ensure an adequate representation of life. In 1884, Bourget's ideas were probably not clearly formulated yet, and it seems likely that he profited much from James's experience and kind encouragement. We should also not forget that both were very fond of the theatre and did try their luck later on the stage.

Bourget's admiration for James was reflected in his Preface to *Cruelle Enigme*. He also wrote an essay which he published in the *Parlement*, a daily newspaper to which he contributed during its short existence from 1779 to 1884. This article is important as it reveals Bourget's admiration for James in whom he sees a man full of 'love for a complex experience of life.' He considers him 'subtle rather than colourful, delicate rather than powerful, inquiring rather than deeply moved.' These are characteristics which might be said to be defects rather than merits, but in a period when Naturalism was at its peak, they were traits for which one should be grateful. Moreover, James's writings are replete with spontaneity. Bourget was still of the view that more attention should be devoted to studying the mind in the novel.

James reciprocated the compliment in his essay on Pierre Loti (1888) where he had said that Bourget is 'at once master and disciple' and thought of him to be the only writer in the generation who took a keen interest in the influence exerted by life on the minds of his characters.

It is not much that we know of their early acquaintance but it is clear that they must have met at frequent intervals. James was often in Paris and in 1887 the two met also in Venice, where James was staying at the Palazzo Barbaro and where Bourget had been meeting members of Addington Symond's group. It is now that there was an exchange of themes between the two for possible elaboration into novel or short story form. Bourget related to James the circumstances attending the suicide of his 'beautiful young friend,' Mll S., in Italy, and followed up the narrative with theories to account for

the tragedy—the unfortunate behaviour of the mother, the desire of the girl to escape from the family by marriage, the extraordinary tactlessness she revealed in her conversation with the young man she believed to be in love with her, and so on and so forth. The simple outline resulted forth into *A London Life*, where the original tragedy is obliterated and makes way for an acute analysis of the state of mind of Laura Wing, who does not commit suicide, but leaves the reader with the impression that after all the marriage may come off. Had Bourget treated this theme, it is unlikely that he would have sacrificed that tragic element: and indeed one may well wonder whether part of this tale of Mlle S. has not, with certain modifications, been utilized as the basis of the tragedy of Alba Steno, in *Cosmopolis* which was written in 1892 but the first draft of which was made in part in Venice in 1888.

After 1889 there are more hints that one gets about the friendship between the two writers. In November 1889, James was in Paris and spent a good time with Bourget who had in the meantime become famous as the author of *Le Disciple*. They met frequently also in Italy and in England. In the summer of 1891, Bourget who had recently married Minnie David, came over to Torquay where James was staying at the Osborne Hotel, and spent a holiday there. It was during this stay in England that he began to work out the theme of *Une Idylle Tragique* which, however, was completed only some five years later. The friends met again at Sienna next summer. It is clear that both had a great love for Italy where they often visited their friends, Vernon Lee and Berenson. In a letter written about this time to Charles Eliot Norton, James gave expression to his admiration for Bourget as a brilliant conversationalist. During his stay in Sienna, Bourget was reading the proofs of his novel *Terre Promise* and he showed it to James who found in it the same weaknesses he had formerly disliked in *Mensonages*. On the other hand James approved *Sensations d' Italie*, the work which caused R.L. Stevenson to dedicate his *Across the Plains* to Bourget whom he had never met.

During those years the two spent a lot of time discussing the theory of the novel and gave much thought to matters of technique. James was definitely much more mature than Bourget and was in position

to teach a lot to his younger counterpart. James, however, admired the able portrayal of cosmopolitan life, the serious efforts made by Bourget to ensure harmonious composition, his search for the 'point of view,' his gift for dramatic presentation of his themes and generally speaking his ambition to make the minds of his characters the center of interest in his novels. But it was James who had travelled far ahead than his friend on this path, and during these years, it was Bourget who benefited from their interaction. Bourget realized the weakness of his method and was doing his best to overcome them. In four interesting articles which he published in the *New Review* between 1891 and 1893, Bourget is pointing towards the dangers inherent in the methods he had used. Even some of the titles show his awareness of the imperfections and weakness: *The Limits of Realism in Fiction*, *The Dangerous of the Analytic Spirit in Fiction*. And it was in *Idylle Tragique*, the theme for which he had worked out during his stay with James at Torquay, that he worked very hard to eradicate these weaknesses. Here he gives more importance to straight narrative and to dialogue than passages of psychological analysis which become less frequent. He makes his characters speak for themselves which shows that he was full of admiration for the masterly way in which James handled dialogue in his fiction.

In the field of the novel, therefore, Bourget had almost nothing to teach James. It was in the middle of the nineties that both felt the need to renew themselves in one way or the other. For James, comparatively speaking, it was a simple matter. It is a fact that he really wanted to win fame by writing for the stage, an ambition simultaneously cherished by Bourget, who did write plays fifteen years later, but more successfully than James. James was a failure at the theatre and the dramatization of *Guy Domville* in 1895 was not received well by either public or critics. But his failure as a dramatist had a good effect on his career and he made his decision with confidence. The entry in his *Notebook* on 23 January 1895 says:

I take up my own old pen again—the pen of all my old unforgettable efforts and sacred struggles. To myself—today I need say no more. Large and full and high the future still opens. It is now indeed that I may do the work of my life. And I will. . . . I have only to face my

problems. . . . But all that is of the ineffable—too deep and pure for any utterance. Shrouded in sacred silence let it rest. (179)

The main problem that Henry James was beset with at the moment was that of brevity. He was very much concerned with how he could compress that ever-expanding imagination of his.

It was in the year 1895 that both Bourget and James once again tried out further experiments in the literary field, especially while writing the short story form. James, however, did not stop writing novels and between 1893 and 1990 he produced *Spoils of Poynton*, *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*. Simultaneously he wrote a number of *nouvelles*. Bourget had written stories even earlier but it was not until the year 1895 that the form impressed him. Both the writers met more frequently and it is very likely that they met in England during the autumn of 1895 and also the next summer. James wrote a letter to Edmund Gosse on August 28, 1896 in which he recalls the meeting in the following words: "The only thing that befell me was that I dined one night at the Savoy with F. Ortman and the P. Bourgets—and that the said Bourgets—but two days in London—dined with me one night at the Grosvenor club." (IV, 34) F. Ortman was the editor of *Cosmopolis*, an international journal which printed in its January and February 1896 issues Henry James's tale "The Figure in the Carpet" and in January and February 1898 "John Delavoy." Bourget and James both exchanged copies of their stories as they appeared. These years were very fruitful for Bourget as he had learnt to express himself more artistically in the short story form. In 1897, there appeared in book form *Voyageuses*, a series of tales first published in *Cosmopolis*.

The short stories written by both during this period reveal an interest in similar subjects and this is the field where both had learnt much from each other. In Bourget's work we notice an increasing likeness for stories dealing with artists and painting. James had also taken much interest in artists and intellectual characters right from the beginning of his career. Many of James's tales deal with the supernatural and it is not surprising to see Bourget working out the possibilities of telepathy, metapsychism as material for his stories. Both the writers, however, had a strong liking for introducing chil-

dren into some of their stories. The most interesting example of this theme is two stories which possess many similarities, *Odile* (in *Voyageuses*) and *What Maisie Knew*. In both we find a similar situation: it is the tale of a little girl who suffers from the behaviour of her parents and stepparents. In Bourget's story, the situation is far more simple: since the wife the Marquis d' Estinac, father of Odile, has committed suicide before the story opens, her death allows her unfaithful husband to marry the vulgar Mme Justel and Odile is neglected by the couple who indulge in their desires. In James's story, both the parents are divorced and remarry. S. Gorley Putt, a James critic says:

Underneath all the elaborate quadrille of divorced and remarried parties in *What Maisie Knew* there has been active the unchanging ravages of sexual infatuation. Yet the consequent partners are as farcical as those of Restoration comedies. 'A' (male) and 'B' (female) are divorced. 'A' remarries 'C' (female) and 'B' remarries 'D' (male). Before long, 'C' and 'D' begin to form a third regrouping. All very entertaining and 'knowing'? Yes; unless we view it all, as James asks us to do, through the eyes of the innocent yet sensitive and intelligent eyes of little Maisie, deserted child of 'A' and 'B.' In her eyes, as innocence comes to terms with squalid ever-changing self-indulgence, the jealousies and greed of the grown-ups seem more hurtful than the sexual license itself. (103)

Here we have a very symmetrical situation. James did treat his subject at greater length and to ensure the link between the two sides of the family, he introduced the character of Mrs. Wix, the housekeeper. Bourget's story remains concise, and very much unlike *What Maisie Knew*, ends in tragedy as is quite frequent in his writings; Odile commits suicide just like her mother. Yet, in spite of these differences in theme, the artistic problem to be solved in each case is similar. In both the stories the situation is that of the behaviour of the parents seen through the eyes and minds of the innocent children—Maisie and Odile. Both these reflectors contribute to the unity of the stories and in no way it means that these children are devoid of any individuality of their own.

Henry James's *In the Cage* which appeared in 1898 and Paul Bourget's *Poste Restante* which was published in 1930 also have

identical themes despite the long gap in years. The center of interest is a young post office employee who builds up in her imagination a love intrigue between the two of her clients who send telegrams to each other from time to time. In due course she reaches the conclusion that the couple is in dire distress and that she alone can rescue them from their condition. She suddenly realizes that this is no romantic love-affair, but a sordid intrigue between a woman and a much younger man riddled with debt who preys upon her affections in order to maintain himself in society. The young girl realizes the folly of her day-dreaming and returns to her worthy, rather dull fiancé upon whom she has so far rather looked down. There are certain incidents, however, which have no counterpart in Bourget's tale but it is still interesting to compare the two treatments of the situation. There is no doubt that James, as far as characterization and technique are concerned, emerges the superior of the two.

One can find other examples of the debts which Bourget and James contracted towards each other but it is round the middle years of the Nineties that the most interesting period of their friendship is to be found. They were authors who were prepared to help each other and the most important cause of their continuing friendship was their concern for the art of novel writing. James was definitely the senior partner and it was Bourget who was to learn more from him and the one who needed guidance, support and encouragement. James gave him direction when he needed it most. After Bourget had found his path and made up his mind on matters religious and political, there was no means of holding him from his worst defects. It is not to suggest that there was estrangement after the year 1900 but it can be said that circumstances were not favourable to the interaction of their personalities. Even travelling for both the authors was not as easy as it was in the past.

We could, however, say that it would be really very difficult to know the full measure of the friendship between James and Bourget. They were closest in their general ideas of the novel and it did help them clarify their ideas on an art which they considered very seriously. We should also not forget that they did a lot to interest the public on the technical aspect of the novel.

I must finally give an extract from Henry James's letter to Paul Bourget written on December 23, 1898 from Lamb House, Rye:

I am very glad to hear you have opened the door again to the fairy invention. She always passes and repasses a few times before she comes in, but come in she at last *does* if you keep the threshold swept and put a chair to keep the door back. I am sure indeed that by this time she is comfortably seated with you. For myself, more than ever, our famous "Art" is the one refuge and sanatorium. (IV, 91)

## NOTES

1. For a more detailed explication, reference may also be made to Joseph Conrad's account of his intentions as a novelist in his Preface to *The Nigger of Narcissus* (1897) which is the basic document of his early artistic development and where he repeats Henry James's claim that "the air of reality [solidity of specification] seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel—the merit on which all its other merits . . . helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there, they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist." "The Art of Fiction," pp. 86-87.
2. Leon Edel, ed., *Henry James Letters* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984).
3. F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, ed., *The Notebooks of Henry James* (New York: George Braziller, 1955).
4. S. Gorley Putt, *A Preface to Henry James* (London: Longman, 1986).
5. Morris Shapira, ed., *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism* (Penguin, 1963)

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**Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*:  
A Tale of Enchantment and Epiphany**

**AKHILESHWAR THAKUR**

**Y**ann Martel, Spanish born Canadian writer, made his mark as a contemporary fiction writer after the publication of his second novel *Life of Pi* (Penguin India, 2001). This novel won him the prestigious Booker Prize for 2002 and also won him an enviable place among fiction writers of today.

*Life of Pi* is basically a story of enchantment, suspense and surprise. It deals with magic and miracle that accompany human endeavors on many occasions. The strength of the novel lies in this feature of its enchanting story. Establishing the credibility of the story has been the main concern of the novelist. Martel has observed in his author's note that he had hunted the story now and then moving from one place to another. He had thought of India but staying near Bombay had failed him. He then moved towards the south and in Pondicherry—the legacy of the French Colonial ambition—he had an encounter with one Mr. Adirubasamy who gave him the clue to the story of Piscine Molitor Patel who is Martel's Pi. Martel writes about his conversation with Mr. Adirubasamy:

Then the elderly man said, "I have a story that will make you believe in God."

I stopped waving my hand. But I was suspicious. Was this a Jehovah's Witness knocking at my door? "Does your story take place two thousand years ago in a remote corner of the Roman Empire?" I asked.

"No."

Was he some sort of Muslim evangelist? "Does it take place in seventh century Arabia?"

"No, no. It starts right here in Pondicherry just a few years back, and it ends, I am delighted to tell you, in the very country you come from"

"And it will make me believe in God?"

"Yes."

"That's a tall order."

"Not so tall that you can't reach." (x)

And also towards the end of the novel as Mr. Tomohiro Okamoto of the Japanese Ministry of Transport talks to Pi regarding Tsimtsum, the Japanese ship and its wreck in the Pacific, the question of credibility comes. Mr. Okamoto quite bluntly says: "Mr. Patel, we don't believe your story." (292) And he dismisses his story as incredible. Pi Patel, after a while, replies, "I know what you want. You want story that won't surprise you. That will confirm what you already know. That won't make you see higher or further or differently. You want an immobile story. You want a flat story." (302) And ultimately Pi, the narrator, fabricates another story to the satisfaction of Tomohiro Okamoto.

What all these and many other postmodernist strategies adopted in the concluding part of the novel suggest is that Yann Martel wishes to give utmost realistic colour to his imaginative world. Suspension of disbelief has been very significant in his scheme of things. The novelist's ultimate aim seems to chart the agonies of ordeal that his narrator Pi has braved and withstood. Its acuteness is so stark and heart-rending that one just cannot believe it. And thus the question of credibility surfaces time and again. However the unique narrative pattern that the novel has dismisses all such doubts. By the successive intrusion of the episodes of Pi's later life in Canada, Martel makes his story most credible.

Pi is an average Indian teenager, born Hindu and brought up in a Hindu home. But as he grows older his Faith grows up in a modern secular manner like the majority of young Indians. He realizes the profundity of religion and believes that religion is more than rites and rituals. His young mind ponders over the metaphysical meanings of religious discourse and ruminates over the philosophical abstractions of religion. Eventually Pi grows up into a unique young man who lives on the interface between one religion and another namely Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, the three important religions practised in India. Pi has been groomed in such a condition that for him religion is not an insular faith of a particular community rather it is open-ended, celebrating plurality. As a young and ma-

tured man in his later life in Canada he humorously says to his foster mother:

that Hindus, in their capacity for love, are indeed hairless Christians, just as Muslims, in the way they see God in everything, are bearded Hindus, and Christians, in their devotion to God, are hat-wearing Muslims. (50)

And he proves it in his real life as we find the manifestations of many goddesses like Lakshmi, Parvati, etc., and ideas, numbers, figures and illustrations of Islam and Christianity in his house in Canada.

Pi's childhood represents the quintessential secular credentials of India; and in his growth and making are mirrored the doubts and despairs that accompany it. Pi passionately pleads before his father, 'why can't I be a Hindu, a Christian and a Muslim?' (73) And by the end of the first part of the novel, when Pi is just sixteen years old and waving goodbye to India for good along with his entire family including the animals of his father's zoo, he is a mature and enlightened mind, almost a pagan in persuasion and a pantheist in his approach to God. During the days of his misfortune—which covers the second part of the novel—it is this belief which rescues him from the Jaws of death. In those hours of crisis he achieves epiphany which seems to be the crux of the whole affair.

The second part of the novel, entitled "The Pacific Ocean," brings the major action and its various ramifications to the fore wherein lies the main thrust of the novel. It draws an intricate pattern of faith and fear, agonies and awfulness, doubts and despairs and, thus, takes the novel to an epic height reminding the tragic ambiguities inherent in the essential being of man.

It describes Pi at sea for 227 days in a solitary lifeboat bobbing on the wild blue Pacific after the cargo ship, carrying his entire family along with the animals of Pondicherry Zoo owned by his father, sinks during a storm. In the lifeboat there are four other survivors apart from Pi but they are not human beings, they all are animals—a hyena, a zebra with broken leg, a female orangutan and above all a 450-pound Royal Bengal Tiger. Pi is the lone human survivor with his ardent belief and robust faith that his woes and suffering would end one day. And ultimately he proves right when after 227 days of agony he comes ashore on the Mexico coast.

The sufferings of a sanguine Pi is the dominant motif of the second part of the novel. The scene is set for an extraordinary adventure and enchantment. Martel brilliantly conjures up an enormously lovable and terrifying situation suffused with wonder. Pi, the narrator, recapitulates his woeful experiences and meandering thoughts of his survival. The awful ambience of the blue Pacific with death knocking at every moment and wild animals in the lifeboat, for Pi life was nothing short of an ordeal. On occasions it seems that the narration centres round the fight between Pi and his fears. However, Pi is strong enough to overcome his fear because of his bottomless faith in the ultimate authority of God and his achievement of epiphany. He hears a voice saying:

I will not die. I refuse it. I will make it through this nightmare. I will beat the odds, as great as they are. I have survived so far, miraculously. Now I will turn miracle into routine. The amazing will be seen every day. I will put in all the hard work necessary. Yes, so long as God is with me, I will not die. (148)

In due course all animals die or get killed and eventually the strongest one, that is the Royal Bengal Tiger, namely Richard Parker, survives. After it, events meticulously oscillate between the tiger and Pi with God above and death underneath. Pi daily conversed with God and invented Him in his own unique pagan manner. 'The blackness would stir and eventually go away, and God would remain, a shining point of light in my heart.' (209) Thus Pi went on living with his hunger, thirst, loneliness, sickness and his will to survive with profound faith in God's dispensation and providence.

Martel's magical story reaches its climax when we find that the narrator continuously tries to fight death and slowly defeat it with the sheer strength of his will to live. Pi himself tells that he survived because in his utter loneliness, it was the painful awareness of death alone which gave him strength. Pi recalls it with all seriousness: "Only death consistently excites your emotions, whether contemplating it when life is safe and stale or fleeing it when life is threatened and precious." (217)

The plot thus moves on the dialectics of life and death, hope and despair and man's efforts and divine dispensation. What ultimately saves the situation and redeems Pi's life, otherwise punctuated with grief, ache and endurance, is his immense faith in God and strong

will to survive. With all sincerity and solemnity Pi confesses that it was very natural for him to turn to God finding nothing else to combat death:

The lower you are, the higher your mind will want to soar. It was natural that bereft and desperate as I was, in the throes of unremitting suffering, I should turn to God. (284)

And when ultimately Pi reaches land and struggles to shore, falling on sand and he looks about the life ahead, he is sad and gloomy. He is sad to think that he is now truly alone. 'I was truly alone, orphaned not only of my family, but now of Richard Parker and nearly, I thought, of God.' (285) What it, after all, shows is that for Pi even the object of death, the tiger, was a companion of his in his torment and he weeps like a child for its sudden disappearance. Also Pi is tormented to think that he is now orphaned of God. God remained with him for all these months and now that the ordeal was over, he was sad to think that the pious proximity with divinity would be over. The 'moments' of epiphany would vanish and though he would have a sea of humanity beside him, he would remain all alone in a crowd.

Thus Martel's ultimate aim seems to highlight this pious proximity or epiphany which every man of sensibility longs for as therein lies the recipe for salvation. Martel's Pi is that saintly creature who achieves it and it is his power of love that triumphs over death. What looks astonishing is that Pi loves even the object of death, death itself, to overcome it.

What is extraordinary about the novel is that such a serious and solemn discourse is embodied in a child-like edge-of-seat adventure story. It may be an allegory or a magical-realist fable or an animal story much in the manner of the classic Indian *Panchatantra* or all combined, what it ultimately evokes is the man's essential angst for overcoming agonies, torments, loneliness and death. And this is the real essence of the novel. The story is awfully engaging and full of magic, wonder and enchantment but what makes the novel memorable is that evocation of 'Faith' which eternally protects life that is constantly at stake. It is in this sense that the novel may be summed up as a tale of enchantment and epiphany.

## Religious Landscape in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*: A Secular Perspective

SMITA MOHANTY

The Canadian literature has become significant in the genre of fiction on Indian connections. In the socio-political movement from the postcolonial to the commonwealth status Canada has made a long leap into the literary field like her other Commonwealth counterparts. With the writings of Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Alice Munro, Rohinton Mistry, Mordecai Richler and Carol Shields, the Canadian literature has occupied a place of distinction in the global literature. "The literary activity of the press voyagers, explorers, and traders with which Canadian literary history begins is notable for everything, for quantity, variety, hardship, calamity, documentary, scientific value, for everything that is except literary skill."<sup>1</sup> Every national literature has a central symbol and for Canada the appropriate symbol is the collective victim struggle for survival against a hostile nature and a colonial environment. After Margaret Atwood's Booker winner *The Blind Assassin* (2000), Yann Martel the Spanish born Canadian novelist has made a mega success in his eponymous Man Booker Winner *Life of Pi* (2002). The novel is a psychological romance, a theological hypothesis, and a personal wrestling in the Coleridgean subconsciousness.

Martel narrates the personal suffering of the protagonist in his struggle against a hostile nature which brings him to the Hindu faith in redemption, and to Catholicism and Mohammedanism. "Struggle for survival against a hostile nature and a colonial environment"<sup>2</sup> is the central symbol of Canadian literature. In the post-colonial setting of the novel India's socio-political environment is hostile to the protagonist and his extended family. This compels them to emigrate to Canada. On the other hand the confessional accounts of the narrator of his shipwreck have brought about an emotional disaster and

self-examination in complacency. In his secular thinking he develops the religious modalities vis-a-vis the ferocity of the sea, and realizes the sagacity of God. *Life of Pi* is an "Indian novel" with its Indian connection for it deals in Hindu belief over and above the Biblical allusions and evangelic Mohammedanism. Martel himself also admits: "I truly think that in some ways India is the richest place on earth."<sup>2</sup> He believes that in India "Religions are about story telling. And religion is woven into the fabric of India in a way that is more visible, and goes deeper than in Christian countries." (*Ibid.*)

The novel is about the life story of a sixteen year old boy, Piscine Molitor Patel of Pondicherry whose career prompts every school boy's creative and sadistic talents. Piscine, called as Pi being christened after a French Swimming pool, narrates his seven months' ordeal on the sea after his shipwreck. The story begins and, in a sense, ends at Pondicherry. Pi's father has a zoo at Pondicherry and decides to emigrate to Canada for a better prospect of his zoo business, following the instability in India during "Mrs. Gandhi's dictatorial takeover of the nation."<sup>3</sup> The decision of his zookeeper father to emigrate to Canada on a Panamanian registered Japanese Cargo ship *Tsimtsum* with his animal family ends in a failure. The ill-fated ship sinks in a storm and the most of the animals on board are fated to die. Fortune has favoured a few only, to torture them. An injured Zebra, a hungry hyena, a confused orangutan and a huge 450 pound Royal Bengal tiger, Richard Parker, are saved. The animals unconsciously struggle for life in Darwin's theory of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest. But Pi as the only human survivor on the lifeboat, understands the secret of existence by his suffering and intelligence. In the hostile environment of the sea, and among the wild animals, Parker survives finally for his strength, and Pi survives for his intelligence and faith in God. Martel's description of Pi's survival on the lifeboat and the stronger animals' struggle to live by defeating the weaker ones is quite harrowing. He witnesses the gruesome scene when the hyena "started pulling out coils of intestines and other viscera . . . it plunged head and shoulders into zebra's guts, upto the knees of its front legs . . . the zebra was being eaten alive from the inside." (125) Pi is shocked with an impression that the herbivores cannot win the carrion eater because the herbi-

vores do not know how to use their strength and agility to protect themselves in times of misfortune.

After months of eating raw fish, facing thirst, dangers from sharks and other terrors, Pi finds himself "orphaned in the middle of the Pacific, hanging on to an oar, an adult tiger in front of me, sharks beneath me, a storm raging about me." (107) He observes "the tiger because it was a distraction" (191) and a "terrible burden to carry." (183) This makes Pi to cling to religion in his inherited and acquired beliefs. He churns Hinduism, Islam and Christianity as a whole in his secular belief and thinks: "religion is about our dignity, not our depravity." (71) Secularism is a common faith for a multifarious society as in a country like India in an existential scheme. One's religion is determined by his birth, by a chance, but his acceptance of religion is made by choice. Pi's secular thinking of three religions is not a flaw in his religious belief, rather it is a spiritual flaw for a *samskara* through the equanimity of love and wisdom.

The setting of the religious background in *Life of Pi* is Indian in context, and cosmopolitan in spirit. The book is a story of adventure full of suspense, and a demonstration of how extreme needs alter man's character and lead him to developing a profound meditation. But however learned or versatile in religion a man is, he only clings to it when he is desperate, helpless, and nowhere. As the days wear on in the middle-of-the-sea, Pi discovers only the brutal laws of nature. His encyclopedic and National Geographic knowledge of the animal world from his father; his science teacher Satish Kumar and Dr. Atal, the zoo veterinarian, help him enough to survive on the lifeboat. His experiences on the sea, and among the host of wild animals, help him to realize the intriguing and informative knowledge on zoology, nature and sea. The young Pi's curious mind leads him to explore the aspects of religions other than his native Hinduism, and he practises Christianity and Islam equally with joyous resignation. Diving deep into secularism he develops a sort of inclination towards other religions, and takes an initiation in it. He realizes "all of them speak the same language. It is the language of personal relation with God . . . because each organized religion is different from others. . . . Religion is man's attempt to understand the greater plan, and it's a big planet, and there are different kinds of

people and societies. . . . Faith is universal, the social expression of it is very different."<sup>4</sup> Religion is extraordinarily stimulating to the imagination of the Indians to idealize India, the ashram yogic thing, and overwhelming.

In his surrealistic, allegorical and hallucinatory suffering Pi understands the universe, and takes refuge in religions. Forgetting his suffering for the time being, he explores religions as a Hindu with marked Christian and Muslim leanings. While the local pandit, Imam and priest have a highly comic serious tussle over Pi, and over the virtues of their perspective religions, he manages to cling to all of these in his earnest desire just to "love God." He thinks that secularism never collapses God but the commotion over it is due to unintelligibility. By becoming secular one does not taint any religion nor develops any indignation towards God. The outlandish and hallucinatory experience of Pi is an endless blue expanse of story telling about adventure, survival, and ultimately, faith. In an open mind Martel narrates Pi's secular belief in religions in his sufferings, with a lovely meditative twist. Pi's past and present commingle in his self-knowledge and in his redemptive faith in Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. In his sufferings he understands truth, and gives a surprising comment that "The reason death sticks so closely to life isn't biological necessity—it's envy. Life is so beautiful that death has fallen in love with it, a joyous possessive love that grabs at what it can." (6)

Pi's suffering, and his strategies to obtain food and water, occasionally bordering on insanity, is engrossing. After five days of restless journey in half terrified condition he remembers the Hindu Pantheon and says, "I felt like the sage Markandeya, who fell-out of Vishnu's mouth while Vishnu was sleeping and so beheld the entire universe everything that there is. Before the sage could die of fright, Vishnu awoke and took him back into his mouth." (177) At the same time he says, "I would like to visit before I pass on, after Mecca, Varanasi, Jerusalem and Paris." (6) This expresses his satisfaction with his secular belief but disappointment with his spiritual odyssey. He is preoccupied with secularism before his leaving India and his emotional disaster, a trial worse than high fever, is an exhilarating tension. Pi's understanding of zoology and theology help

him to understand the sociology of the animal world. He understands that the common animals have no religion, and that they do not understand any ethical values in life. It appears often: "When two creatures meet, the one that is able to intimidate its opponent is recognized as socially superior, so that a social decision does not always depend on a fight; an encounter in some circumstances may be enough." (44) But in case of wise animals like man, his thinking and intelligence make him socially superior or inferior. The basic truth is that socially inferior animals remain loyal or faithful to the socially superior animals.

The religious setting of the novel and Pi's understanding of the ultimate Reality, from chapter fifteen to twenty-five make it Booker-worthy. Pi's understanding of three religions and its comprehensive analysis on the lifeboat make the book a learning experience. He learns in misfortune to strike when a good chance of success comes. Like Noah, Crusoe and Santiago, he is rather inspired to survive in the hostile environment holistically for months together by developing the instinct of a hunter. By killing the dorados and flying fishes for his survival, he had become a killer. He needed expiation like Coleridge's mariner for the killing of the albatross, and therefore offered tortoise meat as *prasad* in prayer. He has made all possible attempts to defend himself against Parker, the magnetic pole of his life having discarded the unnecessary thoughts for committing suicide. He knows that killing the innocent and committing suicide are crimes in every religion. He realizes that his clash with Parker would earn nothing, and prefers to tame it in claustrophobic suffering of both of them. He knows Parker was a wild animal in the Sunderban and in the zoo but living with it is exhaustingly interesting. Parker does not know God, religion and spirituality but in its spiritual transformation by suffering the ferocious carnivore has become a religious tiger like that of R.K. Narayan's vegetarian tiger in *A Tiger for Malgudi*. Parker was aggressive but later it becomes a "gregarious cat." (222) In taming the strong and ferocious Blakean tiger, Pi provides it with big dorados, "the Jesus Matsya" (221) and slowly his terror becomes monotonous. Adversities have also made Pi a carnivorous secularist and he hates fish, turtles and birds. In the dramatic sufferings of their life, deliriousness affects them. Pi realizes that the tiger "didn't have aggression in his mind. Simple bal-

ance was enough of a challenge; he was as wobbly on his feet as I was. When he advanced, he crawled close to the ground and with trembling limbs, like a new born cub." (261) Yet he does not believe this predatory animal as its urge is to kill. It is difficult to separate this urge from him.

Pi's voyage on the Pacific is a pilgrim's progress, and a spiritual odyssey. His voyage was started on 2nd July, 1977 and ended on 14 February, 1978 covering 227 days. The survival manual on navigation which was saved in the lifeboat helped him enough to save his life. Before his leaving India Hinduism was the original landscape of his religious imagination as contained in Truth, Unity, Absolute, Ultimate Reality and Ground of Being. He says: "I owe to Hinduism the original landscape of my religious imagination." (50) He knows that Hinduism is full of rites and rituals and God can reside in the sanctum of temple and in heaven though He has His cosmic presence. Brahma, Krishna, Shiva and Shakti are the notable deities in Hindu faith. On the lifeboat he practises religious rituals, "solitary Masses without priests or consecrated Communion hosts, *darshans* without murtis, and pujas with turtle meat for *prasad*, acts of devotion to Allah not knowing where Mecca was and getting . . . Arabi wrong." (209) He becomes a secular *yogi* uncertain about his future but expresses his gratitude to God for saving him on His Ark. His despair is a heavy blackness, a hell beyond expression.

Martel's description of Hindu deities, their respective duties and worship through rituals are Forsterian. He describes the Hindu worshipping of God by offering garlands, broken coconuts, clanging of bells, beating drums, fragrance of incense, flames of *arati* lamps circling in the darkness, bhajans, elephants standing to bless, and colorful murals. Pi carries this Hindu faith and thinks: "The universe makes sense . . . through Hindu eyes." (48) He is a Brahman and possesses Brahman nirguna (without qualities) beyond understanding, beyond description, beyond approach as well as Brahman Saguna (with qualities). Brahman is the man believed divinity in everything and the *atman* or soul in every living being. Pi understands this cosmic truth and "The finite within the infinite, the infinite within the finite." (49) Brahman and *atman* relate precisely as "*atman* seeks to realize Brahman, to be united with the Absolute, and it travels in this life on a pilgrimage where it is born and dies, and is

born again and dies again, and again, and again, until it manages to shed the sheaths that imprison it here below." (49) In Hinduism, "The paths to liberation are numerous, but . . . the Bank of Karma, where the liberation account of each of us is credited or debited depending on our actions." (49)

For Pi, Hinduism is a *darshan* of human life. It connotes a noble, elevating way of life. In his impression, Hinduism neither dechristianises Christianity nor deislamisises Islam. Hinduism is cosmopolitan, an assimilation without extinction, adaptation without subversion, cherishing without perishing. India's historical onslaughts have not decimated the multifarious aspects and dimensions of Hinduism. In India's historic, civilizational and cultural entity Hinduism has a reverential association with Islam and Christianity in its pluralistic manifestation. Pi believes in Hinduism as a secular concept of the state, a *mantra*, a *sankalpa* of life to show respect for other religions and faiths and to practise no discrimination among citizens. Pi's secularism and religions are mutually inclusive. Secularism does not dissociate anybody from God rather it establishes his reverential association with other religions. In Indian context and for New India it is a *chintan* (thought) that affirms that India belongs to all, and all belong to India. If Hinduism is the father of religions of India, Islam and Christianity have a rhetoric honeymoon with it in their political correlation. In the anecdote of Lord Krishna and milkmaids' dancing, he realizes that "the moment the girls become possessive, the moment each one imagines that Krishna is her partner alone, he vanishes." (49) Krishna's foster mother Yashoda realizes the finite in the infinite when "She sees in Krishna's mouth the whole complete entire timeless universe, all the stars and planets of space . . . all the lands and seas of the earth and the life in them . . . all ideas and all emotions, all pity and all hope . . . and every bit of dirt in its truthful place." (55) A Hindu enjoys divinity in the deification of things in the universe.

During his visit to Munnar in Kerala he had his meeting with Father Martin. His meeting with the Muslim baker during his visit to Mullah Street had helped him to understand Islam. He had realized Islam and Christianity in new dimensions. His mother's Hindu upbringing and Baptist education had made him realize all religions sacred and secular in spirit. In a secular tone he says: "I want to pray

Allah. I want to be a Christian," "Because I love God." (72) He believes Allah-Brahman, Swami-Jesus in his existential sufferings from illness, injury and depression. For him Krishna or Ram, Allah, and Jesus are literally the finest rewards of life with their beauty in Supreme Reality. Religions may not earn material profit for him in his zoo business but certainly is a kind of purgation and "living the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian." (181) Islam is a "beautiful religion of brotherhood and devotion." (61) Muslims pray in quick, necessary, physical bouts "a sort of exercise" (60) as Christians pray Christ on the cross—the Image of calisthenic communion with God. A short bout of meditation on Muslims is like "Hot-weather yoga for the Bedouins" (60) and *Asanas* for heaven-oriented Hindus. Pi's mind has a multi-religious setting and he understands all the three religions as equal.

Pi's leaving his country with his parents' desire makes him share the parental sin. He has been torn between his love for the country and love for the religions. His experiences appear to be a story of crime and punishment in his crave for God and craze for zoo business. His father's zoo business is the Eve's apple (temptation) and search for the Almighty helps him enjoy the Adam's apple (suffering) in an expiation. Like a staunch Muslim he desires his atman's union with Allah and like a Sufi (Muslim mystic), sought *fana* (union with God) through the practice of *dhikr* (reciting ninety-nine revealed names of God) by *hafiz* (learning Quran by heart). The argument and boasting of Pandit, Imam and priest over their respective religions helps Pi assess other religions and acquire essence from them. These three magi are the paradoxes of their learning and argue over Krishna, Allah, Christ—Benaras, Mecca and Bethlehem. Their criticizing each other's religion as Islam and Christianity are the foreign religions to India, Muslims cause greater violence by "Provoking riots," "Hindus enslave people and worship dressed up dolls" and "kneel before cows," the Christians "kneel before white-man" are not the healthy signs for the secularism of India. Secularism grants freedom of practice" to all religions and for a secularist "All religions are true" (69) and "God is universal." (68) While in Hinduism there are many stories, in Christianity one story is enough. In Christianity Jesus faces adversity and dies at last. In Hinduism gods face the same though they don't die. In Hinduism

the *avatars* (incarnations) of God only die. Hindu gods leave death only to mortals. On the other hand "Christianity is a religion in a rush" (57) because the world was created in seven days and the creation was in frenzy. The quick resolution of Christianity has a dizzy effect. "If Hinduism flows placidly like the Ganges, then Christianity bustles like Toronto at rush hour." (57) In Hinduism God created Brahmanda (the universe) for his pleasure and created man biblically after his own image. Pi believes that "whoever meets Christ in good Faith is a Christian" and "Christianity stretches back through the ages, but in essence it exists only at one time: right now." (57)

Pi's seven months' ordeal on the lifeboat is the driving force behind his spirituality and secular belief. His love for God almighty not only gives but also forgives. His secular belief is not a treason against the dignity of any religion in India's post-colonial status. In his secular consciousness Pi becomes the re-incarnation of Sri Ramkrishna and Bapu Gandhi. He is the innocent victim of his misfortune who surrenders to God in his suffering. He is Martel's Childe Harold who sings the song of religions with an understanding of the reality in Vishnu's incarnation as *Vamana* (the Dwarf) in His cosmic size to cover the earth and heaven in first and second strides and boots Bali into the nether world in His third stride.

Religion leads to spirituality. Secularism is not politics nor meant for the decline of dharma. It is rather meant for *moksha* (salvation) in a multi-religious and multicultural country like India. Secularism lies at the heart of India and provides a common idiom, a shared matrix of reference to all Indians giving them a philosophical, spiritual and historical legacy. Pi realizes this during his voyage from Pondicherry to Tomatlan, the coastal town of Mexico via Manila and the Leviathan algae island of meerkats. His journey is Copernican and Darwinian and like a neo-Columbus he enjoys the algae island with its "colour of Islam" (257) a chlorophyll heaven—the abode of God, and the place for freedom. As Parker leaves him after his arrival on the coast, he is accepted by the members of his own species and treated like "a premature baby." (286) Remembering his love for Parker and love of the people for him, he imagines that "Love is hard to believe. . . . Life is hard to believe. God is hard to believe." (297) He understands that reason is life's true opponent,

but it is the best tool to understand God and religion. The epical dimension of his suffering teaches that enmity earns nothing and love conquers all. Religion is the greatest healing force, and law of the universe, enables man to muster courage in his misfortune. Religion and spirituality stand for Eros—the force that establishes connections, relationship and unions. Pi becomes religious as it helps him to locate truth, value, and integrity in life. For him religion is the great reservoir of hope, faith and purpose, but one needs to handle it with care. The religious man learns tolerance, love and saintliness, remaining above exploitation, communalism, bigotry and hatred. In his emotional vulnerability he accepts religion as the quintessential element of life. Politics is abhorred as it has a mysterious alchemy with religion but secularism favours life much with a promise of paradise.

Secularism is integral to the Indian society and nation. State imbibes this concept in India's religious tradition. It is meant to annihilate schisms in religions. Pi interprets religions in a secular way. Secularism is his religious *mantra* and an integral part of his academic life. In other words his secularism is not a form of escapism from any particular religion—it is a nurturing element of his life. In his secular belief he sees the light and shine of Divinity. The novel appears to be a religious treatise in the genre of doomsday literature in its “transformative: improvement”<sup>5</sup> over Brazilian writer Moacyr Scliar's novella *Max and the Cats*. In his book Martel has extolled India's multi-cultural and multi-religious social fabric in its religious sub-text.

## NOTES

1. William Walsh, *Commonwealth Literature* (London: OUP, 1973), p. 67.
2. Sandra Diwa, “Canada,” *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary World Literature*, ed. John Sturrock (London: OUP, 1997), p. 71.
3. Yann Martel, *Life of Pi* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2001), p. 78.
4. Yann Martel, Interview with Sanjay Suri, “India is a Wonderful, Horrible Place,” *Outlook*, Nov. 11, 2002, p. 75.
5. Roger Boyes, “Did Booker Winner Plagiarise?” *The Sunday Statesman*, Nov. 17, 2002, p. 2.

## An Evening with Rohinton Mistry: Brief Sojourn of the Expatriate Writer

ALKA SINGH

The sunshine abandoned the Assi Ghat of Varanasi but an anxious crowd awaited at Hotel 'Ganges View' to be luxuriated by the breathtaking performance on 'Saarangi' to be followed by book reading by Rohinton Mistry. The evening began with the scrap of sunshine drifting from the balcony. The question answers that followed showed that Mistry thinks carefully before he speaks. A soft melodious voice yet tinged with sweet-sour reminiscences. He visits India and continues to mine it for his fiction but stresses that "It would be a strenuous undertaking to move back. It would be another migration, and I think one in a lifetime is enough." Bombay, the city where he lived for his initial twenty-three years of his life is a concern that still remains with him: "Not just the land of milk and honey also the land of deodorant and toiletry." (131) It would not be wrong to quote Pascal from his own *Family Matters*: "the heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of."

Rohinton Mistry grew up in Bombay and spent twenty-three years of his life there before emigrating to Canada in 1975. He is a Zoroastrian Parsi. His ancestors were exiled by the Islamic conquest of Iran to put them and their kind in diaspora in the Indian subcontinent. As a Parsi, Mistry's work reflects the experience of 'double displacement.' There appears to be a resistance against the dominance of the "Hindu-glorifying culture of India." The initial interest of imitating music of the West in order to earn a livelihood appeared futile in the face of reality. This illusion which was short-lived dawned on his emigration when he realized a "lot more involved in living in the West." Being alien to that culture he acknowledged the irrelevance of making an effort to 'mimic' their songs for which he

would have no audience. It is here that his passion for reading found an outlet in attending evening classes at the University of Toronto along with his full time job at the bank. The latent ability of writing aroused through the assignments for the courses ultimately led him to various prizes for his short stories. From 1983 onwards he did not have to look back, expanding his canvas from his stories to the publication of his collection of 11 short stories, entitled *Tales from Firuzsha Baag* (1987), his first novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995) and now *Family Matters* (2002). All the three novels have been shortlisted for the prestigious Booker.

Mistry still hung up on the homeland left behind refuses to deal with the Canadian realities for the Indo-Canadians of tomorrow. His journey begins with a nostalgia for the homeland mingled with fear in a strange place to go on to locating India in the matrix of Western culture. Through his works Mistry wishes to explore the relationship at the heart of Parsi community, their uniqueness and their cultural identity. This probably emerges from a deep-rooted feeling of finding himself at the margins of the Indian society. The various incidents are so fabricated around the characters to bring forth the idiosyncrasies of the Parsis in Bombay. The demands of the umbilical connection make Bombay stand tall in most of his writings and he confesses that "it is almost as though you are never going to be removed from that place. Twenty-three years in the place where you were born, where you spent all your days with great satisfaction and fulfillment—that place never leaves you." Embedded in between the lines there is also an aftertaste of guilt for having emigrated from the land of their birth to end up in subsequent worldwide resettlement. Elements associated with Parsi culture are deftly tackled celebrating the use of the Parsi language. To a great extent his attempt is outstanding in linguistic hybridity.

Though his major concern is to portray Indian culture and family life but one can't just miss out the political concern for he intentionally creates in his characters a political consciousness. The splendour, the decay and the restlessness of his birthplace is depicted in outstanding evocative terms. Mistry declines from making a conscious observation and claims at beginning his novels with an image to be expanded on a conscious decision later on. Nonetheless

it is with the growth of the characters that the canvas grows. He confesses that "being true to your characters is more important than demonstrating your skill with words." Various critics find his work reminiscent of 19th century literature due to the traditional mode of story-telling, social realism but then it is due to his inclination at honesty to "keep inventing and creating that complete world, one which you can inhabit and feel is real."

His journey in his writing career begins from a description of the daily life of the Parsi residents in an apartment block in Bombay. The affliction that these Parsis in Bombay endure with a focus on their peculiarities form the major concern. Few stories throw light on a few Parsis of Firozsha Baag who dare to leave their place to undertake a journey to North America. There is explicit reference to the guilt after their flight. "I am guilty of hubris for having sought to emigrate from the land of my birth and I must pay with the price of my burnt eyes." (180) The series of interlocking tales is a reminiscence of gentle fictional tradition of India.

His first novel *Such A Long Journey* (1991) too is anchored in the story of a struggling Parsi family who desperately holds on to any means of livelihood to make the family survive. The characters are all enclosed in a claustrophobic community. The subcontinent's postcolonial politics forms the background of the story of the family life setting. The war between India and Pakistan over what is to become Bangladesh forms the canvas upon which the troubled life of Gustad Noble and his family is played out. The personal and political realities are so entwined that the microcosm echoes the macrocosm. The lives of the characters are deeply affected by corruption and failure on part of the Government. What Mistry magnifies is the inevitable fate of the characters and their problems which also partly arise due to the community's heterogeneous nature: "For himself, the day had come, he knew, when his father's bookstore had been treacherously despoiled and ruined. The shock, the shame of it had made his mother ill. How swiftly moved the finger of poverty, soiling and contaminating." (10)

The daily lives of the inhabitants of the Bombay apartment complex are sketched with great care. What makes the story wonderful is how the hope prevails despite all adverse conditions. Gus-

tad's wish to celebrate Roshan's birthday and that too with a live chicken being brought to the house prior to the occasion was triggered off by a pleasant dream of his happy and well-spent childhood. He wished to revive the same happy spirit:

Gustad watched thoroughly confused, squeezing and prodding to pretend he knew what he was doing. But each chicken was very much like the next. When he finally approved one, it was the vocal protestations of the bird, seemingly louder than the others, that make him decide. He would have been the first to admit his inexperience with poultry. The number of times he had been able to afford chicken for his family in the last twenty years, he could count on the fingertips of one hand without using up the digits. Chicken was definitely not his area of expertise. (26)

Along with characterization and symbolism there's a vivid picture of Indian family life and culture and a story rich in subject matter. The personal life of the kind hearted Parsi man is disturbed due to the political context but the private and political are exposed as manifestations of the same reality. The characters get entangled in the corruption and inadequacy of the government's policy.

*A Fine Balance* (1995) too keeps us back in India dwelling on the nightmare of Indira Gandhi's declaration of the internal 'Emergency.' The novel is a fine mixture of the private lives of the four major protagonists. The novel with its panoramic view turned out to be intensely dramatic bursting forth from its pre-destined seams. The corrupt government, the exploitation of the helpless by those who were powerful, the gulf between the Muslims and the Hindus and various other conditions of the Emergency provide the backdrop. The misery portrayed in the novel at moments appears to be an "unreasonably cruel portrait of India" but then Mistry insists that it is "not a political story" and one finds just a faint sound of party politics in the background.

His four major characters, so very different from each other, find themselves thrown in the same humble city apartment. Mistry's decision to focus on the lives and the painful past of these protagonists in itself indicates his prime concern: one of caste and privilege. Dina the widow is the employer of the two tailors Om and Ishvar, uncle and nephew and a student Maneck Kohlah who she takes in as

a boarder from the foot hills of Himalayas are all too concerned with the business of earning to survive. They make an attempt to help each other to survive through the adverse conditions of life in the underclass of Bombay. The narrative is woven around the separate stories of these four unlikely characters that are drawn together during the state of emergency. Along with these four we have a host of unforgettable community of characters. Mistry confesses to have begun this novel with the image of a woman sitting at a sewing machine and then consciously decided to set it during the 'Emergency.' Mistry reveals that it was during the course of writing the novel that he got deeply involved with the lives of the characters: Dina Shroff a widow who refuses to remarry and her heroic struggle to earn just enough in order to survive; the two tailors with positive hope of finding work in the city (a dream that many Indians nourish); a student to continue his education in a city school. The canvas expanded with details of village life and the foothills of Himalayas: a subtle yet powerful development. The lives of the characters are weighed down by tragedy. The protagonists suffer every kind of misfortune and atrocity that may have been inflicted upon anyone during Indira Gandhi's Emergency. The suffering is unbearable but what makes one wonder is the ability of the characters to endure.

Nusswan the tyrannical yet well meaning older brother of Dina and Zenobia her childhood friend both want her to follow the traditional ways of her class and people. Dina on the other hand wishes to preserve her "fragile independence" (11) but finally gives up when Sergeant Kesar serves the court order of eviction. The patchwork quilt that Dina made for Om's bride symbolizes hope that is shattered later. She muses: "One phase of life was concluding another beginning." (567) Nearly all her attempts to sustain life are thwarted by social or political systems. After spending sixteen years of her life earning for herself she is forced to return to her brother and thus the cherished 'freedom' remains a distant dream for her. The two tailors seek to survive in a world of segregation, oppression and corruption by making an attempt to escape the castist oppression of their village landlord. They thus reach the city. What makes their tragedy unbearable is when Om is forcibly castrated to show the results of family planning by the administration as no more vol-

unteers were available. He was thus deprived of any hope of marrying anyone in future. On being questioned about Emergency by Ishwar, she says "Government problems—games played by people in power like us." "That's what I said" murmured Om Prakash. "My uncle was simply worrying." (88) This simple worry later turned to be a grim reality. The grim realities of the beggars' life, the ultimate suicide of Maneck is also an effort to free themselves. Mistry stresses:

Given the parameters of my characters' lives, given who they are, how can you expect them to have any more happiness than they have found? I think that the ending is a hopeful one: The human spark is not extinguished. They continue to find humour in their lives. This is an outstanding victory in their case.

What's more, there are thousands and thousands of Ishvars and Oms in India today, people who keep going relentlessly in spite of the odds, and this is why I am hopeful.

One is not so heartbroken on seeing the lives of the protagonists so cruelly diminished but to see them laughing towards the final pages of the novel despite all odds. A warm affection towards human race is reawakened. It is apparent that what we have here is not merely the preoccupation of an individual, but a flowering of a longstanding tradition based on a deep human need.

In Mistry's own words, voiced through Nariman Vakeel, the seventy-nine year old protagonist of *Family Matters*, "The loss of home leaves a hole that never fills," (246) is actually a recurrent theme of all his novels. Often he is questioned as to why all his stories revolve around a Parsi family and Bombay and not on the Indo-Canadians of tomorrow and Canada where he presently resides. What he voices through Mr. Kapur in this novel explains it all. "No matter where you go in the world . . . there is only one important story: of youth and loss and yearning for redemption. So we tell the same story over and over. Just the details are different." (221) Even a cursory glance at the title arrests our attention. Analyzing the novel to be dwelling on the details of family matters is not really sufficient for an essential premise of life is that "it's a family that really matters." The very crucial pivot of human relationship. Mistry confirms this through a minor character, "without family, nothing

else matters, everything from top to bottom falls apart or descends into chaos." Answering to questions after reading portions from his novels he tried to speculate on the writing of a family saga and analyzed it as an internal journey that probably is as profound as the external journey which he undertook in his previous two novels. Though not autobiographical it is basically a story that has emerged from a direct quality of experience:

*Family Matters* I think has an internal canvas which is as complex as the external canvas. . . . But there are concerns, primarily political ones. . . . If you write about Bombay in the mid-90s, especially if you give your characters a political consciousness, it is inevitable that they will sit and talk about what is happening in the city, what is appearing in the newspapers.

With an openness of thought he has woven stories through his direct relationship with people or maybe an acquaintance and thus they are real and honest representations. In dealing with matters of the family the problem that arises is to create an absolute distinction between the family itself and the larger world and secondly whether the family we are referring to is an aggregation of kinsfolk or a house full of co-residents. The family in question in *Family Matters* is an extended one: Nariman Vakeel, the seventy-nine-year-old grandfather suffering from "osteoporosis, Parkinson's disease, hyper tension" (32) and later a broken ankle, Jal and Coomy Contractor his step-son and step-daughter, unmarried, Roxana, his daughter Yezad Chenoy, her sales-clerk husband, their children Murad and Jehangir: "If at least the childhood bond, when relations were not tainted by "half" or "step" combinations because hyphens were meaningless to them then—if at least that had endured, it would have offered some consolation, something good salvaged from those miserable years. But this, too, was denied him. Naturally. Only a rotten ending could come out of such a rotten beginning." (10)

The reader is intended to watch with love and sorrow the predictable career of self-destruction of Nariman. Not only in his present life is he enduring pain and incontinence but in his past too wherein he gives up the love of Lucy Barganza believing that "No happiness is more lasting than the happiness that you get from fulfilling your parents' wishes" (13) and thus falling into a loveless

marriage with Yasmin contractor, the widow, the mother of two children but Parsi. A ray of hope and happiness filtered in Nariman's life with the birth of his daughter Roxana and Nariman reflects sadly: "The joyous family time had been short. Much too short." (10) He sought happiness in her company and her family and often a "sad look of loneliness returned to" (39) his face when she was not around. He even snubbed Coomy on complaining of her exhaustion after her sister's departure by saying "To me it feels like a fresh breeze has stirred the stale air." (39) The ebb and flow of the verbal tussels within the family, and of the external is exploited to add tension and interest to the actions and emotional entanglements of the characters. Nariman is an embodiment of paradoxes—he is intensely, inwardly proud yet forced to endure the routine contempt of many characters; a committed father and yet estranged from his children. Emerging slowly from the swell of humanity into the foreground of the narrative, he forms the pivot around which all revolve. Gifted with great intellect, humour, wit and handicapped by his illness, physical immobility and associated limitations, stands for the richness of human love and is loved by others in their own ways though often they feign not to understand him—an undesirable encumbrance. The responsibility thrust from one to the other: To pacify Yezad, Nariman says, "For successful dumping advance notice is unadvisable. Remember that both of you when you want to return me to Chateau Felicity." (115) Coomy grudged against her stepfather for she felt that he was the cause of unhappiness in her mother's life and now theirs. Thus given the weak foundation of the relationship between them and the tensions produced by the difficulties faced in handling him on being bed-ridden make the tragic conclusion of conspiring to shift him to Roxana's house inevitable: "He should be with them. . . . If Doctor says it's a question of life or death surely Yezad has no business to say no." (82) Nariman speculates on refusing to move out but finds it pointless in his helpless state for he knew that "they could still have their way." (83) He observed their happy faces at the relief of not having to look after him and felt that it would be like a "holiday" to them. No Anger, just reflection:

Poor children, thought Nariman, it was difficult for them to disguise their eagerness. And he couldn't blame them. The blame lay with the ones thirty-six years ago, the marriage arrangers, the wilful manufacturers of nursery. He could still hear his parents' voices after the wedding benediction. Now you are settled in life and we can die in peace. Which they had a year later. They had survived long enough to perform their duty but not to witness the misfortune it would foster. (85)

The inability of human being to entertain anything but the outward show is an ironic and engrossing contemporary preoccupation. On one level of generation conflict one sees a resistance to everything Yezad who himself couldn't get rid of thoughts of his own house "Jehangir Mansion" (43) wishes to inculcate the same sense of belonging in the children who happened to be influenced by some imaginative world of Enid Blyton. He argued that the book did harm the children "it encouraged children to grow up without attachment to the place where they belonged, made them hate themselves for being who they were created confusion about their identity." (93) Then there is the examination of family bonds, the way they inform and lead outward to the public-political actions.

When you think of our forefathers, the industrialists and ship builders who established the foundation of modern India, the philanthropists who gave us our hospitals and schools and libraries and baags, what lustre they brought to our community and the nation. And this incompetent fellow cannot look after his father. Is it any wonder they predict nothing but doom and gloom for the community? Demographics show we'll be extinct in fifty years. Maybe it's the best thing. What's the use of having spineless weaklings walking around, Parsi in name only. (50)

Mistry's words may sound austere but not hopeless. One must join the struggle even though its outcome is unforeseeable. He is interested in exploring and asserting the sovereignty of good. His attempt is to describe the whole of human relationships in their real-social structure, in their very power of making the world. Yezad burdened with his father-in-law's responsibility sarcastically remarks "that the chief not only had his private nursing home but also his own butler—what more could he want? He later emphasizes the same in bitter tones: "I'm truly blessed to have such a family. Makes up for all other deficiencies." (117)

Roxana, in contrast to this, exhibits plenty of resilience, endurance in all odd situations. Goodness prevails as she tries to groom her sons too, "if they learn kindness, happiness will follow." (278) Without giving up, she stands by her family. Small yet vibrant and the thread that ties all. Her reckless flight mixes grit and grace with impressive confidence. Little Jehangir and his little attempts to keep their world from falling apart are so exquisitely rendered that it harmonizes all Mistry's drives. It's a struggle to maintain faith, emotions in extremes of situation. The vitality of the portrayal is commendable to "piece together the lovely mornings of story and laughter and joking, which seems to have disappeared so completely." (282) Human ideals and aspirations are pitifully measured against human weakness and wickedness. Writers which take us onto the battlefield or down in a submarine pale into insignificance when set against this kind of work. The sole attempt to locate somewhere with in the eternal swell of human experience. Ready to believe "that the traditional ways were the best" (16) his works do reflect the 19th century realism, exploring his experience and sharing it with his society at large was something long overdue. Most of his characters find the strength and spirit to fight back against their multiple oppression. Few draw courage from the simplest and most profound assertion of their human right of existence like Daisy the matka queen, Vilas the letter writer: "He felt that chance events, random cruelty, unexplainable kindness, meaningless disaster, unexpected generosity could together, form a design that was otherwise invisible. If it were possible to read letters for all of humanity, compose an infinity of responses on their behalf, he would have God's-eye view of the world, and be able to understand it." (136) Others take to the emotional ladder, to haughty indignation and finally to the state of stubbornness where the mind is locked. Yezad's journey from a loving caring husband to his self-contained frustration of economic crises, which often illicit a cynical behaviour, and finally to the hard hitting investigation of the fanatical religious and spiritual journey. Nonetheless Mistry celebrates the power of love at its regenerative work of healing, suffering and pain and restoring the joy of life.

Fabricating a circle of worldly and tolerant people who are under constant pressure from the hostility or incomprehension of others, and doubts and fears within themselves regards survival he gives the personal touch to the characters. The lure of romance inherent in the novel is again a continuance of tradition. Jehangir's concern to keep every member of the family happy, his genuine concern for his grandpa, the courage to provide the urinal to him in his dire need despite being reprimanded by his father, making money in school and various other instances drive one to a stimulation of nostalgia. Murad walking back from school to buy his little brother Christmas gift and Yezad's submission to taking care of his father-in-law with his ablutions, then catching sight of his wife, "her eyes overflowing with gratitude so intense, he averted his own in guiltiness" prove that this genre of humanity is indestructible. It is a total reversal of the readers' expectation when the relationship sustains the storms to prove that it is supple and strong to withstand the assaults of private malice and public ignorance. The characters are found to change profoundly during the progress of the novel, some for betterment, some just grow while some die: "Everything is temporary, Yezadji. Life itself is temporary." (123) The moral that one draws when he finishes telling the story: "Remember, people can take everything away from you, but they cannot rob you of your decency. Not if you want to keep it. You alone can do that, by your actions." (226) Of all, Jehangir's maturity, his vision of life, grips the very mature too. One is astonished at his concern and attempts to make peace within the family. His insistence on wanting to help his grandfather makes Roxana succumb. After a superficial warning she leaves him to feed him while Jehangir assures her of his understanding: "I know Grandpa chews slowly, I've seen his teeth." (108) Under such pressure of circumstances it is surprising to see such work of sustained quality and quantity. Roxana's struggle with the burden of the domestic management and the guilt that it induced on having her father in the house, despite an intelligent and enlightened household is outstanding. The little support she finds in her son is comforting:

And then it struck her like a revelation—of what, she could not say. Hidden by the screen of damp clothes, she watched, clutching Yezad's

shirt in her hands. She felt she was witnessing something almost sacred and her eyes refused to relinquish the precious moment, for she knew instinctively that it would become a memory to cherish, to recall in difficult times when she needed strength. (108)

This was the moment of enlightenment: "Roxana felt she understood the meaning of it all, of birth and life and death. My son, she thought, my father and the food I cooked. . . . A lump came to her throat; she swallowed." (108) It took some time for realization to dawn on Jehangir too: "It remind me of the time long ago when Grandpa came to live with us in Pleasant Villa. And how my world suddenly become a much bigger place, much more complicated and painful. I think of Grandpa sleeping on the settee beside me, holding my hand to comfort me. And later, me holding his when he had bad dreams." (486)

Mistry does not allow his characters to sink under their tribulations. Their vivid humour and insatiable appetite for life is brilliantly illustrated. Quarrelling, loving, genuine concern and probably just living is the very essence despite the subtle sketches of turmoil: political, modernity, racial and the like. These characters throng of the pages and engulf the reader with their vitality. Through his odyssey I wonder if he has reached "completion in utter solitude" as he desired.

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## Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*: Interrogating Multiculturalism

SANJAY KUMAR

While reading Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*<sup>1</sup> a reader is inevitably faced with the question—can this novel be classified as a work of Canadian literature. There is hardly anything in the novel which connects it even remotely with Canada, neither the setting, nor the characters, nor the events—except for the two references in the acknowledgement where the novelist thanks the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for their assistance. And yet this novel has gone on to win the Governor General's award and Smith's First Novel award in Canada besides having been shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1991. This has also been made into a much-acclaimed movie of the same name by Sarah Gurnarsson with assistance from Canada Film Council. The only criterion by which this novel would then apparently qualify as a work of Canadian literature is the fact that Mistry is a Canadian citizen and he lives in Toronto. What confounds this vexed question further is the puzzling remark in the blurb of the novel that "*Such a Long Journey* is a brilliant first novel by one of the most remarkable writers to have emerged from the *Indian literary tradition* in many years" (emphasis added). So, does it belong to the Canadian literary tradition or to the Indian one, or can it belong to both the traditions at the same time. Such a question has become increasingly urgent and persistent in the face of the fact that "national literature is not only increasingly seen as a product of the nation coming into being, but it is also seen as playing a decisive role in the formation of the nation."<sup>2</sup> Underlying this notion of national literature being a product of nation are the specific issues of identity construction in the larger discourse of nation formation and the space assigned to racial/ethnic minorities in it. In asking such a question one presumes that there are a host of factors which coa-

lesce to give rise to a Canadian (national) identity and a work is to be classified as such to the extent it conforms or does not conform to this identity.

But this notion of single homogeneous Canadian (national) identity has always been problematic. The discourse of nation formation always tends to be monologic, appropriated by the dominant group which always declares itself to be the mainstream and thus the norm and excludes others from this construct because of race/ethnicity. In fact, race and ethnicity have been used as floating terms to demarcate some people as totally inassimilable to the mainstream culture (the racial other) and others as partially assimilable (the ethnic other), while the mainstream is held as norm, having neither race nor ethnicity. But, of late, the project of nation has come under severe strain and what seemed to be a seamless unity has come to be frayed at edges. In fact, it has become a heavily contested site in modern/postmodern discourse, marked by contemporary struggles between what has been constructed as the national cultural mainstream and those who belong to groups that have been traditionally excluded from this construct because of race/ethnicity. Describing the ambivalence of nation Homi Bhabha says that "the locality of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation."<sup>3</sup>

Canada has always been multicultural, at least, a bicultural society because of the presence of both the English and the French settlers. Even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Anglo Celts who dominated both economically and politically had to contend with the French-speaking people in Quebec. It is a matter of historical record that in the nineteenth century Canada, the mainstream Anglo Celtic Canadians tried to suppress the French-speaking Quebecers by denigrating them and describing them as the racial other, but met with stiff resistance they had to settle for a

bicultural and bilingual society. So Canada has always been characterized by what Sutherland calls "two nations in one state"<sup>4</sup> or what MacLennan calls "Two Solitudes."<sup>5</sup>

The twentieth century witnessed new waves of immigrants from almost every part of the world including India. Stranded between the French and the English mainstreams of Canada, the Indian immigrant writers have experienced difficulties in making their voices heard. While the mainstream continues to pay lip service to the notion of multiculturalism, in actual practice it continues to ignore the immigrant voices. On the one hand, it is claimed that Canada is a multicultural mosaic and that immigrant literature has come of age, on the other writers of outstanding merit such as M.G. Vassanji, Rohinton Mistry, Uma Parameswaran, Arnold Harrichand Itwaru, Arun Prabha Mukherjee, John Ramsaran, Neil Bisoodhnath, Naznin Sidique etc. are not considered worthy to be included in the celebrated White anthologies or even to be mentioned in any history of Canadian literature written or compiled by the White authors.

This refusal to give recognition to the voice/s of the 'other' is to be seen as an endeavour to contain the threat, on the part of the dominant mainstream White Anglo-Saxon culture, of defilement and disruption of the monolithic national culture by the racial other. But this act of guarding jealously the national culture, or the very fact that such a need has been perceived, ironically and paradoxically enough reveals the deep fissures in the façade of the nation—that it is not given, natural and primordial, but it is made and constructed. This made-up-ness reveals the element of coercion in forging this nation-ness, an identity which is only provisional and whose stability is constantly threatened by the rhetoric of the other lurking on the margins. The margin thus becomes the space from where to mount the challenge to the dominant cultural discourse of the nation.

The marginalization of the immigrant writers fails to deter them from writing their versions of Canada. From their position on the margin they create narratives which challenge the static borders of national and cultural identities by disrupting the dominant discourse of the nation. These narratives seek to extend the boundaries of the nation, neither by assimilation into the dominant narrative nor by its

simple subversion, but by hybridizing the discourse through a process of creative dialectic tension.

Living in a multicultural society and being characterized by an ethnic identity, the Indian community in Canada has been invariably required to negotiate the problem of ethnicity. They have been engaged in active economic and cultural competitions. They have experienced ethnic discrimination, either explicit or covert. Having a unique socio-cultural history, the Indian community in Canada has evolved as a distinct diasporic entity. 'Home' for them becomes a mental construct symbolizing their distinct socio-cultural identity in an unsullied and distilled form. Safran has observed that it is a general characteristic of diaspora that "they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to the homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship."<sup>6</sup> Thus the diasporic Indians do not sever their relationship with their ancestral land. And, naturally the writer in his role as a preserver of the collective tradition, a folk historian and mythmaker, recreates this sense of community in his writings by invoking the past and history.

Mistry is one such writer who invariably goes back to India in his writings, to the Parsi community to which he belongs, to be precise. But this going back to his past is characterized by neither nostalgia nor bitterness as it happens in the case of most of the writers of the Indian diaspora. He seems to have a matter-of-fact attitude in his portrayal of the Parsi community in India. He does it with compassion and warmth but there is also a sense of gentle irony. If there is a sense of frustration at the social injustice, ineptitude, corruption and numerous problems that India faces, then there is also a sense of celebration and joy for the essential nobility and virtues of human life. In fact, invoking the past becomes a positive attribute with him as it becomes a strategy to cope with the present by resisting assimilation into the mainstream Anglo-Saxon culture. By asserting and maintaining a distinct cultural identity he presents a better vision of the future by strengthening the multicultural fabric. From his position on the margin, Mistry presents an alternative worldview which not only interrogates and challenges the hegemony of the Eurocentric discourse and worldview but also leads to a better ap-

preciation and understanding of Canada's multicultural fabric. Sutherland points out that "ethnic writers . . . distil their experiences of Canada through a variety of rich cultural heritages. Perhaps it is this very process of diverse cultural distillation that will become the distinct characteristics of Canadian Literature."<sup>7</sup>

Canada is paradoxically present by its absence in Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*. One cannot help but read this novel as an allegory of multiculturalism. It presents Mistry's vision of a multicultural society and the place of minorities in it. Set in Bombay in 1971 against the backdrop of the Indo-Pakistan war and the birth of Bangladesh as a nation, *Such a Long Journey* deals with the life of the Parsi community in India. On the one hand, this novel opens up a new world for the readers in Canada—the life and ways of the Parsi community—and thus helps them in developing a better understanding and appreciation of their culture. On the other, it also presents to us a model of multiculturalism in its delineation of this minority community in India and how well they have integrated into the Indian society without losing their cultural and religious identity. This can, Mistry proposes, act as a model for the Canadian society and will go a long way in strengthening the fabric of multiculturalism in Canada.

The novel focuses on the lives of Gustad Noble and his family, residing in Khodad building together with other Parsi families in Colaba and how the Indo-Pak war impinges on their lives. Parsis as we know are a closed and insular community, strictly regulating and preserving their cultural and religious identity by not allowing any intermingling with other communities at the familial, kinship and religious levels. Having been driven away from Persia around eighth century AD, they have lived in India for 1300 years. Though now declining in numbers, this minority community has maintained and preserved their separate identity and they have also contributed significantly to the public life as architects, industrialists, merchants, bankers, statesmen etc.

In its loving evocation of the details of the cultural milieu the novel manifests a specificity and rootedness which are rare to be found in immigrant writings. It beautifully and faithfully renders the life of the minority Parsi community—its religious beliefs, rituals,

mores, social norms, modes of dress, food habits, linguistic habits and idioms etc. But amidst all these particularities which show their distinctiveness from other people, there is also emphasis on the universals of human experience. There is a tension between the particular and the universal. Even readers in Canada can easily identify themselves with these characters in spite of the different socio-cultural space that they inhabit; they can find in them many similarities to their own situation. If these characters appear different outwardly in their religious beliefs, social norms and mores, and linguistic habits, inwardly there beats the same heart in all of them, betraying the same range of emotions and feelings—love, joy, happiness, anger, frustration, helplessness, anxieties and fears which ordinary human beings do. In fact, showing universal in particular becomes Mistry's way of showing unity in diversity and thus presenting a paradigm of a stable multicultural society.

The Khodad building with its Parsi residents comes to stand for the Parsi community. And the six feet high compound wall running around it becomes the symbol of its insularity, protecting and sheltering it from the eyes of the majority community, and thus rendering that space sacred where they can practise their faith unhindered. If this wall becomes the symbol of their insularity, it also becomes the target of attack of the majority community which shows its contempt by pissing against the wall. Safe within this sacred space, they occasionally betray their anxieties and fears and insecurities as members of a minority community, although they have done better than other communities including the majority Hindu community:

What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to? No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. *It was going to be like the black people in America twice as good as the white man to get half as much.* How could he make Sohrab understand this. (55, emphasis added)

He turned and slipped into my seat! Insult to injury! What to do with such low class people? No manners, no sense, nothing. And you know who is responsible for this attitude—that bastard Shiv Sena leader who worships *Hitler and Mussolini*. He and his 'Maharashtra for Maharashtra' nonsense. They won't stop till they have complete Maratha Raj. (23, emphasis added)

These references to the plight of the Blacks in America and to Hitler and Mussolini internationalize the dimension of racism and thus alert us to the Canadian situation. This also simultaneously points to the phenomenon of racism/ethnicity/communalism as the darker side of the discourse of the nation which India has inherited as a legacy from the West. This cannot be dismissed as an example of deviant or distorted nationalism. In fact, the racial/ethnic/communal other is the necessary condition for the discourse of nation which achieves its identity in difference not only from outside but from inside as well.

The compound wall of the Khodad building, a symbol of the insularity of the Parsi community, is soon transformed into a multi-religious shrine, a mosaic of different religions and cultures, as a pavement artist draws pictures of deities of different religions and renders stories from epics of different religions on this wall. People of all faiths and religions come to worship and pay their obeisance. This wall symbolically becomes a multicultural and multi-religious space where different cultures and religions exist in harmony. In the end the wall is brought down by the municipal corporation in the name of widening the road but this does not happen without stiff resistance of the people who spontaneously rise up to save the wall. What the novelist seems to be suggesting here, in my opinion, is that the multicultural fabric of the society can be preserved, sustained and strengthened only with the will and commitment of people, not just through some official policy.

If the novel portrays the Parsi community in India on the large canvas with broad brush-strokes, then it also draws the miniature paintings of individuals with fine brush strokes. At the individual level, the novel tells the story of Gustad Noble, a bank clerk and the peculiar way in which the Indo-Pak war of 1971 makes an impact on his life as well as that of his family. It becomes the story of a common man living and surviving in hard times. Having seen better days during the time of his grandfather and father, Gustad now lives in straitened circumstances in the Khodad building with his wife Dilnawaz, two sons Sohrab and Darius, and a daughter Roshan. Gustad has dreams and aspirations which, though quite modest and ordinary, prove difficult to fulfill. He finds it quite baffling that

things do not happen the way he wants them to. His dreams slowly crumble and his hopes die a slow death as he has one frustrating experience after the other.

Life for him seems to be an endless series of trials and tribulations. First, he feels betrayed by his long time friend, Major Jimmy Billimoria who suddenly decides to leave the Khodad building without even bothering to inform him. Then, his eldest son, Sohrab, after having qualified for the IIT, refuses to join it and all his efforts to persuade him fail and it leads to quarrels and fights at home, and finally Sohrab leaves the home in a huff. "How to make him realize what he was doing to his father, who had made the success of his son's life the purpose of his own? Sohrab had snatched away that purpose, like a crutch from a cripple." (55) Then, he is worried no end over the illness of his daughter Roshan whose condition continues to deteriorate even after medication. On top of that, for the sake of friendship he gets drawn into a cloak and dagger operation of helping the Mukti Bahini on the request of Major Billimoria. And then comes the illness and death of his friend Dinshawji. His problems seem to be endless.

He returned to his desk, kneading his forehead. It was becoming too much to bear, Roshan's sickness, Dilnavaz blaming him for potassium permanganate, Jimmy's treachery, Dinshawji's stupidity, Laurie's complaint, Sohrab's betrayal, nothing but worry and sorrow and disappointment piling up around him, walling him in, threatening to crush him. He moved his massaging hand from the forehead to his nape and closed his eyes. (177)

What redeems his character in our eyes is his manner of facing his problems. These experiences fail to break him. Though angry and frustrated at times, he does not give in to any prolonged bout of despair or cynicism. As his name suggests, he maintains the essential nobility of his character all through. He endures his trials with dignity, courage and equanimity without losing faith in humanity. The novel is, in fact, the story of his education that man does not always control his destiny, that there are forces beyond his control and larger than he is and of his learning to come to terms with it.

The ordinariness of his life makes Gustad the symbol of every man just as the Khodad building is the symbol of the Parsi commu-

nity. If on the one hand, Gustad as an individual becomes every man in his aspirations and anguish, on the other he as a member of his community shows his independent cultural and religious identity. Through the character of Gustad, Mistry shows that in spite of the cultural and religious differences, there is a lot which people have in common with each other as human beings and it is this commonness which unites people despite the differences. And this is Mistry's way of offering a paradigm of multiculturalism for Canada, though Canada does not figure in the novel.

## NOTES

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## Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*: A Quest for Positive Identity and Spiritual Survival

UDAY SHANKAR OJHA

Over nearly thirty years during which Margaret Atwood has published ten novels, ten books of poetry and three short story collections, she has shown tremendous talent for surprising her readers with her ongoing experimentalism and her radical challenges to contemporary social and cultural myths and fashionable ideologies. The oeuvres of this superb creationist have "contributed substantially to the definition of a national identity in Canadian literature and to its international reputation, signposting a specific landscape and culture as an important location in the 'global village.'"<sup>1</sup>

Margaret Atwood stands as one of the pioneers of contemporary Canadian women's fiction in English today and rightly deserves the most coveted Booker's award bestowed upon her for her novel. A celebrity of the millennium year, Atwood, earned global reputation because of her debut novel *The Edible Woman* (1969) which became the epoch making voice owing to her abiding and presiding commitment for women's identity, the layers and levels of consciousness in a male chauvinistic society and the myriad meanings of men-women encounter. This paper, however, intends to analyze and examine the struggle of the characters in *The Edible Woman* to overcome alienation, their quest for positive identity and spiritual survival in "the seemingly sane but actually insane society which is both predatory and suffocatingly sexist."<sup>2</sup>

Before diving into the depth of the text and texture of the novel itself, the problem of a unique Canadian identity which has further been complicated by the country's preference for a 'mosaic' rather than a 'melting pot' structure, needs to be briefly explained. Cana-

dian national identity still remains as elusive as ever on account of its being an economic colony of the United States and emergence of small, isolated, closely-knit garrison societies of the French-Canadians and English-Canadians in which moral and social values are deemed unquestionable. The "Colonial Cringe" imprinted "almost like genetic information" on the Canadian sensibility has adversely affected the slow and painful psychological transition of Canada from a colony to a nation. As in most postcolonial cultures, the Canadian experience of an acute identity crisis, though as a temporary amnesia caused by the country's subordinate position under imperial overloads has made "survival" the great fact of Canadian life.

Since "nations are to a large extent invented by their poets and novelists,"<sup>3</sup> the protagonists of mainstream writers like Atwood, Laurence, Kroetsch and Hodgins struggle hard to transcend the wilfully cast victim state of the Canadians. Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, particularly, reflects her strong disapproval of the negative identity which emerges from the self-destructive survival myth. Throughout the novel, Marian MacAlpin, Atwood's "abnormally normal" heroine is involved in the exciting process of fostering a more positive identity very much in tune with the spirit of postmodernism for the desire for a 'single,' 'unified' spiritual identity. Her struggle to overcome alienation and achieve personal and social integration is "imagined as a freedom to love, to share, to meet, to touch such a state which is our spiritual home, the human goal the grail."<sup>4</sup> However, Atwood strongly asserts Irving Layton's stand that "every artist is an incurable mythologist"<sup>5</sup> and advocates first for the need for vital communal myths to fill up the spiritual void created by the erosion of religious faith in modern western technological society in general and secondly the need for personal myths to help overcome feelings of alienation and despair in particular. In the theoretical framework of the text, Atwood embraces and devoutly diagnoses that the quest for spiritual survival depends on rejecting the mythos created for consumers and re-discovering the world of myth. A close adherence to the indigenous myths, religion and culture and an outright rejection of the habit to importing religion and culture from other countries are the most obvious and

recurrent episodes inhibited in the other novels also like Atwood's *Surfacing* and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*.

Emerging from the vortex of the theoretical framework of the novel, if we focus our attention to the very epigraph of *The Edible Woman*, which is the recipe for puff pastry from I.S. Robauer and M.R. Becker's *The Joy of Cooking*, we find that "the novel itself with its light, witty and effervescent tone is a kind of puff pastry but also that a certain amount of pain is involved in the making of good puff pastry as the fingers of the one who makes it "should be chilled throughout the operation."<sup>6</sup> Like three other novels, this novel is also set in the city of Toronto. The city, though described realistically, often takes on mythic overtones and functions as a potent symbol of identity crisis in the world at large. A profound sense of rootlessness is sensed throughout the novel particularly in the images like boarding houses, rented rooms and hotels.

*The Edible Woman* is considered to be a manifesto of postcolonial women sensibility and sensitivity where states of marginality and 'otherness' are seen as sources of energies for potential change and progress. The writer, in fact, becomes the creator of reality and explores the themes like victimization and survival. The question of female identity, the politics of gender-alienation of women in a male dominated society, the narrow de-limiting definition of a woman and her function in society and man's attempt to destroy the selfhood of women are some other vibrating inquiries which run like a red thread throughout the novel. As a reaction to this, we see a gradual carrying out of female spaces through various strategies, and her quest for identity, self-definition and autonomy.

Atwood's *Survival*, her thematic guide to Canadian literature, categorizes woman in four basic 'victim' positions, which not only helps us to explore the various possibilities available but it also indicates a way out of this gender power struggle. The three female characters Lucy, Millie and Emmy, whom Ainsley collectively calls "the office virgins," actively hunt for husbands. At the party, they waste no time when they spot Leonard as single and available. The conventional role of women as wife, sexual object and their availability is explored in these characters when they get Leonard "backed against the wall in the neuter area now, two of them on the

sides cutting off flank escape and the third in front" while Emmy and Millie are fairly dumb and hunt occasionally. Lucy is clever and cunning and is constantly on the prowl. With her "delicious dresses and confectionary eyes"<sup>7</sup> she trails herself "like a many-plumed fish-lure with glass beads and three spinners and seventeen hooks through the likely-looking places, good restaurants and cocktail bars . . . where the right kind of men might be expected to be lurking, ravenous as pike, though more maritally inclined." (112)

Contrary to this first category of women like Emmy, Lucy and Millie who seem to be completely brainwashed by this more glamorized rendering of the slogan "biology is destiny" and wish to be happy suburban housewives, Clara, a wife and mother of three is a suburban housewife but is far from being happy. Embarrassed by her "mental grey-out,"<sup>8</sup> Clara seems to be undergoing an identity crisis. Realizing the hoax played on women like her by their society who daren't voice their unease and resign to a life of matrimony and motherhood, Clara, to her husband Joe, "allows her core to get taken over by the husband. And when the kids come, she makes up one morning and discovers she doesn't have anything left inside, she's hollow, she doesn't know who she is any more, her core has been destroyed." (236) Now, this is the second stage of victimization: the woman acknowledges the fact of being a victim but accepts it as something inevitable.

Ainsley, a dynamic, action-oriented rebellious graduate in psychology is just the opposite of Clara. She repudiates the victim role. She subverts the traditional male-female victim-predator role assumptions and exploits man to fulfill her needs. She decides to have a baby sans the encumbrance of a legal husband because, according to the 'experts,' "Every woman should have at least one baby. . . . It's even more important than sex. It fulfills your deepest femininity." (40-41) Turning into "a scheming superfemale," (122) she hunts for a male with healthy genes to impregnate her succumbing ultimately to flamboyant playboy Len's weakness for young and inexperienced girls. Ainsley's dream that her child will be a boy is almost shattered when she is told by a male psychologist that in the absence of a strong Father Image in the home, boys often tend to be homosexuals. Lastly, Ainsley's being blessed with fertility worshipper fish

and her fall into matrimony reflect the hypocritical stand of feminine mystique in the North American society.

Atwood, very subtly but implicitly makes out a case against each of these possible alternatives that Marian can either choose to be the 'scheming superwoman' like Ainsley, or the submissive 'earth mother' Clara or the opportunistic 'office virgins.' In this connection, Alan Jawe, in the introduction to the novel opines, "*The Edible Woman* is a novel about choices." Marian is not a static figure, she moves through the three positions till she arrives at the fourth, i.e., becoming a creative non-victim. Analyzing Marian's psychological journey away from her society and back to it, Coomi S. Vevaina critically examines the "mythological overtones" present in it and finds that "Marian's regression from a conventional-minded adult to a foetus and her development from a foetus to an unconventional adult reveal her struggle for spiritual survival in Crazyland."<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of the novel, Marian appears to be a 'normal' and 'well-adjusted' young woman who compliments herself on her "moral superiority" to Ainsley. Marian doesn't believe in the absurdity of Emmy, Lucy and Millie also, who vehemently desire to trap husbands into matrimony, rather considers herself and Peter, infinitely superior to Clara and Poe who "aren't practical enough, and have no sense at all of how to run a well organized marriage." (102) It is nothing but a vague acceptance of the victim role. With her engagement to Peter, she gradually loses her autonomy and becomes increasingly dependent on him. This loss of autonomy and self-identity is accompanied by a loss of appetite physically and the loss of the 'first person singular' voice in the narrative structure. The more she conforms to Peter's standards, the more violently "her body rejects various kinds of foods." (177) It is the consumer society which encourages its victim to passively consume rather than actively create.

The predatory side of Marian finds its fullest manifestation in her desire to play the role of a nurse. "The embryonic noble nurse that is supposed to be curled, efficient and self-sacrificing in the heart of every true woman" (109) is rather active in Marian.

The state of growing uncertainty aggravates further the quest for identity crisis and it is conveyed through the reflections she snaps of

herself in various objects. "The small silvery image" where her "upside down reflection" indicates her mental status in a state of flux. When having a bath, she sees "a curiously-sprawling pink thing" (218) in the hot and cold taps and the spout between them. However, it is worth noticing that Marian's alienation is the direct outcome of her passivity also.

Marian's quest for individuation and selfhood brings her back to cling to the only one self-image left to her; that of a nurse. But to her utter dismay and depression, when she asks Duncan how he feels being initiated into sex the previous night, he ruthlessly replies: "You want me to say it was stupendous, don't you? . . . That it got me out of my shell. Hatched me into manhood. Solved all my problems. . . . It was fine; just as good as usual." (264)

Now, this is alarming. Marian's marriage to Peter would be disastrous to her own integrity. On the other hand, Duncan's awkward and wayward response to her is a painful realization. She comes to know that she is not the first and "the starched nurse-like image of herself she had tried to preserve as a last resort crumpled like wet newsprint." (264) Like the narrator of *Surfacing*, she seems to be caught in a violent duality and refuses to be a victim. She wants to reclaim her body and reinscribe it with different meanings that of power, action and strength. When she regains her identity, her body (stomach) is restored to its former equilibrium and she finds her voice again. The narrative goes back to the first person made to imply a rediscovery of the self.

It is through the character of Marian, Atwood has exhibited that a woman will be consumed if she projects herself as an 'edible' object. In a crystallized structured form, Atwood "successfully makes way for the new woman not as a consumer product in a capitalistic society but a woman transforming the marginal experiences into a creative force and potent energy."<sup>10</sup>

Uptil now, the focus of this paper has been on the female characters of this novel but one can't disagree with John Lauber who in his well-researched paper notes, male and female identity are equally problematic "and the novel insistently asks whether and how anyone can achieve identity in the artificial society"<sup>11</sup> in which we all live.

In *The Edible Woman*, Peter is the most tragically self-alienated male character who is unaware of his true inner self. "Peter-the-Presentable" is a lawyer and even with a small firm "he is rising in it like a balloon." (17) Symbolic of his being made up of surfaces and totally without a core, to reveal his masculinity, he keeps two rifles, a pistol "and several wicked-looking knives" (59) on a peg-board in his bedroom. Moreover, he decides to marry Marian for she appears the most "sensible" (64, 89) of all the women he knows. "Sensible" is synonymous with "conventional" for Peter, who along with Len, feels self-alienated due to the masculine mystique created by the frustrations and anxieties of the sick society. Marian suits his taste for her passivity and her lack of strong convictions and feels she is not the kind of girl who would try to "take over his life." (61) But very soon, Marian feels the predatory side of Peter who regards her as a thing rather than as a person. This feeling, in fact, of being ruled over and measured before being spiritually slaughtered, severs her engagement with Peter.

Though Peter thinks of himself as entirely 'normal' for the majority of people around him seem to think and act like him, he is trying his best to come out of the vortex of continuing alienation from the inner self.

However, *The Edible Woman* in the critical and theoretical perspective truly pronounces the concept of "power politics." It is nothing but the bifurcation of reality into hostile opposites, which permits the patterns of subordination and domination. Here, the most vital statistics is "how power operates and who has power over whom."<sup>12</sup> But ultimately the unconscious part of the psyche which alone apprehends the world of myth brings back the vision of life, in its own way to the characters. Since myths are "clues to the spiritual potentialities of human life,"<sup>13</sup> they help create a deeper awareness of life itself and facilitate a way for inner journey leading to the quest for positive identity and spiritual survival.

## NOTES

1. Coomi S. Vevaina, *Re/membering Selves: Alienation and Survival in the Novels of Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence* (New Delhi: Creative, 1996), foreword.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
3. Aldous Huxley, *Texts and Pretexts* (New York: 1993), pp. 51-52.
4. Patricia Morley, "The Long Trek Home: Margaret Laurence's Stories," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 11, No. 4 (November, 1976), p. 19.
5. Clara Thomas, "A Conversation about Literature: An Interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1, No. 1 (Winter 1972), p. 67.
6. Coomi S. Vevaina, p. 102.
7. Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (1969; rpt. London: Virago Press, 1984), p. 112.
8. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; rpt. Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), p. 20.
9. Coomi S. Vevaina, p. 114.
10. Pushkala Shivram, "A Search for Identity in Atwood's *The Edible Woman*," *Literacy Journal* (Vol. 21, March 1998, Stella Maris College, Chennai), p. 17.
11. John Lauber, "Alice in Consumerland: The Self-Discovery of Marian MacAlpin," *The Canadian Novel: Here and Now*, ed. John Moss (Toronto: New Canadian Press, 1978), p. 20.
12. Coomi S. Vevaina, "A Conversation with Margaret Atwood," *Times of India*, Sunday Review Section, 20 March, 1988, p. 8.
13. Bill Moyer's interview with Joseph Campbell (videotape) "The Message of Myth," Part II of *The Power of Myth* (Apastrophe S. Productions and Public Affairs Television, 1988).

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## Feminine Assertions in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*: A Socio-Ethical Perspective

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The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed a sudden spurt in feminist writing in Indian English fiction. A group of Indian women novelists in their inbetweenness, hybridity of thought and multicultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious social dimensions have contextualized the women problems in general and middle-class and upper class women in particular. While the gynocritics think that too many women in too many countries speak the same language of silence, some Indian women novelists like Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Meena Alexander and Manju Kapur have tried with sincerity and honesty to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women. Manju Kapur, a Reader in English literature at Miranda House, University of Delhi, is the winner of the 1999 Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Book *Difficult Daughters* (1998) from Eurasia region for highlighting different issues emerging out of the socio-political scenario in our country with insight and precision. While her first novel is a family saga against the historical backdrop of partition, her second novel *A Married Woman* (2002) is a work of investigative reporting on the most controversial and political issue of the demolition of Babri Masjid and a woman's obsession with love and lesbianism. The novel is a kind of narrative on a woman's incompatible marriage and resultant frustration and the contemporary political turmoil in its historical context. Like premarital relationship in Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), adulterous relationship in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* (1983), second marriage or bigamous relationship in Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985) or Alan Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama*

(1988) and in her own novel *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur's second novel *A Married Woman* deals with lesbianism.

In the novel, Kapur has taken writing as a protest, a way of mapping from the point of a woman's experience. Kapur negotiates different issues emerging out of a socio-political upheaval in her country. In a realistic way, she has described the Indian male perception of woman as a holy cow even though women are not very interested in history and those in power trying to twist and turn historical facts to serve their own purposes. As a writer of new generation in an atmosphere of the nation's socio-political flux, Kapur has recorded the truth in her fictive narrative. With a zeal to change the Indian male perception, she describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer, and perish in for their triumph. She is shocked at the growth of fundamentalism and the rise of religious zealots to uplift and elevate the country by a crusade and establish a paranoia by presenting evil as a historical necessity. Kapur describes this politics of genocide as an important fabric in India's unique experience of democracy. She is sincere and naive as a sociologist in exposing the bizarre paradox of rationality that underlines a sentiment of antipathy sheltered under political support and social approval. She resonates with her feminine assertion, hatred for violence, blood, death and ill-feeling in the name of God and religion, and her feminine assertions remain untouched by history, politics and human interpretations.

*A Married Woman* is a novel with a social purpose. It deals with three issues—reinterpretation of history, political ideologies and feminist views in the present context. The pointed references to life and delicate dealing with political activities of the time are presented with the historical backdrop of Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi episode. This gives the story a tangible shape with the articulation of emotional issues, communal hatred and women concerns. While the political backdrop is controversial and not conducive for the secularists, the demolition of Babri Masjid adds substance to the novel. The main ideas conceived in the novel are based on family life, sexual relationship, gender discrimination, socio-political upheaval and the desire for peaceful co-existence. The purpose of the novelist seems to be uni-dimensional with the idea of

love what can really drive a woman into such a relationship. In her interview with Nivedita Mukherjee, Kapur says, "It is an attempt to inject an element of artistic and emotional coherence. Actually a relationship with a woman does not threaten a marriage as much as a relationship with a man."<sup>1</sup> The novel exposes the domestic terrain where woman explores the space in her domestic relationship. Kapur has remained very truthful in presenting the women and the challenges they face in their personal, professional, religious and socio-political levels." Taking into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values, the Woman's Question, despite basic solidarity, needs to be tackled in relation to the socio-cultural situation. The impact of patriarchy on the Indian society varies . . . and therefore . . . stream of feminism grounded in reality."<sup>2</sup> Kapur the socialist conveys the message that communal riot is a terrible disease that kills God in man and commits murder in the cathedral while Kapur the feminist refers to three forms of mysogyny, sexism or discrimination against women, patriarchy or male supremacy at institutional and individual level, and phallocentrism or discrimination at the conceptual level. She desires to prove through her woman protagonist that "A woman should be aware, self-controlled, strong-willed, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense."<sup>3</sup> She seems to bring out the implicit fallacy in Aristotle's dictum, "Man is a social animal," in the present socio-cultural context of India in which people fail to realize the futility of violence, and the necessity of peaceful co-existence for all. She apprehends the approach of an apocalyptic social climate with the rise of the fundamentalists and fanatics in nation's spurious politics who take religion to be ultra-patriotic.

Like *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman* "has a sophisticated plot."<sup>4</sup> The story of love is honest. Set at a time of political and religious upheaval it is narrated with sympathy and intelligence for anyone who has known life's responsibilities. The novel is a sincere confession of a woman about her personality cult in the personal allegory of a bad marriage. Astha the sensitive daughter of an enlightened father and orthodox mother has grown in a middle-class

educated family in South Delhi and becomes a housewife, teacher, painter, and a lesbian in her status of a married woman she fights for her self-assertions. Unlike many unmarried girls she had her infatuations of adolescent love for Bunty, a boy of another colony and for Rohan who left for overseas for a better career. But her real story of love and marriage started with Hemant, the son of a successful government official in Delhi. Soon after marriage Astha gets disillusioned about human nature in general and politics of the country in particular. She is fed up with the politicians who, in the guise of democrats and socialists, attempt to organize different yatras for their vote banks under the pseudo-secular banner of national unity. On the other hand, these yatras have become inauspicious for the nation. Sharing her feelings "we should struggle with her, agonize together with her about her choices, and weep with her once she's made them."<sup>5</sup> Astha's family affairs are not good and nothing is right with her. Hemant doesn't prove a suitable boy nor she becomes a desirable daughter-in-law in her in-law's house. In the Kosher world of *saas bahu* social dynamics, she does not want only to be heavily sindoored, bejewelled and walk around the tulsi plant every morning and offer a mandatory pooja. As a married woman she becomes an enduring wife and sacrificing mother. Her temperamental incompatibility with her corporate thinking husband compels her to play the role of "mother and father"<sup>6</sup> for her children. This denies her self-fulfillment and leads to the collapse of the institution of marriage. Discontentment leads her to defiance and restlessness. Her anxiety, discomfort, loneliness and isolation do not encourage her to give voice to her unhappiness over her troubled relationship, rather it prompts her to develop the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of self-esteem in facing the challenges of her life. Restlessness drives her to enjoy absolute loneliness, a sort of entrapment by the family, its commitments, its subtle oppression and she yearns for freedom.

In the midst of a family and its vast minefield of income, expenditure, rights, responsibilities, knowledge, discontent, restlessness and dependency, Astha enjoys the fate of the poorest. She is suffocated with the growing needs of her family and "always adjusting to everybody's needs." (227) Astha understands a married

woman's place in the family to be that of an unpaid servant or a slave and the thought of divorce brings social and economic death in her Indian status. She feels for herself that "A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth," (231) are the necessary prerequisites of a married woman. She contemplates marriage a terrible decision as it puts her in a lot to enjoy bouts of rage, pain and indecision. Judging the male impression of woman she thinks that a married woman is an object of "mind fucking." (218) She does not think "marriage is just sex" (275) rather it provides interest, togetherness and respect. Being torn between her duty and responsibility, faith and fact, history and contemporaneity, public ethos and personal ethics she thinks "a tired woman cannot make good wives," (154) and struggles for an emotional freedom from the scourge of the nation. She develops psychosomatic symptoms of stress and depression balancing between existing and living. Astha's slow discovery of her differences with her husband, her change from a tender and hopeful bride to a battered wife and her meeting with Pipeelika Trivedi lead her to realize the other state of woman in their "familiar distress." (188) This leads her to an immoral, rather amoral, guilt consciousness of lesbian love rationalizing her outmoded morality. Being marginalized by the affluence of her family, vicious social atmosphere, sheer hysteria of communalism and quarrel of two communities for god over a small thing, she is disillusioned in the empirical study of man's nature and his framing of social values. There is the evolution of a romantic fantasy in her lesbophobic imagination for her self-definition and self-reliance.

Astha's marriage to a Pan-American and Pan-Indian husband in her parents' choice is a miscalculation. Hemant's foreign education, banking profession and money minting addiction do not make Astha happy for a long time. Hemant's resignation from the banking job and joining in T.V. manufacturing business, Astha's joining as a teacher, her giving birth to Anuradha and Himanshu bring enough change in her life. Her impression that "with good job comes independence" (4) is proved wrong and she "seemed very pedestrian." (47) By giving birth to a son on the one hand, she proves herself not "socially inferior" and enjoys the gratitude of her family members

for whom "The family is complete at last," (68) and on the other she expresses commitment to her profession. Like every married woman, no doubt she has a liking for motherhood but she does not like the sex-subjugation of her in laws. She is surprised at the reaction of the family and society when they remain cypheric of Anuradha's birth but gets an overwhelming approval of motherhood after the birth of Himanshu. In her feminist assertion Astha does not appreciate superstition, sex-subjugation and pride and prejudices of having children just for their discriminated sex in the Indian perception. Being "caught up in the web of daily life" (84) she develops restlessness, anxiety and tension, "the disease of modern life." (76) She remembers her mother's words "woman is earth," (69) and that, duties, responsibilities and obligations help a married woman to understand the grandeur of Hinduism, *Vasudha ev Kutumbkum*. She does not believe that only a woman can bring purity, and peace to the family. She becomes serious for man's ignorance at woman's suffering and asserts her rights with the knowledge that "Religion is a choice as much as other things." (89) She differs from the male perception of woman as a holy cow that must be a secular food. The inhospitable family and hostile social atmosphere due to Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi issue have made her realize the other state of a woman's life. Pipeelika, a Hindu Brahmin girl, had married a Muslim Aijaz Akhtar Khan, a sensitive, socially committed history lecturer, painter, theatre activist and founder of Street Theatre Troupe. Astha appreciates them for the ideals of their conjugal life and their secularist vision. Like a modern feminist she appreciates Aijaz's aesthetic and creative genius and for his working on slum life and sufferings of underage girls. She admires Pipee's asserting her rights to marry against her mother's desire and against society's recommendation.

Astha, like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, desires to have a break from "dependence syndrome" and proceeds on the path of full human status that poses a threat to Hemant and his male superiority. She is, not a lesser mortal for her sex and like her male counterpart takes interest in political activism and fundamental issues of human life. Although she finds herself trapped between the pressures of the modern developing society and shackles of ancient biases she sets

out on her quest for a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship. She canonizes and commemorates her insulated feminine sensibilities raising the male tantrum to socially transform a society. The duality of Astha's self causes her psychic complications, emotional stress syndrome and psychomatic illness of lesbian continuum for Pipeelika in her melancholy, depression and despair. The primary intimacy with Pipeelika for her suffering in her status of a widow, the sharing of rich and difficult inner life and bonding against male tyranny make them confident of their claim to gain strength for women liberation. Understanding the socio-political realities of the country and the position of women in it she becomes attracted towards Pipeelika, a professor's daughter, a Muslim's wife and a worker for an NGO, Ujjala and as one who has "lost everything and had nothing more to lose." (184) Both of them fulfill female bonding in passionate, and intense fantasies of lovemaking with their overwhelmed body and sexy mouth. Astha gloats herself in flirting by justifying lesbianism as a component of larger human urge, as pleasure is an important element in sexual activity. In her shattered family life she prefers this as an antidote to masochism offering homage to her conventional morality. For her, marriage is a noun while sex is a verb in her lesbophobic imagination and she accepts it for lasting human relationship and happiness in life. If Astha becomes the victim of male passion, Pipeelika becomes the victim of communal riot and for the mistakes in history. In their feminine *swabhava* they forget their personal anguish and agony in *samarpan*, thinking that their identities as individuals are threatened under the guises of mother, wife, and daughter and they become a property and the purity of their bodies come at a premium. While the lesbian attempt drags Pipeelika to the world of forgetfulness, Astha takes a sweet revenge on her husband. In this act of vengeance, unnatural sex, little excitement, little impatience and much imagination, she has a big jerk in her mind and this cripples her married life. Astha is Kapur's New Woman "conscious, introspective, educated, wants to carve a life for herself, to some extent she even conveys a personal vision of womanhood by violating current social codes."<sup>7</sup>

Although about one third of the novel deals with lesbian relationship, Astha-Hemant's heterosexual relationship is the main story in which Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi episode and Astha-Pipeelika episode are added with an artistic touch in Kapur's fictional reconstruction. The novel is heavily plotted and it traces the life of Astha from her young adulthood. In the process, she marries, discovers the joys of intimacy with her husband, is estranged from him, struggles to become a painter, becomes a social activist, falls in love with a woman and almost, more or less, finds herself. The central focus is the relationship between two women. The greatest strength of the novel lies in its rich social context that expresses the author's concern for a girl who, uprooted from the familiar environment of her childhood, girlhood and youth, leaves behind her the most formative part of her life in the past tense, and moulds herself anew in a completely strange environment, with a completely new set of rules and regards it as the only permanent fact of her existence. This dislocation in a married woman's life seems to help her confront the harsh realities in the previous and present status of her life—*Janambhoomi* and *Karmabhoomi*, *smriti* (memories of identity) and *vikalpa* (imagination) in the atmosphere of social purity. Sufferings and bitter realizations help Astha to emerge as a socially committed painter against the backdrop of Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi debacle. She completely gets dejected with the male ego allowing the nation bleed with violence, murder and damage to other's faith in the name of religion and God.

The issue of Babri Masjid and Ram Janambhoomi, ever the most controversial and contentious in Indian history, has been over politicized. It has greatly damaged the secular fabric of India. While the former is the fact and the latter is the faith, they both motivate the political forces of the country. The conservatives and pseudo-secularists understand myth in their myopic vision and history is understood in a hysteria of political will. The Masjid-Mandir issue is the 77th political struggle to restore the Ram Janambhoomi, the national heritage of India where three lakhs karsewaks have laid down their lives in the last four hundred years. The Hindus think that in 1528 Mir Baqi had decreed that a mosque be built at the highest point of Ayodhya in the name of his most noble ruler Em-

peror Babur. The Muslims claim that the temple at Hanuman Garhi had been built on a mosque. During the British rule after 1857 the Babri Masjid was bifurcated allowing half to the Hindus to enter the structure from the east and relinquishing the other half to the Muslims to enter, from the north. On 22nd December 1949 some idols appeared there mysteriously and the Hindus claimed it to be a miracle. The district magistrate declared the area disturbed and the issue assumed a political colour inciting both the communities to retaliate against each other. In 1992 the Babri Masjid was demolished with the rise of an aggressive Hindutva that made the Hindus a martial race. Thus, in the rewriting of history and Hindutva, Ayodhya has become the epicentre of a political earthquake. Kapur's study of the facts has been delineated with a fictional imagination in Astha's impression in raising the question, "Is art imitating life, or is life imitating art?"

Besides, all the amazing anachronism in history appears to be irrelevant to the long tradition of the country. Astha is surprised to find this historical monument to have caused ruthless bloodshed for centuries. In the conspiring and hypocritical attempts, the facts have been distorted and faith has been tortured in the hands of the politics of the past and the present. Yet faith is sacrosanct and it needs political will to be protected. She is shocked at the facts of history being twisted and the people being not so much careful of Ram's principles as worried about the exact spot of his birthplace. Astha believes that Ram is a sacred name and has his sacred place in myth, history, tradition and belief of Indians. Ram was governing the social life of his citizens, Ram was the birth of legality, and Ram marked the beginning of an understanding of the concept of social justice. The classic is revived with the televising of the *Ramayana*. The Hindus have dreamt of Ram Rajya, the golden age of India to flourish again with justice, honour, responsibility, devotion, truth and loyalty. Astha believes that "The Hindu religion . . . is wide, is deep, capable of endless interpretations. Anybody can get anything they want from it, ritual, stories, thoughts that sustain." (85) But,

The amount of blood, hate, and passion for ownership, these words evoked bathed each stone with a corrosive mixture, slashing through the surface so that it was no longer an old mosque. It was a temple, a

birthplace, a monument to past glory, anything but a disused nesting place for bats. Despite all this it had endured for over four hundred years. (108)

Astha realizes how the powerseekers on both sides (Hindus and Muslims) use religion quite blatantly in the name of secularism. While the holy men exhort a semitised Hindutva under the banner of saffron shade and trident the Nehruvian secularists appeal for a higher and more enlightened Hindutva. They fail to realize secularism as the legalized sibling of humanism that never dishonours God nor corrupts mankind. In a moral paralysis, impotency in secular belief and willing suspension of disbelief contemporary politics has no more remained a pure philosophy; rather it lacks a contextual mandate in India's existential suffering. As in Nietzsche's cry, "God is dead" for political pilgrims of India and they are directly responsible for this theocide. Religious beliefs cannot be compatible with violence nor can it be used to damage other's belief nor will the Mandir-Masjid tangle serve a *religio medici* for the evils of Indian society. Astha is confident like every rational Indian that "Ram would have hated what was going on in his name—a man who sacrificed everything to keep his father's honour, who left his home, his palace, his kingdom in order to make sure his brother inherited, he would be the last to appreciate the fuss over his birthplace." (108) Astha is shocked to see the way in which "Ram is being associated with Hindu-Indian-nationalism" (202) and disillusioned with the religious leaders driving chariot, identical to Arjun's in the serialized *Mahabharata*, started from Somnath, the first place destroyed by the Muslim marauder Mahmud of Ghazni, for their political prominence. As Kapur's secularist intellectual, Astha understands the public sentiment, popular belief and political interpretations in her rebellious self and ejects her venom at the barefoot pilgrims moving towards Ayodhya like warriors. She thinks that intolerance is the real enemy to India's multi-cultural and multi-religious society which needs political correctness and ethical orientation. She is in quite an off mood when her family life suffers a setback for the Mandir-Masjid issue, and the politicians make the monument a tool for modern political equations.

Kapur has made a thorough sociological study in the Astha-Aijaz-Pipeelika relationship. In their complex relationship Astha and Aijaz have their ideological love for man, religion and society, Aijaz and Pipeelika have their secular love and Astha and Pipeelika have their lesbian affair. Aijaz is a teacher with a reformist zeal. He tries to use his pen disseminating the social and political awareness. Besides teaching, his dramatic activities and staging of the play "Babri Masjid: Fact, Fiction and You" is an "effective way of addressing communal issues and dealing with social evils." (120) His chief aim is to expose how the Muslims are believed to be stupid and loyal to Pakistan and are looked upon with suspicion. But Astha and Pipeelika are impressed with the community as they are good friends, partners and human beings in spite of oblique references—"four wives, large families, instant divorce, inter-community marriages, the religion of babies from such unions" (132) dating from Babur's time to the present day. While Astha's miniatures contain socio-political matters of the time with an ethical touch, Aijaz has a radical view with his ready impact on society through his theatre-activities. This leads him to be a martyr to the cause for his "working for everybody's good." (139) Both Astha and Pipeelika for their higher education and understanding regret for the anachronisms of history in their existential suffering:

In essence women all over the world are the same, we belong to families we are affected by what affects our husbands, fathers, brothers and children. In history many things are not clear, the same thing that is right for one person is wrong for another, and it is difficult to decide our path of action. We judge not by what people tell us, but by what we experience in our homes. And that experience tells us that where there is violence, there is suffering, unnecessary and continuous suffering. When we look to righting wrongs committed hundreds of years ago, we look to the past. But the past cannot feed us, clothe us, or give us security. History cannot be righted easily, but lives are lost easily, pain and trauma to women and children come easily. Tomorrow your sacrifice will have been forgotten because the duty of life is towards the living. (197-98)

Kapur's female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individuals caged within the confines of a conservative society. Their edu-

cation leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them. They struggle between tradition and modernity and develop the awareness of the New Woman, who has a voice of her own. Marriage, the social institution, traps and curbs their spirit by binding them to the responsibilities of a home. Astha is ensnared into misalliance with her male partner of an extremely different temperament and character. Her life contends with pressures much greater than those exerted by her attachment to Pipeelika, a woman she meets half way through the narrative of her life's journey. Both Astha and Pipeelika have failed to reach the climax of their emotional and physical passions with men—one due to her rich socio-political understanding and the other for her misfortune. The murder of Aijaz has sterilized Pipee's feminine sensibility and in her widowhood she is desexualized. Rather by falling in love with each other both have made their lives refreshing:

Slowly Pipee put her arms around her. She could feel her hands on the narrowness of her back . . . feeling her back with her palm, . . . in no hurry to reach any conclusion. They were enclosed in a circle of silence, the only sound, the sound of their breaths, close together and mingled. (230-31)

If Astha had failed in her attempt to risk such a guilt she would have failed to provide herself joy or liberate herself and she would have courted death or madness. She embarks on a powerful relationship with a younger woman risking the loss of her feminine acquisitions while her husband is alive and she has her children. Kapur makes Pipee's gender almost irrelevant as a convenient plot device making her role in the relationship rather masculine.

In her narrative Kapur has exhibited the new facets of the married women. Her New Women, Astha and Pipeelika are disillusioned in life with their suspicions of male integrity, and their awareness of male frailty. Astha was completely disillusioned by her discovery of a condom in her husband's travel suitcase in his business mission. In their sundry experiences both had found their husbands as "embryonic Othellos." (221) Unconsciously they were in search of a safe, warm and loved place after their shattered con-

jugal lives. This made them to be close in their emotional intimacy. Pipee as a lesbian lover and Astha as a lesbian beloved are passionately in love with each other. Their love is unconditional and selfless in the term of *svakiya* for their husbands but they have experienced *parakiya* for its own sake and for its no other ulterior or *samsaric* motive or gain. Astha's female atman desires to have a union with Pipee's male Paramatman in the shringara rasa theory, the supreme love between Radha and Krishna in Indian classical tradition. In the deep recess of her mind Astha desires to be loved, respected and to revitalize her life with a delicious secret that goes beyond the land of *Kamasutra*. She knows that sex suffers if marriage suffers, and it leads people to seek solace beyond marriage. She asserts her feminine rights for her emotional satisfaction by the betrayal of her body. She tries to justify that there is a Radha in women if there is a Krishna in men. "When she was with Hemant she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who noticed, nothing, . . . she accepted the misery of this dislocation as her due for being a faithless wife." (287) Her diabolic body disturbs her psychologically, and her code ethics turn into crude ethics. After qualifying in the GRE Pipee leaves for the U.S.A. to do her Ph.D. Astha lives again mechanically in an emotional vacuum as if "Her mind, heart and body felt numb. . . . She felt stretched thin, thin across the globe." (307)

Kapur is serious in regard to the communal violence and disintegration of human values in the social trauma and political upheaval of the 1990s. In her authorial concern she has raised the issues in the context of patriarchy, inter-religious marriage, family bond, female-female bond, co-existence of past and present in the socio-political facts. In her creative consciousness she describes her woman protagonist as a victim of biology, gender, domestic violence and circumstances. Though the novel appears more like a reportage, Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi issue is presented in a realistic-imaginative reconstruction. She makes it clear that for the benefit of individual and society religion may find its place in politics, but not the vice versa, since spurious politics cannot provide secular immunity to a healthy democracy like that of India. She expresses her serious concern for the political zealots' declaration that

religion is above politics, nation and the court. Unlike Austen and Tolstoy, on the other hand she thinks that there is a man within every woman and a woman in every man when manhood is questioned and womanhood is fragmented. Understanding the problems of women in and out of the family she explores the causes of Astha's restlessness, and her search for identity. Astha's adversaries are her acquisitiveness, a sense of attachment, the code of dharma and the philosophy of quietism. As a breadwinner of the family and peacemaker for the country she balances a tight rope walking between 'sais' and 'unsais.' Astha knows that her silence would announce her death and agitation would make her alive.

Like Shashi Deshpande, Dina Mehta, Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee, Kapur expresses her concern for women with a missionary zeal and seems to suggest that a married woman's job is not to complete wifing, child-bearing and housekeeping but to do something more. Her Astha appears to be an Ibsenite who raises her voice, a question, whether religion is used to build or destroy the glorious past of this country. In the gynocentric struggle for liberation and fulfillment, like that in Flaubert and Lawrence, Astha struggles for the togetherness of the family as a unit. Not as a flag-waver nor as a patriot she is fully aware that venality, brutality and hypocrisy are imprinted on the leaden soul of every fanatic Indian, Indian democracy has become a holy cow in socio-political crisis and the benefits it yields are used and abused at will by a diluted politics. Through Astha, Kapur offers "a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanism"<sup>7</sup> by her inner potential as an individual and her desire to attain personal recognition. Dealing with religion, politics and social values Kapur realizes India as socially cosmopolitan, politically egalitarian and religiously sectarian. The age-old themes of marriage and politics are coupled with lesbian relationship, in the narrative making Kapur the first Indian English novelist to highlight women's desire for homosexuality. If Arundhati Roy, in her novel emphasizes the women's desire to choose their mates, Kapur goes a step beyond marriage and presents her protagonist in *A Married Woman* indulging in a pseudo-sexual relationship with a member of her own sex for the sexual orientation and gratification of her passion. *A Married*

*Woman* conforms to the rules of lesbianism and gay theories, and it is by exploring a hidden aspect of a woman's passionate life as defined by comfort levels without societal sanctions. Thus, the novel has broken a new ground in the genre of Indian English fiction of modern times.

## NOTES

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## Individual versus Society in the Novels of M.R. Anand and Anita Desai

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Literature and society complement each other the way human heart and mind do. The superiority of one upon the other cannot be established in a hurry. Literature records dreams and desires, fears and furies, fact and fiction in its minutest details to soothe and soften mankind in hours of agony and anguish. It also creates the background of numberless games, which decide the fate of individuals and of society. It brings a change, which keeps germinating, in the minds of man for years. The saga of man's emergence from the savage to the civilized stage is nothing but the result of the transforming power of literature.

Mulk Raj Anand and Anita Desai, the two prolific practitioners of Indian writing in English, through their novels, have described the transformation of Indian life and society in a very subtle manner. Their portrayal of a variety of characters shows not only the hue and cry of individual against system but also the whispering notes which the individuals feel but fail to hum against the noises of the maddening crowd.

The present paper endeavours to trace the impact of the restrictions imposed by society before individuals as delineated in the works of these two novelists. The reactions of their characters to the social issues bespeak the exciting and inspiring tale of their struggle and quest. The growing concern of Anand and Anita Desai for their characters in this hydra-headed world doesn't go waste but keeps mankind reminding of its hush-hush hissings.

Both Anand and Anita Desai through their novels show how their characters in their search for identity find themselves at war with society, the masses. Their desire to earmark a little space in this vast world mars their hopes and harmony offering them pains

and perils in return. In their struggle for quest, success or failure gets only a materialistic outlook, propelling them to shine forth like gold in furnace.

*Cry, the Peacock* (1963), the first novel by Anita Desai, depicts an individual's cries against the mass in general and Maya-Gautama's incoherent marital life in particular. Their marriage grounded upon the friendship of Maya's father and Gautam fails to obtain the test of each other's trust and they become poles apart. The artist in Maya covets for the sensations of life, which cannot be lived on terms. Gautama's legal quibbles fail to find any room in Maya's heart. The impediments in their relationships are born of the lack of understanding each other's waves. Maya's parental passion and Gautama's garrulous grudges seem never to end and only widen the cleavage between them. Gautama tries to console and convince Maya but fails to fulfil even her carnal desires. As a result, Maya feels herself an appendage not only on her husband but also on his family. To attach at least some sense of significance to her injured self, Maya builds a world of flora and fauna. She alienates herself not only from Gautama and his family members but also from Leila and Pom, her one-time friends. She turns inward and nauseates to find the depletion even there. Unlike Rosie in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Maya doesn't believe in falling into the arms of someone who soothes her physically and mentally. Rather Maya's agonized self can get peace only by killing her husband in a vindictive rage. Maya, the peacock, finally fulminates furious cries and vindicates herself. The novel, though a love-hate tragedy at large, appears as an individual's outburst against society: "Now that I understand their call, I wept for them, and wept for myself, knowing their words to be mine."<sup>1</sup>

In *Voices in the City* (1965), Anita discusses the plight of a sensitive intellectual woman who fights against the hostile family only to triumph after her death. The voices of Monisha, the heroine of the novel, are subdued by the authoritative society represented by her in-laws. Neither the husband nor the members of his family sympathize with Monisha and she ends her alienation by burning herself to death. The other characters namely Nirode and Amla are also snubbed. Monisha's brother, Nirode, is an artist who meets failure

one after another. Not only Monisha but also Nirode, Amla, and Maya dwindle into insignificance in their fight against society. Nirode works in a newspaper office and shuns his job because of his dissatisfaction. He edits a literary magazine named 'Voice' which fails to lend the ears of the city dwellers and still he writes a play only to taste another sting of failure. Nirode's creative waves have very few takers. He fails and fritters. At one place, he admits: "I want to move from failure to failure, step by step, to rock bottom. I want to explore that depth."<sup>2</sup>

Nirode is soon disillusioned with life as Monisha's death ultimately seals his medium for communication. His younger sister Amla, trained as a commercial artist in Bombay comes to Calcutta to join an advertisement firm. Notionally different from Monisha and Nirode, she attends parties and dances to the tune of time but realizes lately that 'happiness was but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain.' She, too, grouches in anguish: "this city, this city of yours, it conspires against all who wish to enjoy it." (50) The city of Calcutta represents a big world, a greater society where the individual's voices are always choked only to be yoked with violence in the form of goddess Kali, which the city symbolizes.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1982) depicts an individual's fight against society more poignantly. The novel deals with the agony of the middle-aged heroine Sita who wants to live life at her own costs. Sita has high expectations of life and her expectations receive a jolt as she fails to adjust herself with her husband and his family. Her marriage with Raman was not a marriage of true minds. Raman, a businessman failed to feel the weariness, the fever and the fret, which Sita experiences behind the curtain of his house. Her desire to live life independently forces Raman to live with her separately in another flat. But here again she lives unhappily. Having given birth to four issues, now she shows signs of boredom when she becomes pregnant for the fifth time. She smokes all through the night and shows her reluctance to deliver the fifth child.

Her abnormal behaviour surprises everyone. She decides to go to Manori, an island where she had spent her childhood under the shadow of her father. Her father, a public figure, had spent his entire life on the island calling it "Jeevan Ashram." The island also

doesn't extenuate her whimsical approach and she appears mad to Moses and his friends. Her children also stand up against her and want to return to their father in Bombay. When Raman reaches the island, Sita receives a blow and is full of shame and frustration. She has come to realize that life cannot be lived on one's own terms and decides to go with Raman who is a symbol of security to her. She reconciles in the end, no doubt, but the way she expresses her crisis of life not lived, give a hint at her individuation: I thought I could live life with you and travel—alone mentally, emotionally. But after that day, that wasn't enough. I had to stay whole, I had to."<sup>3</sup>

Sita's return to Raman may at surface level appear to be her defeat but at the deeper level there is a delight in this defeat. Defeat or win in a private life has got no substance. Her life on the island is an exile, which has uprooted her from her setting. Her return to Bombay is a possible push towards rejuvenation. And that is why Usha Bande, a noted critic, justifies Sita's compromise in the following way: "Acceptance shows growth, ripeness; it implies the process of actualization. The ability to 'connect' the fragments of life and achieve an integration, will perhaps enable her to realize her place and experience herself as a part of a larger whole."<sup>4</sup>

Anita Desai shows the fight between the individual and society more clearly in one of her later novels, *In Custody* (1984), which has been considered "more individual, less generalized and conventional than her earliest fiction."<sup>5</sup> The hero of the novel, Deven, buys the wrath of many only because of his unflinching passion for Urdu poetry. He worships the aged Urdu poet, Noor, like anything and keeps pining for his interview to be taped. Deven is humbugged in this crazy project by his one time college friend Murad who fans his frenetic sparks most fraudulently. Deven's poetic venture ends in a fiasco and he finds himself all alone. Not only his friend Murad but the poet Noor also dupe him and Deven is stripped of the entire amount he had managed from the college. He feels himself distanced from his wife, his friend, the poet and society at large. Deven finds his fate sealed and his future blurred. The last lines of the novel amply demonstrate his anguish: "He walked up the path. Soon the sun would be up and blazing. The day would flash out of the sky

and cut him down like swords. He would run to meet them. He ran, stopping only to pull a branch of thorns under his foot."<sup>6</sup>

Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1985) runs parallel on the lines of Anand's first novel *Untouchable* as regards the subject matter. Both the novels talk of the problem of discrimination the biases of caste and creed. While Anand deals with the problem of untouchables, Anita Desai touches upon the problem of black immigrants in England. Both the novels, apart from the historical debate of racial malice and hatred, nurse the sores in the souls of the protagonists.

*Bye-Bye Blackbird* talks at length the identity crisis faced by Adit, Sarah and Dev. Adit Sen, a young Indian, marries an English girl and settles in England. But after some years he becomes disillusioned and his humiliation in an alien country creates in him a longing for Indian food and friends. He leaves for India with his English wife, Sarah. His return to India gives birth to Sarah's sorrow. She starts feeling frustrated and her crisis begins. Desai describes her plight most pathetically: "She had become nameless, she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity, and she sat there, staring, as though she watched them disappear. Or could only someone who knew her, knew of her background and her marriage, imagine this? Would a stranger have seen in her a lost maiden in search of her name that she seemed, with a silver falling of the light of glamour, to an unusually subdued and thoughtful Adit?"<sup>7</sup>

In her search for identity, Sarah longs for freedom. It is not a freedom from tradition and conceptions but freedom from the self—the self, which she wanted to hide. Anand's Bakha, too in *Untouchable*, finding himself slapped and humiliated, is full of despair but it is not a moment of defeat. The individual in him rises. He's full of rage. Anand writes: "The accumulated strength of his giant body glistened in him with the desire for revenge, while horror, rage, indignation swept over his frame."<sup>8</sup>

Mulk Raj Anand, one of the founding fathers of Indian-English literature, through his many novels has portrayed Indian life and its conditions at various stages. K.N. Sinha in one of his perceptive

remarks calls Anand "nothing less than a novelist of human condition, a novelist whose province is human nature."<sup>9</sup>

Anand may appear to be a social historian to many but as a novelist he is not stuck up in his socio-political materials. Gradually, he moves towards a more comprehensive and more assimilative vision of life. Each novel of Anand has several layers of despair and delight. One can hear in his fiction 'echoes of all kinds.' If we look at the evolutionary process, we will modify the conventional perception about his fiction. What Anand told P.K. Rajan philosophically is of great significance: "I have been evolving a philosophy of the human person which is miscellaneous. It is not doctrinaire thought. It is a number of insights, possibly arising from my experience itself, from all experience. I think we are part of a much bigger universe, we are part of the whole world."<sup>10</sup>

Anand's major novels highlight the individual's fight against society in various forms. His characters become rebels. And this can be traced back in his personal life also. Anand rebelled not only against his father but also against all other obstacles to the growth of a free mind, a free spirit. Marlene Fisher finds in *Lalu*, the protagonist of the second trilogy, the fictional counterpart of Anand. *Lalu* symbolizes for Marlene Fisher "the natural and spontaneous urge of a new generation to forge his own identity."<sup>11</sup>

Anand's early novels namely *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud* deal with the theme of their protagonists' fight to seek their identity. Bakha, the hero of Anand's first novel *Untouchable* (1935) is a victim as an individual of the caste-conscious society. The novel describes an inauspicious day in the life of Bakha who's made to feel that he's a sweeper's son and hence untouchable. A well-built child of nature with a stout stature, Bakha feels his agony and wants to react and yet has to restrict himself before his father's subservience to the privileged class. A workaholic Bakha is dutiful and yet the society heaps abuses on him because of his low origin. Wherever he goes, he's belittled with words as 'defiled' and 'polluted.' All these insults and injuries strengthen his body and stiffen his soul. The individual in Bakha, even when slapped does not die but faces only the crisis of identity. E.M. Forster rightly tells, "Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand,

sometimes weak and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive; we can recognize his broad intelligent face, graceful torso, and heavy buttocks, as he does his nasty jobs, or stumps out in artillery boots in hopes of pleasant walk through the city with a paper of cheap sweets in his hand."<sup>12</sup>

Besides all pricks and pinches, the novel ends hopefully when Bakha is delighted to know the introduction of a 'machine which clears dung' and can change the lot of Bakha and his likes. Both the Mahatma and the young poet create in Bakha a new desire to know more about the path to his salvation.

*Coolie* (1936) deals with the difficulties of Munnoo, the young protagonist who moves from the village to the town, from the town to the city and then to the mountains. A frail boy in a hostile world faces a savage struggle for survival. The novel discusses the sufferings of an individual coolie in a class-ridden society. Munnoo has to endure the foul smell and stink deep and sticky sweat, dust and heat and dung. His search for delight is menaced by the brutalizing urbanization symbolized by Bombay. In such a climate life is a threat and death is a release. Even in a hostile climate, Munnoo's love for the high altitudes does not abate in Bombay. The sudden surge of love and friendship makes the death of Munnoo a memorable and moving moment.

*Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) also discusses the theme of exploitation of coolies working in teagarden, at the hands of British officials. Gangu, the protagonist of the novel is an old, beaten man. He is a victim of man, God and civilization. The stifling working conditions make Gangu and his wife sick. His own integrity fails to toe the lines of other coolies who offer their wives or daughters to Reggie Hunt for a piece of land. Gangu's wife dies of cholera and Gangu resigns to his fate. He starts doing a part-time cultivation on a strip of land provided to him through the doctor. But life doesn't run smooth for Gangu. Once Reggie Hunt's eyes fall on Leila, Gangu's daughter. Hunt wants to defile Leila but Gangu comes in between and is shot. The strain of irony becomes unbearable when Reggie Hunt is discharged. But all these do not signify the end of individual spark. Gangu's zeal and zest for life can be found in the following lines: "He gripped the handle of his spade with an unwav-

ering faith and dug his foot into the sod made by a furrow and sensed the warm freshness of the earth that would yield fruit."<sup>13</sup> One can also find a new light in Leila's eyes. The way she bruises the python symbolizes a revolutionary message.

Anand presents Lalu as the hero of his second trilogy. The novels like *The Village*, *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle* deal with Lalu's struggle for survival. A young rebel, Lalu is bubbling with energy and vibrating with dreams and is determined to reject all the prohibitions and prescriptions of the conservative Indian society. He symbolizes a revolutionary consciousness and a determination to shape his destiny afresh. He joins the war as a professional soldier and his heart bleeds at the sight of death and destruction. The third novel concludes at a note of Lalu's quest for self-realization and self-actualization. He returns to his village, which is still in the grip of dirt, debauchery and disease. Lalu's return is not a defeat but it shows the emerging self of Lalu as an individual against the crippling climate of Indian society. What brings delight to Lalu is his individual will which conflicts continuously with the social facts of Indian life.

The fight between the individual and the society won't be complete if we leave Anand's *The Big Heart*, *The Road* and *The Death of a Hero*. The protagonists of these novels, experience the severity of all kinds. The fight of the hero in these novels means the conflict between the social reality and the fantasy of the hero. Anant in *The Big Heart* symbolizes the new upsurge in opposition to the old orthodoxy. The novel ends with Anant's death but his death becomes a heroic act of resistance against the orthodoxy. Anant is a big-hearted revolutionary who stands for the redness of heart and not for the blackness of hatred. Anant chooses to die to let others live hopefully and harmoniously. What the poet says after Anant's death is a glowing tribute to the triumphant assertion of Anant's will and spirit: "One man can die, but life cannot be extinguished in the world altogether until the very Sun goes bold and the elements break up."<sup>14</sup> Bhikhoo in *The Road* and Maqbool in *Death of a Hero* show the same resistance and symbolize a new myth without which nation's resurgence cannot have any meaning.

Anand's women characters are very traditional and confined since he considers them to be the apostles of love, of warmth and security, i.e. home. But in *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), Anand puts in them more voice to oppose their silent sufferings. Gauri, the heroine of the novel becomes conscious of her individual talent and self-esteem and she defies the traditional society and decides to live freely and fearlessly. Gauri's struggle for survival can be viewed as individual's self-discovery and self-actualization. Gauri will not sulk like Narayan's Savitri in *The Dark Room* or Anita Desai's Monisha in *Voices in the City*. She rejects the narrow world of orthodoxy and slams the door against her husband. She does not allow her cultural conditioning to deform her into an image of self-surrender. She doesn't annihilate her identity. Her life is a pilgrimage of hope and faith, and her inner transformation delights us.

Anand and Anita Desai seem close in voicing their protests against persecution of women in their writings. The women in Anand's early novels seem to bear the brunt under the age-old legacy of man's subordinate being who keep the oven burning to ensure the health and harmony of family in a traditional set-up.

The cause of women's suffering in the early novels of Anand can be ascribed to the lack of education, the blind faith in gods and goddesses, the age-old belief of being man's subordinate or secondary. The social taboos appear like mountains in their way to blur their vision (if they had any). Anand portrays them as devoted, docile and dedicated wives but recognizes in them a great potential to pave the path to their progress. The need to allow his women characters to subjugate and to silently suffer the pangs may be traced in Anand's revolutionary fervour. The social reformer in Anand perhaps wanted the women characters to boil and burn as individuals and not as women. And hence the projection of new women in his later novels is born out of the need to show the other facets of the women. Anand, unlike Anita Desai, allows his lady characters to raise their heads to wage war against the system. No doubt, these women characters with their new light of learning want to guard their own fences rather than digging holes in the wall through the sharp nails and hammers of pride and falsity.

Anand's women, like his male protagonists fight but they also realize the importance of mending walls. The idea of togetherness never skips their mind. One may come across examples where they adjust to the changing times and trends yet for the idea of being one with their husband or lover, they continue the mission even after their counterpart's demise. It is an ample proof of their being individualistic and revolutionary.

The struggle of the individual becomes more potent in Anand's autobiographical novels. Anand adopts the first person narrative in these novels. He shows Krishan, the protagonist of these novels in conflict with his own emotions and the world, which offers him attractions and distractions. The protagonist's loyalty criss-crosses. He disobeys his father. He also breaks the curfew and is sent to jail. He suffers alienation from his father. But even in these moments of despair, he doesn't leave his quest for truth and his mind is assailed by metaphysical questions like the meaning of life, death and immortality. Krishan has some moments of relaxation in the company of women who give sustenance to his emotional life. *Morning Face* amply demonstrates how personal experience can be transformed to another plane of understanding.

Krishna's struggle for achieving his new identity continues in *Confessions of a Lover*. Once again he is at cross with order, and the dictates of society which appear as an impediment between the love of a Hindu boy and a married Muslim woman. Yashmin's murder leaves a permanent scar on his soul. But it does not destroy his resilience and zest for life. The journey after Yashmin's death becomes more literal and metaphoric.

Thus we find that both Anand and Anita Desai deal with the themes of alienation, loneliness, boredom, denial and deprivations of their characters. But the way their characters respond to these major issues is different. Anita Desai's characters in their struggle to find a meaning in life turn inward and become "engaged in contemplation, not action."<sup>15</sup> In order to satisfy their emotional avalanche, they often take the wrong path. Their solitary confinement most often frightens them and they show their reluctance to face reality. But that does not mean her characters lack vitality and aliveness. In the process of individuation "they reveal self strength and also a ten-

dency to emerge out of their isolation, insecurity and anxiety, and gain a closeness and solidarity."<sup>16</sup>

Anand, on the other hand, offers hope and harmony to his characters in their individual search. The loss of identity in his novels is a moment of despair for his protagonists but he prepares them to regain that identity though after a prolonged struggle. His hero in each novel grows and becomes progressively more sure of himself passing from a low level of consciousness to a more happy adulthood. The inner world of the protagonist in each novel of Anand does not degenerate into a sinister flux. Anand constructs order out of the chaos, strife, confusion and suffering stirs up his hope and heroism. For the delight of man, according to Radhakrishnan, nothing is to be rejected and everything is to be raised. The empirical man is not sufficient because he dances to the tune of stimuli and is in constant war with the environment. The empirical man has to achieve self-transcendence by exploring new horizons. Man can contend with the disruptive forces and can conquer them. He can emerge from the nervous breakdown. If there is a discord in life, it is only a stage and not the terminus. Life is a continuous pattern of despair and delight and it is not without its dynamic thrust. Man has to make and remake himself for an authentic living. The nightmare of living in a hostile world brings fear and disquiet for man; but the solitary contemplative sinks again and again into the quiet of self-communion.

M.R. Anand and Anita Desai are the most established novelists in their own right. The objective of the paper is to show the response of their character to varied situations of life. Both these artists have painted the Indian landscape most dexterously through their characters, situations, dialogues, atmosphere and images. The responses of their characters may be different in the given circumstances but both these novelists portray the dynamic thrust of human personality. The definition of the dynamic thrust of human personality as given by Dr. Radhakrishnan can be found in their novels: "To exist is to stand out of the crowd to be oneself, to be an authentic person making and remaking oneself."<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

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**B.I.T.S., Pilani**

## Colonial Consciousness and Racial Conflict: Immigrant Experience in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*

KANHAIYA JEE JHA

The large scale immigration of the people from the ex-colonial countries of the Third World to the former ruler countries like Britain, France and America, leading to racial conflicts, has been one of the most historical developments of the postcolonial world. Various aspects of immigrant experience and racial relations, in such cases, have been a natural corollary of the colonial consciousness, present, not only in the immigrants as distinct ethnic groups but also in the collective psyche of the people of the host countries. Among Indian English novels, which delineate this theme, Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971) requires specific attention, for it explores the psychic depths of coloured immigrants both as individuals and also as parts of the larger socio-cultural fabric of the adopted country. Desai considers it, of all her novels, the "most rooted in experience and the least literary in derivation."<sup>1</sup> She believes: "*Bye-Bye Blackbird* is the closest of all my books to actuality—practically everything in it is drawn directly from my experience of living with Indian immigrants in London."<sup>2</sup>

Critics have defined modern age or more precisely, the post-modern world as "the age of the refugee"<sup>3</sup> and modern man as "the new nomad,"<sup>4</sup> not being able to put down roots anywhere. The technological evolution has, no doubt, put life in a state of flux, but historically, the large scale immigration of people started as an offshoot of postcolonial. "Violent social change taking place in these communities beginning with the colonization, and gaining momentum in the first half of this [twentieth] century."<sup>5</sup> Expatriation appears as a recurrent motif in postcolonial literature across the world because it constitutes not only the commonly shared experience of

the migrant people but also the creative sensibility of their writers. The bulk of major Indian English novelists, such as Raja Rao, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee and others are expatriate writers like Camara Laye, Wilson Harris, V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming and others.

In the case of an ex-colony like India and the other colonies of the Third World, colonization was a system of institutionalized political force by which a powerful country controlled the destiny of a weaker country. No doubt, modernization, technology, network of communication systems, liberal ideas were the beneficial impacts of colonial system, but the negative aspects of the system were far more poignant. It is now a general conclusion that the colonizers consciously worked to break the spirit of rebellion in the natives by "educating"<sup>6</sup> them suitably and building into them a sense of inferiority and contempt for their own culture and values.<sup>7</sup> The spiritual and moral maiming of native people's consciousness was so deep that the natives began to admire the whiteman for everything and undervalue their own tradition. Even as free nations these societies have not been able to solve their basic problems like poverty, unemployment, overpopulation, hunger, illiteracy, health care etc. On the contrary, the west with its steady economic prosperity got projected as a model of all round achievement. Unable to find adjustment with the shattered economy in their own countries and pressed by joblessness and poverty, many of the natives decided to migrate to Britain, France or America, the ideal countries,<sup>8</sup> in an attempt to get there 'steady, remunerative jobs.'

Working in migrant countries, the immigrants initially achieved a standard of living they could never have hoped for at home, but soon the situation began to change. It was feared that hordes of immigrants pouring in a country like Britain, would endanger an economy which the immigrants had not helped to build and "Panicky Englishmen began to ask for more stringent laws against immigration."<sup>9</sup> Their feelings of insecurity made them accuse the immigrants of "having lowered their standard of living, of having deprived them of employment, of having fouled up their beautiful countryside, of having brought crime and disease to their land . . . and so on and so forth."<sup>10</sup> The discrimination against the immigrants

began to be exercised on racial basis in many ways. Hostility and rejection in the host country produced in immigrants a deeper sense of consciousness about their oppressed condition and compelled them to make a frantic search for their roots and identity. The situation resulted in various psycho-sociological problems such as nostalgia, rootlessness, alienation, schizophrenia and others in them. Despite living in two cultures, their dilemma whether to stay in the host country or return to homeland persisted. The novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* meticulously explores all these aspects of immigrant experience in detail. Like most other important Indian English novels on the theme of immigration, in this novel too, the host country is Britain, which is owing to its colonial relation with India.

The novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, while portraying the lives of coloured immigrants, presents "an authentic study of human relationships bedevilled by cultural encounters."<sup>12</sup> Adit, the protagonist of the novel, leads a settled life as an immigrant in London with his English wife Sarah, the leading female character of the novel. He has a good job and with his considerably lucrative income, maintains a living which has comfort and pleasure. He regards England as a "land of golden opportunities"<sup>12</sup> and material prosperity. He points out to Dev, his friend, who has just arrived there as an immigrant: "You just don't want to admit this is the land of opportunity and you've come adventuring in it." (19)

Rooted somewhere deep within his consciousness the colonial pull finds expression in his utterance: "Oh, I think gold, Dev, gold. I see gold everywhere—gold like Sarah's golden hair." (19)

Adit is sharply critical of the lack of avenues in India, where after years of toil, he could find only "a ruddy clerking job." (18) By comparison, he is proud of his financial achievements in England: "What a relief it was to have a desk of my own, a secretary to make me tea and the feeling that I had found something I would like to make permanent at last." (105)

Adit is also critical of general condition of life in India: "The laziness of the clerks and unpunctuality of the buses and trains, and the beggars and the flies and the stench and the boredom. . . . Then I'm mad to get back to England." (49) His mesmeric attraction to England extends to the region of nature and natural surroundings as

well. In comparison to famine, flood, drought and epidemic at home, he finds in England nature 'soft and mild' and land 'fertile' "Everything so wealthy, so luxuriant." (129)

Dev, another important character in the novel who, with his intellectual pretensions, has come 'to study at the London School of Economics.' Initially he is averse to the idea of staying on in England as an immigrant. He considers London a 'jungly city' and has no wish to live in a country, where one has chance of being 'insulted and unwanted.' (17) He is 'amused' to find his friend Adit, the descendant of a rich Calcutta family, working in a city office like a commoner. What he dislikes most is the "immigrants' sheepishness and abject loss of self-respect."<sup>13</sup> He says to Adit: "The trouble with you immigrants . . . is that you go soft. If anyone in India told you to turn off your radio, you would not dream of doing it . . . here all you do is shut up." (24)

Dev is particularly unhappy by the manner in which the immigrants are subjected to racial discrimination. He also finds himself uneasy to adjust with the "English habit of keeping all doors and windows tightly shut . . . of guarding their privacy as they guarded their tongues." (63)

But gradually a slow change occurs in the attitude of Dev. Refused to be told even the price of a painting in Greenwich Park of London, he asks Adit in anguish "Do I look that shabby?" (72) The experience of such racial arrogance motivates him to find some employment to maintain his social standing. In a country like England it was "necessary to find an empty and warm niche before one was pushed over the ledge into the sea that lapped the island's stony shores." (104) He is also, like Adit, charmed by the magical impact of England. He walks through the streets and parks of London as "charmed observer, the outraged outsider and thrilled sight seer all at once and in succession." (85) He even now begins to think of England as "the land of golden opportunities." (103) Towards the end of the novel, Dev changes place with Adit, whom he had earlier decried as "boot licking toady" and "Spineless imperialist-lover." (19) So while Adit returns to India, Dev continues to stay on in England.

In the case of some other immigrant characters of the novel also, for example the large Sikh family living downstairs of the flat of Adit and Sarah, the allurements of good living and financial prosperity appear to be the prime motive to settle in England.

The major characters of the novel reveal an indelible mark of colonial past of India upon their consciousness. Dev is critical of the educational system introduced by Macaulay, but he is not devoid of its impact upon himself. While seeing different landmarks of the British society and culture, he thinks: "He had known them all, he had met them before in the pages of Dickens and Lamb, Addison and Boswell, Dryden and Jerome K. Jerome . . . the past introduction . . . imprinted so imperially on his mind . . . books that had formed at least one half of his conscious existence." (10-11)

Yet, he considers English language and literature as a tool to produce the "class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (156) Adit, too, reveals the impact of the colonial era on his vision of history and culture. He considers colonial relation as main reason that brought two distinct cultures like India and England together: "It was the magic of England . . . her history and traditions—and the susceptibility of the Indian mind to these elements . . . the reconciliation of two cultures hovering in the air like a thrush with a laurel leaf held in its beak." (156-57) Naturally, colonial consciousness finds strong link with immigration, functioning as a major factor to motivate people to migrate.

Racial conflict and hostile opposition are the natural consequences the immigrants have to face in the adopted country. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is full of situations in which we find characters struggling to survive the racial onslaught. Racial prejudice often gets expression through the accusation against the coloured immigrants for spreading dirt and filth. In the novel there is a character Mrs. Simpson, who while taking her spaniel for a run, chances to step on a group of Asian immigrants taking sleep after holidaying in a park. She passes an acrimonious remark against them: "Littered with Asians! must get Richard to move out of Clapham, it is impossible now." (16)

The mother of Sarah, Mrs. Roscommon-James, finds the situation unbearable when her son-in-law, Adit, intrudes into her kitchen along with his other Indian friends: "It was evident she was thinking that all she had heard about the filthy ways of the Asian immigrants was correct." (135)

It is not out of place to mention that in Kamala Markandaya's novel *The Nowhere Man* (1972) a character Fred Fletcher hurls a similar scathing racial remarks against the immigrant community: "Filthy mob, bringing their filthy habits with them"<sup>14</sup>

Slinging derogatory remarks on immigrants on the basis of the colour of skin is a very common form of the expression of racial prejudice. In fact, this colour consciousness of the white people appears to be a major factor that obstructs the process of assimilation between the races. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Dev is called "wog" (14) by a schoolboy, while making a sight seeing visit in London. He reacts very sharply to the fact that the London docks have three kinds of lavatories—"Ladies, Gents and Asiatics." (17) Mala an immigrant housewife narrates her harrowing experience when her son was chased up by a gang of English children and her son screamed in despair "I'm not black! I'm not black—I'm grey!" (26) Raja Rao's *Comrade Kirillov*, another significant novel on immigrant situation, also reflects acute problem of racial discrimination in the British society on the basis of the colour of skin: "This colour problem in England is terrible you always know what you are through others' eyes. You cannot walk a mile without discovering yourself over and over again a hundred times."<sup>15</sup>

Very often this racial hostility is launched against the immigrants on organized basis. Dev is told that besides "Teddy boys . . . it's rockers now, and mods" (27) who have taken lead in the organized offensive against the immigrants. Dev is also struck by the 'blatant expression' of scorn on the face of Sarah's girl friend Christine Langford when the latter sees him in Sarah's kitchen.

Hostility and rejection in the host country lead immigrants "not just to hold ups in the course of assimilation but to actual regression."<sup>16</sup> Their desperate attempt to get back to their roots and identity generates in the process nostalgia and home sickness in them. They do so also because of the compelling need of having a mecha-

nism of defence against total facelessness. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird* as well as in her other novels, Anita Desai "uses the memories of the past as a method of evaluating the individual's relationship with the present, and nostalgia becomes a narrative technique. The movement backwards is both a medium of self-knowledge and of confrontation with the reality."<sup>17</sup> In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Adit, who in the earlier part of the novel, appears quite settled with his life as an immigrant, undergoes a decisive change in his attitude to England. His nostalgia for India crops up on the surface after his visit to the house of his in-laws, marred by 'inane misunderstandings' and 'basic disharmony.' (175) He gets delighted at the sight of "anything Indian at all." The landscape of India and the other memories of home continue to haunt him, be it 'country lanes' or 'farm yards,' 'rivers of India' or baked 'hilsa fish.' In fact "the ferocity of his growing nostalgia broke that stone dam that had silenced him for long and . . . had become an illness, an ache." (183)

The novel contains many portions showing Indian immigrants getting together and evoking their tradition and culture.<sup>18</sup> The general atmosphere in these gatherings is as Dev experiences: "He felt himself back in the company of Indian friends, in the relaxed ambience of uninhibited friendship in which jokes and taunts . . . were understood almost before they were spoken." (121) Serving of roti and dal, dancing to the tune of Bhangra, the making of alponas, the playing of Indian classical music are some of the activities by which the immigrants create a little India out of themselves.

Nostalgia, though provides psychological and emotional relief, is not of total help often. On the contrary, it accentuates in the immigrants rootlessness, alienation, schizophrenia and other psychosociological problems, particularly if they are not able to return to their homeland. Dev's psychological distress is reflective of the "issues of alienation and accommodation that the immigrant has to confront with in an alien and yet familiar world."<sup>19</sup> His sense of rootlessness and alienation is explicit is his feeling to be, like Adit: "One of those eternal immigrants who can never accept their new home and continue to walk the streets like strangers in enemy territory, frozen, listless." (181)

His alienation and spiritual agony are indicated through his hellish experience in London tube: "he is swept down with an awful sensation of being taken where he does not want to go. Down, down and further down like Alice falling, falling down the rabbit hole, like a Kafka stranger wandering through the dark labyrinth of a prison." (57)

In his dilemma whether to stay or to go, Dev develops a schizophrenic attitude towards England. He is tormented to face "a tumult inside him, a growing bewilderment, a kind of schizophrenia that wakes him in the middle of the night and shadows him by day." (85)

In the novel, the case of a Pakistani immigrant presents the example of marginal man. He recalls: "My religion forbids me to drink or smoke or touch a woman, but here, in this country, what am I to do? I also do the things I see other men doing." (22) It is evident that he lives physically in one set of reference but mentally associates himself to another set of reference. Adit, too, feels himself as a "stranger, a non-belonger" (184) at certain stage of his stay in England.

Marriage as assimilation of races is a recurrent motif in immigrant fiction of the Third World and generally, in such cases the partners are "native protagonist and the white woman in his life."<sup>20</sup> Invariably, however, such ideal relationships do not endure. "What begins in great passion, love, enchantment, usually wanes into disaffection, estrangement, separation."<sup>21</sup> In this respect the case of *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is slightly different. The representative couple in the novel are Sarah and Adit. When Adit decides to return to India Sarah decides to accompany her husband, unlike her counterpart in a novel like *The Serpent and the Rope*. But her racial consciousness about India creates a sense of fear and annihilation also within her. She felt herself: "fading, fading—like a creature in *Alice in Wonderland*, in a dream world that bordered on nightmare." (226)

At long last, Sarah is able to realize the demand of her situation and mentally prepares herself to relegate her cultural identity in the background, in order to get accommodated in the new culture. This creates a natural anxiety in her. The novel lastly leaves an impression of doubt and uncertainty about the new role Sarah is expected to perform. "Sarah represents, in a sense, all immigrant's wives who

have their own problems of adjustment when placed in the contexts of cultures at loggerheads."<sup>22</sup> It has been rightly suggested that "Sarah's dual estrangement comes not from social transformation within her society but from a cross-cultural catalysis of her own choice."<sup>23</sup>

In *Bye-Bye Blackbird* immigrant experience is not as conclusive as in a novel like *The Nowhere Man*, which suggests "the impossibility of cultural transplant, even in the most favourable circumstances."<sup>24</sup> In the case of Adit, we see that hypnotic charm of English wife and the hangover of English education being over, he is fortunately able to extricate himself from the quagmire of immigrant situation and returns back to his homeland. But there are not many immigrants as lucky as him. The number of easy victims continue to rise with the passage of time. The novelist observes: "England had left Adit drop and fall away as if she had done with him or realized that he had done with her, and caught and enmeshed his friend Dev." (228-29) The same pattern is repeated over and over again.

## NOTES

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## Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca*: A Novel of Spiritual Quest

A.K. BACHCHAN

Anita Desai is a novelist who occupies a distinct and distinctive place in the realm of contemporary Indian English fiction. Her *Journey to Ithaca* is a novel about the soul's journey to enlightenment and awakening. Unlike E.M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*, this novel is her assertive statement that the truth, the enlightenment and the totality of an all-encompassing spirituality is in the heart of India. *Journey to Ithaca* is a journey where Ithaca ceases to be a specific place. Ithaca is the symbol of that un-failing beacon which eternally calls man to wander, to be in quest of spiritual truth, heart's truth, a quest for reaching one's homeland, his inner self. The novel is about one's journey within oneself, a journey which mostly ends in India only because India is the only country which recognizes the significance of the journey within.

### II

*Journey to Ithaca* deals with the adventures of three characters: Matteo, Sophie and the mysterious mother. Anita Desai's inclusion of Prologue in the novel helps her disclose the inner human motives for higher values of life. The early life of the hero, Matteo, an Italian, is made clear to us in the Prologue. To Matteo, the school was like "a theorem set within a larger theorem." (17) Since his childhood, he has been deeply influenced by his tutor Fabian who opened his mind by giving him the book, *The Journey to the East*. The school life "baffled him like the geometry and the algebra." (17) He does not improve in school and ultimately he is withdrawn from there and an English tutor is engaged who would prepare Matteo for examination at home. His father seems to be quite sympathetic but his mother is rigid and dominating. Matteo's tutor provides him

books which contain poems dealing with transcendental experiences and poems from Shelley and Blake. Stories from Siddhartha and experiences from various visits to Italian churches and gardens open his mind to truths and perceptions which are normally dismissed as something wild and irrelevant. Matteo's father is pampering him only in the hope that he will be able to join his silk business with his uncle Phillipio and shine in banking profession. But he has different ideas and is not quite sure what he will ultimately do. Matteo's reading of *Journey to the East* moulds his mind towards the philosophy of Vedanta. In the Prologue, written in flashback, we get the background of Matteo and Sophie and their eventual marriage in spite of incompatibility between their temperaments and initial parental objections. There is a long gap between Matteo and his wife, Sophie and their minds operate at different wavelengths. Even their children do not share their mother's view and they form a separate group.

Chapter One of the novel reveals Matteo and Sophie's departure from Italy to India, their apparent contradictions for the East-West encounters, their experiences of the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad, their arrival at an ashram in Bihar and their aversion towards the activities of the ashram. Matteo and Sophie follow divergent paths. Matteo makes his journey in search of luminosity in the heart of his Ithaca—the mystery that is in India, the India which alone is aware of that mystery. In reply to Sophie's question—"I want to know why we are here"—Matteo's answer is that it is only in India that it is possible to understand the mystery: 'over there people don't even know there is a mystery. . . . There are people—great sages—to guide you. I need such a person.' (55) Sophie, on the other hand, wants to leave the place as quickly as possible. She feels suffocated and always complains against the unsavoury atmosphere of the ashram. Matteo wants to stay in the ashram till the mother's death. The quarrel between Matteo and Sophie continues. Matteo is determined to follow the path of joy as against the path of pleasure. For Sophie, the path of joy and the path of pleasure are the same. Anita Desai comments:

It was true, though: from the beginning it had been as though there were a design, a pattern, to their wanderings. At every turn they seemed to be shown signs, given directions, drawn further, taken deeper. Of that Matteo was convinced, and he never ceased to try and convince the scoffing Sophie. (32)

Sophie revolts and quits the ashram and it is indicated in terms of trivia such as a visit to a cinema or to a restaurant for a smoke and drink or to have snacks, sandwiches and chips. They get a chance when the pilgrims are moving for a trip to a holy shrine in Maharashtra. There is another round of heated argument between them and it reveals Sophie's frustration, which is matched by Matteo's determination to stay in India. To Sophie, all journeys to India mean frustration and disappointment but to Matteo, his determination to stay in India is equally strong: "To find India, to understand India and the mystery that is at the heart of India." (54) Sophie reveals that for her India means a series of personal disappointments, particularly the death of a child had a traumatic effect: "It was the woman with the child; she had placed him on a fold of her sari spread on the ground, and he was terribly still. The woman was not looking at him or at anyone; she held her head in her hands and stared at the ground." (53-54) Desai observes: "The pilgrimage through India became suffused with the rich and aromatic haze of marijuana, it cling to her and became her clothing. It penetrated her and became her being." (55)

To Sophie, the trip to holy shrine also failed and the stories of yogis performing different miracles did not impress and she could not find any sign of meditative, transcendental powers as she was hectorred in different ashrams and temples by brokers and booksellers, discussing the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo or the creed of *Bhagwad Gita* as expounded by Yogi Paramhans. She continued her analysis of various elements or complained of unhygienic conditions like other foreign tourists. She starts enjoying the smoke of marijuana and the drinks.

Once again Matteo is joined by Sophie who starts another journey to another ashram in Bihar. Matteo is easily accepted there but Sophie is spotted as the culprit, breaking and bending every rule of

the ashram. She occasionally tries to mend herself, half-hearted. Her basic approach was wrong from the beginning. Anita Desai comments on the widening gulf: "They had come to India together, to share an adventure: they would go through it together, stay together, recover their unique and essential love." (73-74)

On the other hand, Matteo begins to learn Sanskrit here. Sophie begins to bother about the fleas, the heat of the sun and ends up by crying. She faces various kinds of scrabs and boils as a result into eruption of disease and at last she decides to quit the place on her own.

In Chapter two there is a reference to Matteo's illness and a row between Matteo and Sophie. Sophie tries to wean him away from the path of attachment whereas Matteo expresses a kind of jubilation after reading books like *The Journey to the East* and Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*. When Sophie discovers she is pregnant, she faces enormous hostility, overhearing women disciples condemning her sexuality: "What do they think, that they can come here and live like animals in our ashram?" (78) Sophie wishes to leave the place for another one on a mountain of the Himalayan region for her safe delivery. Both Sophie and Matteo come to an ashram in the Himalayan region on the advice of the doctor. Matteo comes across a beautiful young woman and he is surprised by the way she spoke: "She was speaking very slowly and clearly, enunciating each word very precisely, almost as if it were a lesson in elocution, but it took Matteo sometime to make out that she spoke in English, her voice and accent sounded so Indian, in its pronunciation of ds and ts, its rolled rs and heavy emphasis on the first syllables. Her deeply wrinkled skin was also dark as an Indian's and he took her to be one of the older, perhaps the oldest devotee." (92)

She is known as the Mother and Sophie suspects the spiritual authority of the Mother: "It sounds as if she gets up on a stage and hypnotizes you all like some magician." (103) She has a charm in her voice and her presentation of natural things is quite unique. While Matteo is charmed with her performance, Sophie is unmoved and the other listeners are overwhelmed at the end of her discourse. While Matteo is quite happy and reverential in the ashram under the benign presence of the Mother, Sophie continues to have her reser-

ventions. Even the life in the Abode of Bliss does not inspire her; she begins to find fault with Matteo's search for higher way of life: "She had not thought she wished to enter it or explore it but Matteo's disappearance was so profound that her uneasiness grew. Yet she could not give up her conviction that she could draw him away and back to her, or the conviction that she must." (121)

Sophie with her womanly emotions becomes jealous of the Mother and regards that "The ashram as an earthly paradise, presided over by a benign deity—she knew better than to believe that. For her the Mother was a monster spider who had spun this web to catch these silly flies." (121)

She considers the Mother as a large mother spider in whose web are caught small flies like Matteo to be engulfed and destroyed forever. Matteo says: "She teaches us to work without desiring the fruit from that work. Isn't that a higher way of life?" But Sophie's Eurocentric points of view prevent her from comprehending the essential nature of bliss. For her, "work is work and should bear fruit. . . . If it doesn't bear fruit, it does not serve its purpose." (120) For Sophie, the concept is materialistic/individualistic—work is for material ends and should have personal goals to fulfill. Matteo is in the process of learning to drown his ego, to allow experiences to happen, to be at the receiving end, to appreciate the graces of total surrender. He gradually learns to stop struggling, to allow the Master to pick him up and carry him. The Mother guides him: "You know the Saint Ramkrishna said we should be like kittens—allow the master to pick you up and carry you. Don't struggle, don't resist. The Master, the Mother—they are the mother cats, they will carry you, the kittens." (100)

Sophie is determined to take Matteo away, she tries her best to break the spell of the Mother. The jealousy of a woman makes Sophie enquire all about the past of the Mother. However, she is warned by Matteo against this venture. She tells him that the Mother was a Muslim, an Egyptian, a professional dancer and then adds up the strings together to build a myth of a man-woman relationship between the Mother and her Master, the departed Guru Prem Krishna. The Mother renounced family life because of an unfortunate accident in her life. Sophie begins to concentrate on her two

children, especially her new-born infant, "almost guarding it like a lioness absorbed in her cub." (133) She becomes rebellious against her husband and leaves him and comes back to Italy to her parents. There, she tries to compensate the absence of Matteo in the company of Paolo, whom she meets there in a party. He also finds her quite fascinating. Sophie still experiences the overpowering effect of the Matteo-consciousness on her: "Her life with Matteo had spoilt her for life with men like this Paolo; it was no longer possible." (148)

Anita Desai, thus, upholds the sanctity of the relations between husband and wife. In Italy also, Sophie is rather helpless and restless because her parents try to inculcate virtues and rituals of Roman Catholicism. When she gets the news of Matteo's illness, she makes one more airdash to India which is quite ironical, to say the least. Earlier she had made up her mind that she would not return to India in future and she would stay with her children.

### III

In Chapter three Sophie wants to know about the real person behind the legend. After Matteo's warning, she becomes all the more rigid and determined: "I will break that spell, she went on, that stone—and I will make you see, see her, what she is." (154)

She instinctively decides to embark on her own journey to Ithaca, to search out the truth of the Mother's past, to unravel her mystery and if possible to explode the myth of this legend turned enlightened embodiment of truth and bliss: "I must find whatever there is to find. . . . It is the only way I will ever be able to understand you, what you have done to yourself." (153)

Sophie continues her journey through Mediterranean, Alexandria, Cairo, Paris, Venice, and New York to India, that she reaches her Ithaca, her truth, her enlightenment, it is ultimately a journey within, a real pilgrimage into the heart of the beacon, a meaningful journey, a sojourn into the awakened awareness of the real face of India. Sophie finally discovers the Mother's past life as an infatuated young girl, Laila. In her childhood Laila too, fails the expectations of her teacher-scholar parents as Matteo fails to live up to the standards and ideals of his Italian parents. Alma, a woman of French

origin waits at home for the late uncertain return of Laila, her daughter who may come back home at night with bare legs and tattered dress, but with daisies and alyssum stuck in her hair. Like Matteo, Laila too, considers the home an inadequate shelter, it is like a prison trapping her freedom. "That is how I feel here—a prisoner," (159) says Laila, the eternal rebel, who wants to be free and her means of freedom is visualized through dance, "I want to dance . . . then I would be free." Laila too, like Matteo, feels oppressed when she is sent to school at Cairo in the American College for Girls: "Laila saw a way of learning that had no opening to debate, discussion, doubt or argument." (163) Laila, a free soul cannot be stuck for long: "She was drawn first in one direction, then another, wherever she saw passion taken to its extreme, whether celebratory or ascetic." (167)

Laila completes her schooling. Her parents decide to send her to Paris to her French aunt. While the ship starts sailing and her parents are waving her a bon voyage, Laila unpins her Egyptian kerchief, pulls it off her head and leaves it to the care of the sea breeze as a symbolic gesture of freedom. In this way Laila drowns her past, her Egyptian roots, her unbiblical nexus and seems to be free, a woman among the elements of the universe. At Paris, Laila is equally misfit and a terrible rebel in her aunt's house. Once Laila is asked to eat meat, she refuses it and tells her cousins: "I am a vegetarian. No one will make me eat the flesh of slaughtered animals." (178)

The black panther in Paris and the black leopard in Bihar symbolically place Sophie and Laila on the same plane, though Sophie has her European moorings, on an unconscious level she too, like Laila, is a spiritual pilgrim. What Laila does consciously, Sophie does unconsciously. Both seek freedom from institutionalism which is the essential precondition for a searcher of truth and enlightenment.

In Paris, Laila seems to have found the image of her Ithaca: "a strange statue of some dark metal that struck a dancer's pose within a circle of flames." (187) Throughout the novel, all the journeymen or women to Ithaca encounter the fake images of truth. Laila too in her ignorance encounters a fake image of Krishna equating the

dancer under the mask of the Lord himself. She desperately pleads to the dancer/Krishna to adopt her, train her and make her an Indian dancer, hoping to dance the Krishna Lila and in her dance offer herself to the real Krishna. She hopes that through this dance she can find her Ithaca, her enlightenment. Laila shocks her aunt by refusing to go to church. She has symbolically a psychic bondage with Sophie who rejects Christianity. It is apt for Sophie to journey through the past in search of the truth about Laila, the Mother Goddess, in the north of India. For Laila, the truth lies in India and it is in India, through the means of dance, would she arrive at her Ithaca, her enlightenment. She runs after the dancer Krishna in the hope of going back to India and find her spirit's moorings. Ultimately she knows that the dancer-Krishna cannot be her real Ithaca. Ithaca exists elsewhere, but of course in India. The fake Krishna brings her to a dingy flat in Bombay amid filth and squalor with crows cawing out the poise of her mind. She falls ill, hospitalized for treatment and cure of hepatitis. Matteo was also infected by the same disease. This is symbolic, of course. Matteo becomes the holy man after recovery, and it is from the hospital that Laila finds the way to her enlightenment. She moves on a journey to the north amid the mountains, symbolizing spiritual heights, to Guru Prem-Krishna's ashram. It is remarkable that while Laila received her spiritual umbrella at Prem-Krishna's feet on a night tossed by torrential rains, Sophie too comes to the Mother's ashram on an equally tempestuous night. The two spiritual searchers are symbolically equated.

In Chapter four we come to know about the end of Sophie's search and discovery, which she makes in an interview with Krishna. At first Krishna is not willing to talk about Laila, it is only because of Sophie who rouses his curiosity by telling him that Laila, the famous dancer is called the Mother, he cooperates. He finally says that it was he who acted as a guardian, a father, a teacher and took her to different parts of the world for performing dance. In India she runs after gurus and expresses a desire to lead a spiritual life. Sophie also obtains some papers, photos, reviews and posters. Krishna reveals in a tone of bitterness: "Then she went away—to that guru to that ashram. She did not want the discipline, the struggle, the sadhna of being a dancer, she ran away." (271)

Sophie discovers Laila's diary in which her journey to her Ithaca is recorded. So, Sophie's actual journey to Ithaca begins from India, after her second visit and ends in India with revelations from Mother's diary which she, after her own journey's end, sends to Krishnaji for his perusal. Sophie finds the truth about the Mother and she finally goes back to the Mother's ashram.

#### IV

At the end of the novel we come to learn about the Mother's death. Matteo too has left for an unknown place. The Mother's journey to Ithaca ends in Prem-Krishnaji, Sophie's journey to Ithaca ends with her discovery of the Mother's past but it is Matteo's journey to Ithaca that actually is on. Matteo's final journey begins from the Mother's ashram. He becomes a pilgrim of eternity. Sophie decides to follow her husband to his chosen path. At the end of the novel, Giacomo, the son of Matteo, has a strange vision: "I saw my father . . . in the garden." (298) Everyone disagrees and even his sister Isabel quarrels, but he insists that he is not telling a lie and he gives a detailed account of the vision. His communication with the ghost of his father almost resembles the portrait of Christ in a church.

*Journey to Ithaca* presents a transcendental vision where that journey acquires a symbolical undertone and the spiritual quest theme culminates into a transcendental experience, which is quite difficult to communicate in ordinary words.

#### NOTE

1. Anita Desai, *Journey To Ithaca* (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1996).

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## Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*: A Strange Odyssey of Time and Mystery

GAJENDRA KUMAR

**A**mitav Ghosh is one of the most popular names in today's Indian English fiction writing. Whether it is *The Calcutta Chromosome* or *The Countdown*, it arrests the critical attention of the people in India as well as abroad. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a distinctive novel in the sense that it takes up the issue of Malaria and Mystery. In everyday life of India thousands of people die of Malaria disease but it has been for the first time presented in the fictive form by the creative writer. The author in this novel deals with the subject of the malarial fever amalgamating it with mysticism and mystery, supernatural and superstition, considering it the philosophy of Science and counter-science. The novelist argues:

Now let's say there was something like science and counter-science? Thinking of it in the abstract, wouldn't you say that the first principle of a functioning counter-science would have to be secrecy? The way I see it, wouldn't just have to be secretive about what it did (it couldn't hope to beat the scientists at the game anyway); it would have to be secretive in what it did. (88)

Thematically Amitav Ghosh articulates secrecy, mystery and juxtaposes knowledge and comes across what he terms conventional knowledge." The central character of the novel, Murugan, explains the intricacy of the subject matter. He says:

Maybe this other team started with the ideas that knowledge is self-contradictory; maybe they believed that to know something is to change it, therefore in knowing something, you've already changed what you think you know so you don't know it at all: you only know its history. Maybe they thought that knowledge couldn't begin without acknowledging the impossibility of knowledge. (88)

Murugan, the nucleus of the novel, a scientist has all command over the Malarial fever and the findings of Ronald Ross, a Nobel Laureate. He narrates the story to Antar, the Egyptian technocrat who too enjoys the company of Murugan in the same New York's Life Watch with his computer AVA. The texture of the novel has been woven in a topsy-turvy manner which focuses the skilful effort of Murugan's play with the buttons on AVA. Everything happens like cinematography and Antar watches it like a film. Though everything is discussed in the twenty-first century but the scientific methodology of the discourse is altogether new one. The novel opens with the episode of the 21st century in Antar's flat in New York with the appearance of ID card on AVA's screen that demonstrates its system. This kind of computer has its own system for self-advancement. The novelist artistically displays this system of forthcoming era: "Anything she didn't recognize she'd take apart on screen, producing microscopic structural analyses, spinning the images around and around, tumbling them over, resting them on their side, producing ever greater refinements of details." (3-4) Again the novelist says:

She had been programmed to hunt out real-time information, and that was what she was determined to get. Once she'd wrung the last, meaningless detail out of him, she'd give the object on her screen, final, spin, with a bizarrely human smugness, before propelling it into the horizonless limbo of her memory. (4)

This aforesaid statement purports the moods and moments of the novel and describes the panoramic details which became apparent to Antar. It has been made clear by Murugan that the same events occurred earlier in 1995 in Calcutta and hundred years ago in Calcutta and Hyderabad. The novelist here makes a creative use of time through computer system in the same way as H.G. Wells does in "Time Machine" to move in time—past, present and future. From the readers' point of view it is the past of the 19th century, the contemporary time of August 1995 and the forthcoming time, which weave the centrality of the novel. The novelist has explored the philosophy of time divided between narrated time and narrational

time. Amitav Ghosh tries to delve into the complexity of time theory which can be understood by the English theoreticians.

Nicholas Berdyaev's theory of time is akin to Bergson's concept of time. Berdyaev explores the three fundamental categories—cosmic, historical and existential—to describe time history in literature. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a befitting example of this classification made by Berdyaev. Whatever way time is classified, as conceptual or perceptual as *chronos* or *kairos*, its paramount significance to the creative writer and his art is unavoidable. Vance Bourjaily rightly pinpoints that "the structure of the novel comes from how you decide to handle time."<sup>2</sup> In fact, time leads to certain developments in a causal sequence, culminating in a particular result: What is stressed here is that events unfold in a causal order and one thing leads to another as in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Retrospective time can be analyzed in Kierkegaard's maxim, "Life can only be lived forward and understood backward."<sup>3</sup> Here, the character momentarily steps out of the flux of time, considers his past and often changes his complete life-style. The novelist wittingly shuffles time in such a way that a reader often loses track of all time references. There is a dialectical relationship between clock time and psychological time with no before and after connections. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a novel in which poly temporal time-scheme has been employed. In the poly temporal time-schemes there is a constant shift from past to present to future. Connections of time and space are displaced by a more fundamental search for axiological connections. Values become extra-temporal and clock-time is subjugated to the 'inner experience of time. Lukacs says, "time is profoundly ambiguous in nature, a force both life-giving and life-destroying . . . is also the very fabric of life for reader as well as for the hero the very substance of experience."<sup>4</sup>

Antar after the sincere speculation of two hours over Murugan's studies and experience of two days in Calcutta of the 19th century comes to unfold the hidden mystery of the events. The perusal of the text crystallizes this fact that the story has been conceived at three levels of time through AVA. Theologically the novelist peeps into the oriental philosophy of religion, birth and rebirth, transposition and transcendence that is very akin to dramatic satisfaction. In the

light of scientific discovery of Ronald Ross, the novelist depicts the supernatural power of Mangala, a secretary to D.D. Cunningham. She is considered to be a goddess incarnate who suggests a cure for siphilis. She too has the potency of transcending life beyond life. The contextual analysis of the letter of Farley conveys the two interesting parallel events in relation to Mangala in 1893. Farley being a scientist does not believe in rituals performed by Mangala so he warns the common people and exposes the false belief of the lady. Simultaneously he watches the development very curiously. Later he switches over to his own job to see 'the transformations that Laveran described.' He studies the slides smeared with the dying pigeon's blood. Then, "he saw Laveran's rods appear, hundreds of them, tiny cylindrical things, with their pointed penetrating heads piercing the blood miasma." (128)

In fact, new invention was made by his teammates exclusively meant for the future time. Farley's knowledge about Mangala brought his doom. He is promised by Mangala through the young toy assistant to reveal everything. If I would but accompany him to his birthplace, fortunately the place of which he spoke is not far from the location of my clinic. We are to leave tomorrow." (129) Elijah Farley did not reach his destination, he disappeared in the midst of his journey; never appeared again. It has been discovered by the police that he had indeed boarded the train at Sealdah, as scheduled but had disappeared before his destination—a remote rarely used station called Renupur, in severe monsoon weather. Later it was reported that a young man had been seen carrying his luggage. It has been said that his knowledge for Mangala proved to be fatal for him. The letter which has been written by Farley seems to be instrumental for Murugan in constructing the plot of encounter between Farley and Mangala and the disappearance of Farley. Now, there remains nothing about Farley's knowledge and the existence of that letter. The author creates mystery about Farley's intelligence and his disappearance. In the same manner, another incident takes place in 1995. Once Sonali comes out to locate the whereabouts of Roman Haldar at Robinson street. The novelist says:

She caught a glimpse of tops of dozens of heads, some male, some female, young and old, packed in close together. Their faces were obscured by the smoke and flickering firelight. (139)

Roman Haldar's and Mrs. Arafounian's bodies are set for the ritual performance. Roman Haldar decides to meet Sonali during evening hour but all of a sudden he disappears. According to the design of the novel, the novelist does not think necessary to explore his sudden demise or what he calls, disappearance. Both the events occur at the difference of hundred years accentuate the intricacy and mystification of the plot. In case of Farley his knowledge has been kept unknown which is proved to be decisive in his disappearance—death. Even in relation to Haldar, nothing has been chalked out barring the incident of mysterious rituals which are performed in Calcutta in 1995 in the name of some special knowledge of transcendence. Afterwards, the novelist again weaves a story of a stationmaster who is murdered at Renupur (the place where Farley disappeared in 1894) on a moonless night by Laakhan. In the year of 1933, Phulboni fortunately saves himself from the train accident. Same is the case in 1895 when Grigson had hardly saved himself. Both the incidents took place in the same circumstances and the persons, who were trying to kill them, were not recognized. Phulboni himself narrates Laakhan, the ghost trains which he visualized and also the ghost-station master whom he encounters. In the heart of the novel Lutchman, Laakhan, Lucky of the 19th, the 20th and the 21st centuries appear and disappear. As a matter of fact, these characters are not even constructed or projected as multifaceted characters. Stylistically, the organization of the novel is something unique. Murugan correlates the same boy who once comes at the doorstep of Urmila with fish wrapped in papers as Laakhan. The novelist finds a common feature in connection with all these boys that they have a deformed thumb. The novel after all does not ensure any physical or intellectual improvisation.

Owing to these parallel developments of the plot, the mystery of the novel gradually becomes acute and no body can say convincingly as to which direction the novel is moving ahead. In all the mystery novels the novelists make a successful attempt to arrive at the resolution. At last the AVA presents Murugan, Urmila and Son-

ali going towards the station Sealdah, where they come to know that Phulboni and Mrs. Arnouin have left the venue. Murugan too has been found, later, missing from here. Everything has been left to the imagination of the reader. This is Sealdah station from where everyone has been disappearing. At the moment they are going towards the station in 1995 while Urmila utters that she would protect them and take them across and the next movement, Antar listening sounds, getting similarity between Tara and Urmila and Maria and Sonali, speaking to him, as if they were accompanying him in his room, "a voice whispering in his ear, 'keep watching' we've here, we are all with you." (256)

There are so many queries and questions which lurk in the void. No body argues from what he is to be saved and where he has to go across. The novelist explains everything in the galaxy of his theory of counter-science and secrecy and contradictions of knowledge. He himself points out "what I'm really talking about is technology for inter-personal transference." (90) This technology is considered to be 'The Calcutta Chromosome.' "Herein we find the echoes of the *Bhagvad Gita*, about body being a sort of garment to be discarded when it turns old and torn to acquire a new, fresh garment for the soul. The end result of the application of this theory to the characters in the novel is far from satisfactory."<sup>5</sup> Amitav Ghosh in his unconvincing attempt scrutinizes the topical issue of the recurrence of the malarial fever and the theory of time and space. The Edwardian novel was felt to neglect psychological for physical detail and to run in the current of time and space without diving deep into the infinite potentiality of any one moment. Whatever is most valuable in modern/postmodern fiction writing is a meditation on the nature of time, on the mystery of memory and personality. The meeting of the past and present defining differences as well as similarities is crucial to the novel. The narrative moves up and down through layers of time. The whole pattern is 'a marriage of past and present with the flying multiplicity of the future racing towards ones.

No doubt, this is a readable novel but it does not create a long-lasting impact. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly says: "To promise them out one would have to read the novel a second time."<sup>6</sup> Some passages remarkably evoke the Phulboni episode told by Urmila and

Phulboni's anguished cry for the goddess of silence. Calcutta has been presented a city of love and laughter unlike Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*. This city seems to be craving for the goddess of silence. The writer through his gallery of characters creates thrill in the reader's mind but the use of new technology through which characters appear and disappear do not give us an impression of the work of literary heavy-weight.

## NOTES

1. Amitav Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1996).
2. Vance Bourjaely, "A certain kind of work," in *Afterwards*, ed. Thomas McCormack, qtd. Higdon, p. 3
3. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
4. Frederick Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (New Jersey, 1971), p. 117.
5. Indira Bhatt, "Disappearances and Discovery: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*," *50 Years of Indian Writing*, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: IAES, 1999), p. 49.
6. Meenakshi Mukherjee, Review in *India Today*, May 15, 1996.

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## Postcolonial Arguments in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

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Even though the word 'Postcolonial' gives rise to different shades of meaning, one can still claim a novelist to be postcolonial for the simple reason that she is born in a politically independent country. My idea is to read Shashi Deshpande having in mind the arguments of the three major postcolonial critics—Said Bhabha and Spivak—as well as those of others who take part in postcolonial discourse. When we see socio-cultural and economic specificities in the world of Shashi Deshpande, we find the touch of 'postcolonial' argument in her novel. However, Deshpande, unlike many other postcolonial novelists, refuses to dwell on the issues of nationalism, caste and hybrid cultures. Through a case of selective reading of the works of Said, Bhabha and Spivak, I have tried to set the context for a discussion of the novels of Shashi Deshpande. I focus mainly on Said's idea of contrapuntal analysis, Bhabha's concept of hybrid and ambivalent cultures and Spivak's concept of the "gendered subaltern."

To begin with, Shashi Deshpande can be considered a postcolonial novelist because she is writing in post-Independence India. Her narrative mode of social realism and her avowed interest in limiting herself to small social landscapes especially that of either joint family or a nuclear family her preference for a narrator who uses the first person narration, the absence of issues which directly deal with questions regarding nation, imperialism, neocolonialism or the conflicts and differences between cultures could act as resisting blocks in claiming her to be either postcolonial or postmodern.

Said suggests that the canons of the center should be read contrapuntally with the works coming from the margin. Thus the binary exists even though Said's vision for the future is more utopian in

nature. In a very strange way, the 'here' and the 'there' that Said talks of in the colonial situation can be seen in the world of the female protagonists of Deshpande too. Once again one feels the presence of such concepts as 'we' and 'they.' However these two terms are not arranged in a hierarchical manner and 'we' is further reduced to 'I' of the narrator. Moreover, in her novels, the influence of one strong colonial institution, namely English literature, can be clearly felt. This strengthens, on the one hand, Said's argument that any culture represents a culture of innumerable borrowings but, on the other hand, the novels themselves are demonstrations of the specificity of culture in the life of a middle-class educated woman coming from a particular caste and religious background.

Deshpande's novels reveal the inability of the woman to speak and the positive movement is always the movement towards speech, towards the breaking of 'that long silence.' We could link these female characters with the statement of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that the subaltern cannot speak.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the first novel by Shashi Deshpande explores the myth of man's unquestionable superiority. Deshpande focuses on the world of Indian women in the context of modern Indian society. Unable to expel traditional patriarchal norms of society, these women characters attempt to realize and preserve their identity not only as woman but also as human beings. The novel focuses on woman's awareness of her predicament, her wanting to be recognized as a person than as a woman and her wanting to have an independent social image, Saru's feminist reactions date back to her childhood, when she had to contend with sexist discrimination at home. Her mother loves her brother but hates her. And when he is drowned, she blames her: 'You 'killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?' This is the plight of not only Saru but millions who are born girls. The fault lies with their gender, not with them. It brings in to focus the concepts of gender which are man-made.

Saru breaks the umbilical chord and leaves home. This is her first public defiance of the patriarchal power system. Saru's defiance is further expressed, when she becomes economically independent and marries of her own choice. The institution of home,

which is supposed to foster the growth of a child, robs the woman of her right of respectability and individuality. She encounters Manohar and falls in love with him. Saru's marriage with Manohar is a means to get away from her mother and her home. Saru is disappointed with her married life. Marriage, the promised end in a traditional society, in feminist fiction becomes only another enclosure that restricts the movements towards autonomy and self-realization.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* reacts against the traditional concept that everything in a girl's life 'is shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male.' Saru became a famous doctor and he turned out to be simply a lecturer. This made her socially and economically his superior.

The simmering inferiority complex of Manu burst out the day a girl had come to interview her, who asked Manu: 'How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?' Manu's male ego is hurt. His masculinity asserts itself through nocturnal sexual assaults upon Saru. Since that day Manu became a sadist: the benevolent, cheerful husband by day turns a lecherous, libidinous rapist at night.

P. Ramamoorthi writes, "woman, in order to achieve her freedom, seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. She resents the role of a daughter and looks forward to the role of wife, the hope that her new role will help in winning their freedom." Saru could not get the freedom, which she desired from her marriage: she compromised with the situation.

Reading the novel contrapuntally, where the postcolonial arguments are juxtaposed with these interpretations, one gains a different perspective into the novel. I wish to read Saru, not as a rebellious daughter who is searching for her self-identity, for her freedom, not as an egoist who cannot understand the inferiority complex of her husband, not as the guilty sister who was responsible for the death of her brother, not as a daughter who was never forgiven by the mother, not as a traveller who goes on to a spiritual quest that ends in no resolution, but as a woman who possesses '[w]hite, soft and clean' hands in the beginning of the narration and 'roughened' palms towards its conclusion.

What is of significance to this reading is that Saru recognizes domestic servant Janakibai as the one who looks after all of them; it is because of her that she could possess white, soft and clean hands. Janakibai is the slum dweller, who comes to Saru's house to look after the children and to look after all of them. This is not one Janakibai; there are many Janakibais in our country. She is the representative of all the women who belong to this section of the working women category, who has no job security whatsoever. The existence of these marginal figures makes it possible for many women to articulate about the condition of woman.

I only wish to show that while recognizing the lasting presence of colonialism, one has to constantly remind oneself of the existence of minor configuration of power structures the single metaphor 'woman' even when used in a context where generally woman is marginalized as in a patriarchal society like India, defies generalization. It is only by being aware of the different kinds of women that we could begin to talk about the postcolonial woman. The notion of margin is not anymore the second component of the binary centre-margin; Deshpande's marginal comments about these figures must be read in terms of Spivak's understanding of the term 'margin'—it is the place for the arguments, 'the place for the critical moment.'

Saru's mother occupies the position of being the marginal. Saru's father supports his daughter and allows her to go to Bombay in order to study medicine. Once again we see how formal education is identified, at least to some extent, with liberation, with breaking the bonds of parental house. Saru's mother indicates the postponement of her daughter's marriage, which in turn suggests non-fulfillment of a responsibility. Saru lives in a hostel in Bombay and studies medicine. This moment can be read in term of liberation for a young woman which is simultaneously bound with the "restricting internalization of phallocracy," to borrow Spivak's phrase, because the text contains innumerable references to the life of father and mother—a shared life marked by inequality where inequality itself is sanctioned by tradition and what is normally termed as culture.

However, the ending of the novel is not clear making it difficult for us to read any easy meaning into it. Saru faces her life once again, but the facts of life have not changed for her. Her dead

mother, her dead brother are not going to come back—to give her any kind of assurance and she has no idea that her husband Manu will ever understand if she tells him that he is the creator of nightmare in her world. Saru's stay in her father's house shows her as homebound. To use Said's distinction of 'here' and 'there' the 'here' denoted in Deshpande's novels in the 'here' of parental home.

Shashi Deshpande's novels explore the problems of women in terms of illiteracy, ideological brainwashing in patriarchal societal structures, the problem of dowry, the complexity of the issue of caste, economic status. This kind of reading will then deconstruct the assumed uniformity of Said's orientalism reminding us that the questions regarding the consolidating vision of the novelist will have to be asked in the postcolonial context too.

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## Perspectives on Postmodernism: Reading Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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**T**he *God of Small Things*, the first and the only novel written as yet by Arundhati Roy, has been able to create a tremendous academic euphoria, which has not yet subsided even after six years of its publication. Launched on a sea of hype, this literary event of the year 1997, not only initially drew a curiously paradoxical response from Indian audience, reviewers and critics but has also helped generate an industry of critical anthologies as well in the past few years. My paper, as the title suggests, seeks to attempt a postmodern reading of the novel, *The God of Small Things*. However, before attempting to read the novel as a postmodern text, it would be in the fitness of things to at least have an idea of what this elusive term 'postmodernism' is all about. The first part of my paper deals with tracing, in brief, the genealogy of the term 'postmodernism' and its various features and the next part is the analysis of those features in the novel.

### I

The term 'postmodernism,' as we know, surfaced in the Anglo-American critical discourse during the 1950s and in a very significant way in the 1960s. Even though critics like Jean Francois Lyotard, Linda Hutcheon, David Lodge etc. have tried to define 'postmodernism,' the term eludes definition so much so that "one critic's postmodernism is another critic's modernism or variant thereof."<sup>1</sup> Ihab Hassan goes to the extent of saying: "postmodernism suffers from a semantic instability. That is, no clear consensus about its meaning exists among scholars."<sup>2</sup> David Harvey, however, quotes Jean Francois Lyotard's definition of the postmodern as "incredulity towards metanarratives."<sup>3</sup>

If modernism means breaking with tradition while still retaining an individualist stance, then postmodernism may well be looked at as interrogating both tradition and individualism. Jeremy Hawthorn refers to Lyotard's treatment of the term 'postmodernism'<sup>4</sup> which refers to:

- (a) The non realist and non traditional literature and art of the post second world war period;
- (b) Literature and art which takes certain modernist characteristics to an extreme stage in the form of
  - (i) rejection of representation in favour of self-reference,
  - (ii) rejection of the sense of the work of art as an organic whole,
  - (iii) teasing of the reader for collaboration with him/her,
  - (iv) rejection of 'character' and 'plot' and,
  - (v) rejection of meaning itself as a hopeless delusion and;
- (c) Aspects of a more general human condition in the late capitalist world of the post 1950s.

Postmodernism, according to Harvey, is mimetic of certain practices social, economic, political etc.—in the societies in which it appears. (*Ibid.*, 143) It is also alleged that many postmodernists, fascinated with technology, do not reject the 'popular' as being beneath them and see publication as a strategic act than a bid for immortality. (*Ibid.*, 144) David Lodge, however, lists five techniques<sup>5</sup> which may well be said as typical of postmodernist fiction. They are:

1. *Contradiction*: "Cancels itself out as it goes along." (229)
2. *Permutation*: "Alternative narrative lines in the same text." (230)
3. *Discontinuity*: "Disrupting the continuity of his discourse by unpredictable swerves of tone, metafictional asides to the reader, blank spaces in the text, contradiction and permutation." (231)
4. *Randomness*: "According to a logic of the absurd." (235)
5. *Excess*: "Metaphoric or metonymic devices to excess and testing them to destruction." (235)

These five techniques mentioned above sum up, in essence, what a postmodernist text would be. Linda Hutcheon speaks, almost in a similar fashion, when she refers to "the political dimensions of self-reflexivity, the problematisation of self and history, and the calculated decentering of the text and audience"<sup>6</sup> in a postmodern context. In particular, she stresses that the postmodern texts "decode them-

selves by foregrounding their own contradictions." (211) In a post-modern text, there is a spirit of questioning from within.

One can say that postmodernism is not a fixed system and order but there is an abundance of multiplicity and discontinuity in a postmodernist text. In a postmodernist text, we find the distribution and circulation of the numerous forces and intensities that saturate a text. Postmodernism tends to challenge the traditional humanist belief. Reading into a postmodern framework means looking from a variety of angles e.g. as reading a text and by doing this, reading a country. Another major thrust of a postmodern text is that it employs the technique of parody where the powers and conventions of traditional forms and language are subverted; where mimetic art is challenged and changed; where centre and margin keep shifting to the extent that there is a border-blur; where reader becomes the writer and therefore rewrites; where reader is prioritized and; where both the biographic as well as the bibliographic data are inscribed in the text. In essence, postmodernism induces multiple histories, multiple ways of seeing things and does not reduce the reader to one monocentric vision.

Thus, it may do well to understand the various features of post-modernism in the backdrop of a binary structure as a turning away from modernism to *postmodernism*; from objectivity to *self-reflexivity* (looking at yourself; idea of distance between many selves); from universal to *difference* (differing and deferring); from realism to *constructivism* (instead of unmediated way of seeing the world/unadulterated sense of the word, constructivism means that whatever is *real* is constructed); from history to *historiographic perspectivism* (everything becomes different as soon as you read it, otherwise, it depends on the experience differently); from language as tools of communication to *language as tools of contamination* (contamination helps it grow, deconstruct); from truth to *blurring of that truth in fiction* (blurring of fact and fiction); from authenticity to *illegitimacy* (one never knows what is real, everything is in a process. It is a legitimate depending on the context. It is not a free flowing thing rather it is like a hall of mirrors); from presence to *absence* (Absence is still a presence. Presence is always shifting. It is not the false idea of being rather it is becoming); from proximity

to *duration*; from voice to *heteroglossia* (no monocentric romantic voice but heterogeneous ideas playing simultaneously. Nothing is one's subjective view); from linear time to *temporal shifting* (synchronistic, shifting movement of time); from product to *process*; from centralizing to *decentralizing* (moving outside of itself, there is an infinite center. Idea of moving away from one meaning); from text to *intertext* (it is not bound by the covers of a book rather the text is connected to a million other book. It is not allusion but the intersection of actual textual forces) and also to *context*; from author-centred to *textual interchange*; from the genre of purity to *border-blur* (the realization that the distinctions are arbitrarily constructed; from stable subject to a *processual* subject; from topocentric to *tropologic* (Place within the system of language/within the body of the text) and from meaning to *meming* (Meme is a unit of cultural knowledge that replicates itself in language).

## II

Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* contains all the features of postmodernism which have been delineated in the first section of the paper and very aptly fits into the scheme of a post-modern text, technically speaking, in all senses of the term. According to one interpretation, "In truth, *Small Things* has an easily summarized plot. The setting is an inland town in India's southern state of Kerala in 1969, not so much sultry as dripping with decay, disappointment, family pettiness and social calcification. The main character is Ammu, a divorcee with seven-year-old fraternal twins, who slips into a forbidden love affair just as relatives arrive from distant, admired Britain. A visitor ends up dead, and Ammu's affair leads to tragedy. There are turbulent rivers, unseasonable rains, an interesting peek into the lives of the state's Syrian Christians—a minority with plenty of residual prejudices against India's Hindus—and Big Social Issues, like caste, women's misery and communist politics. The God of Small Things, i.e. social propriety, is the novel's victor. The deity of love and happiness loses out in the end."<sup>7</sup>

What is compelling about the novel is the mode of writing, undertaken by Arundhati Roy, which works against an understanding

of the way truth, history and power circulate in her text. "The twins were too young to know that these were only history's henchmen. Sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws. Impelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear—civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness."<sup>8</sup> Concentrating on the past both as the subject of fiction and as a force of inscribing fiction, the novel traces the ways in which the writer self-consciously participates in the whole construction of the novel.

From "In a purely practical sense it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem" (32) to "Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story." (32-33) We are led to believe in the way construction of the narrative is being made plausible by the novelist. "Still, to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem is only one way of looking at it." (33) very apparently declares the self-reflexivity of the novel. This fluidity of the narrative is an important aspect of the novel. The novel is interspersed with a sense of history, with the narrative in a constant fluid condition. The narrative constantly goes back and forth into the narrative space. The entire novel appears to be a constant differing and deferring mode of presentation which is amply evident in the way the novelist is trying very self-reflexively to trace that "the bleached bones of a story," (32) "began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem" (32) is but "only one way of looking at it," (33) and "it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago," (33) mapping those thousand years with replete references to concrete historical facts, events (Marxists, British, Dutch, Vasco da Gama, Zamorin etc. [33]) and then identifying that "it all began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala. . . . That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made" (33) ultimately provides a very neat exposition of the brilliantly maneuvered differing and deferring mode of presentation.

The narrative mode of Arundhati Roy is indicated very clearly in the novel when "only the way of looking at it" (33) is discarded

and a responsibility is being thrust on the readers to adopt multi-causal multi-centric vision instead of a mono-causal mono-centric vision. This type of narrative mode provides an opportunity for the reader to collaborate with the writer in order to extract meaning out of the text. The lack of any linear narrative, the rejection of representation in favour of self-reference, rejection of the sense of the work of art as an organic whole, rejection of 'character' and 'plot' and finally rejection of meaning itself as a hopeless delusion may be annoying to some readers accustomed to reading traditional novels, but Arundhati Roy shows that whatever appears to be real turns out to be constructed and we hardly have a ready access to what really happened till the very end of the novel. The fluidity of the narrative is imprinted in the novel since the very beginning of the novel when we are told: "And now, twenty three years later their father had re-Returned Estha" (9) and the back and forth movement of the narrative exposing the non-linear progress of it is confirmed within a span of less than two pages in the novel when "After Sophie Mol's funeral, when Estha was Returned, their father sent him to a boy's school in Calcutta" (11) we relapse into the memories of Rahel. Further also, we find it when "It was the first night since she'd come that it hadn't rained. *Around now, Rahel thought, if this were Washington, I would be on my way to work. The bus ride. The streetlights. The gas fumes. The shapes of people's breath on the bulletproof glass of my cabin. The clatter of coins pushed towards me in the metal tray. The smell of money on my fingers. The punctual drunk with sober eyes who arrives exactly at ten p.m.: 'Hey, you! Black bitch! suck my dick!'*" (187) which gets back to the point when Rahel is being asked: "What are your plans? How long will you be staying? Have you decided?" (29) The calculated decentering of the text and audience, which Linda Hutcheon talks about, finds ample expression in the narrative and the novel decodes itself by foregrounding its own contradictions: "Smashed smiles lay ahead of them. But that would be later" (334); "And later become a horrible menacing, goose-bumpy word. Lay. Ter." (145) The foregrounding is further reaffirmed when it is said, "as though they knew already that for each tremor of pleasure they would pay with an equal measure of pain." (335)

A beautiful expression of the self-reflexive style of presentation is described in the novel when the three children Rahel, Estha and Sophie Mol are walking, "past the class III Airport Workers' Union token one-day hunger strike. And past the people watching the people watching the people" (150-151) and also when "Margaret Kochamma smiled and wagged her rose at him. *Ex-wife, Chacko!* Her lips formed the words, though her voice never spoke them." (142) The back and forth movement of the narrative like "it was an easy-to-understand laugh. Not like the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's laugh that Estha hadn't understood" (143) bringing out the fluidity of the narrative. "She was hemmed in by humid hips (as she would be once again, at a funeral in a yellow church) and grim eagerness" (139) provide "alternative lines in the same text." The parenthesis is not only "disrupting the continuity of [the] discourse by unpredictable swerves of tone [but provides] metafictional asides to the reader." (231) The fluidity of the narrative is evident when Rahel reminisces and the narrative seems to be going backwards (131) to the point where reminiscing stops: "Rahel handed Comrade Pillai back the sachet of photographs and tried to leave." (134) Thus, the novel seems to be evoking a culture of fragmented sensations. The element of simultaneity—of attachment and detachment, of empathy and distraction—is always a possibility in the novel as in the mingling of the past and present "so that her eyes looked like pink-veined flesh petals (grey in a black and white photograph). (135) The images of simultaneity provide a multi-centric vision of the novel:

The performances were staged by the swimming pool. While the drummers drummed and the dancers danced, hotel guests frolicked with their children in the water. While Kunti revealed her secret to Karna on the riverbank, courting couples rubbed suntan oil on each other. While fathers played sublimated sexual games with their nubile teenaged daughters, Poothana suckled young Krishna at her poisoned breast. Bhima disembowelled Dushasana and bathed Draupadi's hair in his blood. (127)

The attempts at parodying are not only an act of subversion but they serve in the novel as instruments to provide metafictional aside to

the reader foregrounding the contradictions within the structure of the novel.

Some things come with their own punishments. Like bedrooms with built-in cupboards. They would all learn more about punishments soon. That they came in different sizes. That some were so big they were like cupboards with built-in bedrooms. You could spend your whole life in them wandering through dark shelving. (115)

Thus the novel provides an access to the temporal shifting of time showing the entire exercise of the reading of the novel as a process evoking the readers to read "an absence rather than a presence" (291) thus harping on the constructivism of the novel, "a theoretical construct" (121) reflecting on the historiographic perspectivism "Zamorin's conquest of Calicut . . . to Love Laws" (33) and "That History used the back verandah to negotiate its terms and collect its dues." (199) and "That's the way he was the day History visited them in the back verandah." (190) The novel evokes heteroglossia when we are told:

The twins, weighed down by their mother's words *If it weren't for you I would be free. I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born. You're the millstones round my neck—carried nothing.* (291)

The lines have an echo elsewhere in the novel also:

'Because of you!' Ammu had screamed. 'If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn't be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! You're the millstones round my neck!' (253)

The self-referentiality of the narrative also gives a pointer towards the reading from a marginal point of view referring to mythical "Draupadi (strangely angry only with the men that won her, not the ones that staked her)." (234) Thus, the novel talks about a sense of 'margin-envy' whereby the entire novel becomes self-referential evoking the reader to become writer thus fulfilling the notions of a writerly text.<sup>10</sup> The novelist constantly harps on the idea of an infinite centre which brings forth the idea of moving away from one

meaning thus stamping out the possibility of any mono-centric vision. The 'syntactic scissoring' in the novel also aims at the post-modern characteristics of parody. The parody of 'Hello' to 'Hell-oh' in "grown-up's Hello to Margaret Kochamma and a children's Hell-oh to Sophie Mol" and from "Hello, all" to "Hello wall" (143) provides an example of the subversion attempts. The childhood pranks of the fraternal twins as above is further reflected in the form of reading backwards:

'ehT serutnevda fo eisuS lerriuqS. enO gnirps gninrom eisuS lerrjuqS ekow pu.' They showed Miss Mitten how it was possible to read both Malayalam and Madam I'm Adam backwards as well as forwards . . . she had seen Satan in their eyes. nataS in their seye. (60)

The reading backwards evokes this subversive tendency to outwit the imposed western colonial impression. This different-from-the-mirror-image is subversive of Miss Mitten's overtures in the novel who becomes the image of an abhorrent alien whose authority is being questioned. This subversion is more prominent where the novelist shows "an Ambulance that said Sacred Heart Hospital was full of a party of people on their way to a wedding." (60) This subversive style reflects the postcolonial sensibility where the centre-margin, self-other binaries become more and more focussed. It is indeed significant that this kind of reading becomes quite metaphorical in the present text as the whole vision of the novel has that of an advance-and-recoil rhythm e.g. the post colonial significance of the subversion attempt by welcoming the tourists to the Spice Coast of India to promote tourism where the entire history is embedded in the sign "that said *Kerala Tourism Development Corporation Welcomes You* with a Kathakali dancer doing a namaste. Another sign, unwobbled by a kangaroo, said: emocleW ot eht ecipS tsaoC fo aidnI." (139)

The language of the novel is mutilated to the effect that the contamination helps it grow. The author is able to create a tension with the meaningful punctuational order and italics which works as a statemental index to the critical tension which looms large over the fictional world of Arundhati Roy from "It had been the *What Will Sophie Mol Think? Week*" (36) to "swimming across was not

the problem. Taking the boat with Things in it (so that they could prepare to be prepared) was." (204). The entire novel is marked with the intermittent use of full points and question marks along with cryptic, incisive, italic statemental authorial interventions. The words, and sometimes lines, sound horrid when repeated, evoking the most sterile, machine-like reverberation of life-minus-life:

'Imagine. It's still here. I stole it. After you were Returned.' That word slipped out easily. *Returned*. As though that was what twins were meant for. To be borrowed and returned. Like library books. (156)

The use of the language also provides a whole set of binary oppositions creating the images of violence as verbal constructs. The formidable nature of violence and an elaborate account of the hidden form of violence are noticeable:

Unlike the custom of rampaging religious mobs or conquering armies running riot, that morning in the Heart of Darkness the posse of Touchable Policemen acted with economy, not frenzy. Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria. They didn't tear out his hair or burn him alive. They didn't hack off his genitals and stuff them in his mouth. They didn't rape him. Or behead him. After all, they were not battling an epidemic. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak. (309)

or pathos

*Bye, Estha. Godbless*, Ammu's mouth had said. Ammu's trying-not-to-cry mouth. (300)

Similarly use of deviations like 'Nevertheless' has been used by the novelist to expand the horizons of the readers. Everytime it is introduced in the novel, it invites the reader to put in their point of view in reading. The Derridean idea that a text is a gas and as such has so much of energy that it can create wide horizons for the readers is very well reflected in "'Nevertheless, my dear,' Chacko said in his Reading Aloud voice. 'Never.The.Less.'" (55) or the use of *locus standi*, in the sense of the swarming image of locusts out to usurp when "Chacko told Rahel and Estha that Ayemenem had no locusts stand I." It not only subverts the language eventually expanding the horizons of readers' mind by referring to the phallogocentric disdain

towards the marginalised gender but also forms a protest against the use of the non-English word *locus standi* or the use of five numbers of yes together to show the "nod in mass consent. Yesyesyesyesyesyes." (86)

The foregrounding of narrative's contradiction helps it cancel itself as it goes along. "Esthappen finished his free bottle of fizzed, lemon-flavoured fear. His lemontoolemon, too cold. Too sweet. The fizz came up his nose. He would be given another bottle soon (free, fizzed fear)" (105) shows that the reader is being prioritized and provides only as an example of teasing of the reader for collaboration with the novelist. The narrative-into-a-narrative pattern falls into the broad framework of a postmodern text which *The God of Small Things* proves to be:

And there was Captain von Clapp-Trapp. Christopher Plummer. Arrogant. Hardhearted. With a mouth like a slit. And a steelshrill police whistle. A captain with seven children. Clean children, like a packet of peppermints. He pretended not to love them, but he did. He loved them. He loved her (Julie Andrews), she loved him, they loved the children, the children loved them. They all loved each other. They were clean, white children, and their beds were soft with Ei. Der. Downs. (105)

The blurring of the past, future and present tense gives us another example of simultaneity or multiplicity:

When long bus journeys, and overnight stays at the airport, were met by love and a look of shame, small cracks appeared, which would grow and grow, and before they knew it, the Foreign Returnees would be trapped outside the History House, and have their dreams re-dreamed. (140-41)

The emergence of the text as an imminently processual subject, where the final product is not the thing which is being emphasized most, leads to the realization that the text is not bound by the covers of a book as it is connected and intersected with several other books. This textual interchange is not allusion in the strict sense of the term rather an intersection of actual textual forces. The element of intertextuality, however, provides a method of projecting a link between past and present, antiquity and contemporaneity and other binaries

eventually helping the reader delve deeper into the eclecticism of Arundhati Roy's fictional world. While "the priest with curly beards swung pots of frankincense on chains and never smiled at babies the way they did on usual Sundays (4) reminds us of Blakian disgust with the ecclesiastical authority, Keatsian "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" is contrasted in Ayemenem's world marked by "shrinking river and vacuous humming." (1) Similarly "a hot breeding month" of "May in Ayemenem" (1) immediately reminds the audience of similar references to a particular month of a calendar in the form of description of April reflected in celebration of the spring exuberance and the unitive vision of Chaucer and destructive decayed and dehumanized vision of T.S. Eliot in 'Whanne that Aprille with its showers soote' to 'April is the cruellest month' of Chaucer and Eliot's world respectively. The notion of intertextuality finds ample expression in the novel and fits it into the paradigm of a postmodern text.

Summing up, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* evokes "a culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra and promiscuous superficiality" by harping on the idea of an infinite centre which brings forth the idea of moving away from a particular, one meaning. Crucially, the novel also provides an intriguingly hermeneutic experience by withholding something significant from the reader who has to look intently into the woofings and warpings of the texture in order to attain the knowledge of that elusive 'truth.' The novel is, in fact, an example of meming instead of meaning, which has been rejected as a hopeless delusion, as so many things are gleamed through it. As a unit of cultural knowledge, meme replicates itself in language and a bunch of information is passed on to the reader evoking a big information system through which the novelist or the writer is able to communicate a whole range of thoughts from "a male chauvinist society" (57) to a patriarchal mode of appropriation of women's rights where "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" to "the Walking Backwards days torn between Loyalty and Love" (255) to the "feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear—civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness" (308)

leads to aspects of a more general human condition in the late capitalist postmodern world of today.

## NOTES

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## The Literary Representation of the Subaltern in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Subaltern studies in India and abroad have received a great impetus from the critical works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She has been over more than two decades the promoter and the avid critic of the Subaltern studies. Writing in 1987 a critical essay entitled "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's *Stanadayini*," she has laid down a strategy or a Subaltern reading of the text. The beginning of her essay best demonstrates the concern of a Subaltern reading: "A historian confronts a text of counter insurgency or gendering where the Subaltern has been represented. He unravels the text to assign a new subject-position to the Subaltern, gendered or otherwise. A teacher of literature confronts a sympathetic text where the gendered Subaltern has been represented. She unravels the text to make visible the assignment of Subject-positions."<sup>1</sup> Very much inspired by Spivak's reading of Mahasweta Devi's *Stanadayini*, I have found Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* a sympathetic text where a variety of the Subaltern has been represented. There is an attempt in the present essay to read the text to make visible the assignment of subject positions. A Subaltern reading best unravels its text where the Subalternity has been represented in terms of class, age and gender and the subject-positions have been assigned by social and cultural forces, remaining physically unseen.

Who is the Subaltern: Before 'reconstellation' of a text for Subaltern study, it is but natural to identify who is the Subaltern. Are they the 'have nots' for whom Marx calls for a revolution or are they the economically 'dispossessed' whom Gramsci calls "Subaltern," or is it a psychological state of lack and desire that Lacan defined as 'other'-ness. Perhaps in the Subaltern discourse, they all

submerge and defy any simple definition as this "The term 'Subaltern' is used to denote the entire people that is subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office, or in any other way." It is the subject position that defines subalternity. Even when it operates in terms of class, age and gender, it is more psychological than physical. The lack and deprivation, loneliness and alienation, subjugation and subordination, the resignation and silence, the resilience and neglect mark the lives of the Subaltern, even when they resist and rise up, they feel bounded and defeated by their subject positions. They have no representatives or spokesperson in the society they live in and so helplessly suffer and get marginal place or no place at all in the history and culture of which they are the essential part as human beings.

Arundhati Roy sets her novel in a small place Ayemenem near Kottayam in Kerala. This story of a Syrian Orthodox Christian family is narrated by Rahel, one of the twin-children. The whole action of the novel unfolds in flashbacks of her memory, as if riding high and low on memory lanes. Rahel and Estha are the sister and the brother 'two egg twins'. Their mother Ammu marries a Hindu business-executive but returns to her father's house, soon after the birth of her two children when her husband tries to sexually use her for his job. She and her two children live a neglected and unloved life in her parents' house. The accidental death of Sophie Mol—the daughter of Ammu's divorced brother Chacko, brings the havoc in their life. The little boy Estha is shunted back to his father, Ammu is ordered to quit the house as her secret love with the untouchable Velutha has brought ignominy to the family. Ammu's father and mother's mutual lack of understanding and their unconcern and neglect for their daughter Ammu coupled with jealousy of Pappachi's sister Baby Kochamma (who became a nun in her youth to seduce Father Mulligan but failed and lived a frustrated life with the cook Kochu Maria) had drifted her to discover her own happiness: "To love by night the man her children loved by day."<sup>3</sup> The love of divorced daughter of the prestigious family with a Paravan brings disasters in the lives of Ammu, Velutha and the small children. A false case of rape and abduction is framed against the Paravan and he is beaten to death in police custody. The twins are separated and

Ammu left to earn her livelihood. She commits suicide in desperation in a lodge all alone at the age of 31. And her unfortunate children Rahel and Estha suffer a childhood and youth of separation and alienation—resulting in Estha's silent and brooding personality and Rahel's divorce in married life. After 23 years, Estha is 'Returned' to Ayemenem as his father is going abroad with his new wife. Rahel and Estha again meet at the old house in an altogether changed scenario and try to construct their emotional self that had been put to pieces long years back, by the dominant forces of the society.

The narrative vividly pictures the agony of these Subalterns—Rahel-Estha-Ammu and Velutha. They are the victims of traditional and cultural authorities.

Rahel and Estha are the Subalterns in terms of Age. They have been assigned subject positions by those social forces who deny them the love and care of their childhood. They are two egg-twins: "In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and everything was for Ever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities." They indulge in pranks of childhood, nurture fantastic thoughts "if they'd been born on the bus, they'd have got free rides for the rest of their lives" or "if they were killed on a zebra crossing the Government would pay for their funerals. They had the definite impression that was what zebra crossings were meant for, free funerals." (3-4) At the home, they are looked with contempt by Baby Kochamma and at school punished for misbehaviour. Rahel is punished to look up 'depravity' in the Oxford Dictionary and read aloud its meaning in morning assembly at Nazareth Convent and expelled three times, first for hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors, secondly for smoking and thirdly for setting fire to her House mistress's false hair bun. "It was, they whispered to each other, as though she didn't know how to be a girl." (17) After Ammu died, Rahel moved from school to school largely ignored by Chacko and Mammachi "they provided the care (food, clothes, fees) but withdrew the concern." (15) The occasional meeting of Estha in

Abhilash Talkies where he had one to see a movie with Rahel and Baby Kochamma and Ammu with the Orangedrink Man again shows how this child of innocence and silence is put to exploitation. "The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's hand closed over Estha's. His thumbnail was long like a woman's. He moved Estha's hand up and down. First slowly, then fastly." (103) And when Estha came back, he thought, "if Ammu found out about what he had done with the Orangedrink LemonDrink Man, she'd love him less as well. Very much less." (113) Both Rahel and Estha remain fearful of losing their mother's love that is the only thing in their lives. When Sophie Mol is drowned, Estha is thought to be responsible, Margaret Kochamma seeks Estha out and slaps him three or four times, for which she later apologized in a letter to Ammu. When a decision is taken to return him to his father, much prompted by Baby Kochamma, he accepts it silently. He is one who is used by Baby Kochamma to salvage herself in the police station. He, in the name of saving Ammu is produced as a false witness to recognize Velutha. After twenty-three years when they meet as grown-ups they have lost almost everything. "But what was there to say? Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons . . . only that once again they broke love laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much." Perhaps they are the best representatives of the subalterns of Age.

Ammu's father Pappachi regarded that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, though he sent his son to Oxford for an advanced diploma. Ammu moved to Ayemenem the year her father retired from his job in Delhi. Since her father had not enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals came Ammu's way. "All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill tempered father and bitter, long suffering mother." (38-39) She got an opportunity to spend summer with a distant aunt who lived in Calcutta and Pappachi allowed her to go. There she met a pleasant looking Bengali Hindu boy of 25 who was employed as tea estates Agent. He proposed to Ammu and Ammu accepted and got wedded, when she was not responded to by her parents. When Ammu and her husband moved to Assam, she soon realized that her husband was a heavy drinker and a liar. The loneliness of tea estate

life made her husband an alcoholic and unable to work. One day, at the suggestion of his English Manager Mr. Hollick, he proposed his young wife to 'look after' his boss for the sake of his job. Ammu, fed-up with repeated drunken violence, left her husband and returned unwelcome to her parents. "To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago, except that now she had two young children and no more dreams." In her own house, she lives as a subordinate to the wishes of all. Neither father nor mother understands her needs and desires. Baby Kochamma believed that a married daughter had no position in her parents' house "As for a divorced daughter according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage." (44) They were a little wary of her: "That a woman that they had already damned, now had little left to lose, and could therefore be dangerous." (44) Even her brother Chacko tells Rahel and Estha that Ammu has no "Locusts standi" in her father's property. Chacko told Ammu, "What is yours is mine and what's is mine is also mine." (57) At night, when Ammu's children crash into bed even Kochu Maria, the maidservant would scold her children, "Tell your mother to take you to your father's house, she said—there you can break as many beds as you like. These aren't your beds. This isn't your house." (83) Ammu lives a life of subjugated family member and keeps on instructing harshly and loving sincerely her two small children, to save them from the wrath of elders in the family. After Sophie Mol's accidental death and the shocking discovery of her love for Velutha, she has broken to pieces. She is locked in her bedroom by Mammachi and Chacko. Chacko, crazed by grief, four days after Sophie Mol's funeral, would batter down, "Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body." (225) It is the same Ammu who would lovingly pack Estha's bag to his Father's house and one who would exact "Promise me you'll always love each other she'd say, as she drew her children to her." (225) And that Ammu, whom the children had asked her why she had been locked up, had answered: "Because of you! Ammu had screamed. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in a orphanage the day you were born. You're the

millstones round my neck." (253). This is the voice of Ammu the gendered subaltern. Her love for Velutha is the result of her quest of love and tenderness, denied to her since her birth as a gendered subaltern. Her hanging herself in hotel room in a lonely state and her body's exhuming by Chacko in electric crematorium speak of her wretched existence and her predicament as gendered subaltern. It is she whose bosoms are 'tapped' by the police inspector, when she goes to the police station to get the statement corrected to avoid unnecessary harassment of Velutha. But the laws are too cruel to take sides with the Paravan Velutha and his unequal love—Ammu. There seems no way for her subject position except suicide.

Velutha is true representative of class subaltern. He is a Paravan—the untouchable. His father Vellya Paapen had a glass eye sponsored by Mammachi. Apart from his carpentry skills, he is an expert in mending radios, clocks, water pumps. When Chacko resigned his job in Madras and returned to Ayemenem with a Bharat Bottle sealing machine, it was Velutha who reassembled it and set it up. He is the factory carpenter. Mammachi paid Velutha less than she would a Touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan. But "Mammachi didn't encourage him to enter the house (except when she needed something mended or installed) she thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that touchables touched. She said that it was a big step for a Paravan." (77) He is not liked by the factory workers because of his being a Paravan; it is his ability that has retained him among the touchable workers of the factory. He is especially loved by Rahel and Estha who come to his hut almost everyday for mending their boats to sail in Meenanchal river. Alienated and ignored children have found in him a good friend and coach in swimming matters. His strong built body has an attraction. Children's love and admiration of Velutha drifts their mother too towards Velutha and they meet secretly at night and indulge in love making. "The boat that Ammu would use to cross the river. To love by night the man her children loved by day." (202) There is an alarming movement, when he is seen with a red flag in a Marxist Procession; Chacko is wary of his character and the possible unrest in his own Paradise Pickles factory. The things come to the worst

when one day Vellya Paapen comes to Mammachi and weepingly narrates the love going on between his son and her daughter. Mammachi does not believe him and hurls choicest of abuses upon him, spitting around. Baby Kochamma speaks on her behalf, "When Vellya Paapen finished, Baby Kochamma turned to Mammachi, "He must go" she said, "Tonight before it goes any further. Before we are completely ruined." (257) And with this starts Velutha's unjust punishment. He is spited on his face by Mammachi. A forged F.I.R of rape and abduction of three children is lodged against him. He is beaten to death by the police and Baby Kochamma presents Estha as the eyewitness who, unknowingly, stamps the veracity of Baby Kochamma's version of police report—to save his Ammu. Velutha is put to death in police custody. "After Sophie Mol's funeral, when Ammu took them back to the police station and the Inspector chose his mangoes (tap, tap) the body had already been removed. Dumped in the 'themmady khuzhy'—the pauper's pit—where the police routinely dump their dead." (321) Thus ends the life of this Paravan. Velutha—the black—the untouchable who is guilty of loving or accepting the love of a lady higher than his class.

If one reads *The God of Small Things* as the site of critical deployment of Marxist Feminist thematics, in the light of this representative generalization, "It is the provision by men of means of subsistence to women during the child-bearing period and not the sex division of labour in itself, that forms the material basis for women's subordination in class society."<sup>4</sup> The text of *The God of Small Things* reverses this generalization. The protagonist gendered subaltern Ammu, divorced by her husband, does equal labour in the pickle factory. Moreover if we view her in terms of sexual reproduction, she is the mother of the only male child in the family. And even when she raises her own means of subsistence, her subordination does not come to an end. So the reading of the novel as the site of a critical theory such as Marxist Feminist does uncover its own limitations.

Broadly speaking, Liberal Feminism is that kind of criticism in America that studies the text free from the discourse of Marxism and theorizes in terms of racism and ethnicity the state of women. Its hegemonic analysis of women's predicament raises the questions

like: can men theorize feminism, can whites theorize racism, can the bourgeois theorize revolution and so on and so forth. In their practice, the whole third world literature is clubbed together and the community is analyzed in hegemonies—Man/Woman, white/Black etc. Therefore Spivak calls for the so-called third world literature writers to be “vigilant about their assigned subject positions.”<sup>5</sup> It goes without saying that the text of *The God of Small Things* cannot be site of such a critique. It is the loneliness of the gendered subaltern that has been represented in *The God of Small Things*. Ammu’s subalternity is not entirely imposed by the man-world; the role of Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria and above all Mammachi cannot be neglected that usher in Ammu’s miserable existence.

The subaltern reading of *The God of Small Things* into question that aspect of western liberal feminism which privileges the indigenous or diasporic elite from the third world and identifies woman with the reproductive or copulative Body. In Lacan’s theory, the body is the place of knowledge and the unconscious. “The unconscious presupposes that in the speaking being there is something, somewhere, which knows more than he does.” If one applies Lacan’s theory of Woman’s unconscious, Ammu preempts this unconscious through her body when she is all alone in bedroom. But to say that Ammu’s love is the assertion of her body would be a subversive reading of the novel. She is truly ‘the other’ of Lacan—in her isolation and alienation and subject position.

So, *The God of Small Things* presents a variety of the subalterns. Rahel-Estha-Ammu-Velutha—all have been assigned subject positions by the dominant law of the society. These orthodox, social and cultural forces have scant regard for the individual freedom of the spirit and have no brief for the little freedom these subaltern try to wrench out of their subject positions. Perhaps no other critical theory can best describe the agony of the subalterns in the novel as a subaltern reading does.

## NOTES

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2. Ashok Sen, "Subaltern Studies: Capital, Class and Community," *Subaltern Studies*, V, ed. Ranajit Guha, p. 203.
3. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (IndiaInk, 1997), p. 202.
4. Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (New Brunswick, 1983), p. 147.
5. Spivak, 111.
6. Jacques Lacan, 'Love letter,' *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école Freudienne*, trans. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (London 1982), p. 159.

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## Gender Relations and Cross-Cultural Transactions in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

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In all the fictional writings of Bharati Mukherjee, the impact of expatriation and immigration on the complexities of gender relations has been taken up against divergent ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Her novels exhibit how in more egalitarian societies traditional gender roles and relations are transformed, often leading either to churlish situations, categorical refusals or subterfuges to initiate fundamental changes in traditional mind-sets. The process of cross-cultural transaction involves "complex negotiation and exchange," and is "an interactive, dialogic, two way process rather than a simple active passive one" (Sharma 71). It also contextualizes, modifies and changes—like all other societal environments—the gender-based relationships. Mukherjee's fiction convinces us that gender is a multifaceted category open to change and variation, and reinforces, what Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing had suggested—that particular forms of female marginality must be examined in relation to the conditions of women's lives—as immigrants, minorities, wealthy, poor, black, white, sex workers, maids, or academics (quoted by Rayaprol 135). Mukherjee's depiction of women and their different relationships portrays the dominance of patriarchal practices in traditional society, as well as the forms of liberation and empowerment which are available to women in their diasporic situation. Isobel Armstrong has beautifully commented on this aspect of Mukherjee's writing:

You seem to feel when you come into a Mukherjee novel, a kind of flurry and complexity in the writing. It's rapid, darting, intense and energetic. Mukherjee is fascinated by people who are constantly on the move, who have to live a life in transit, who have to destroy their for-

mer identities in other countries in order to live fully in another. It's an astonishingly ruthless understanding of the personality—that the personality has to travel light and move across countries and assimilate other country's culture and ideas and practices—like putting on another skin. (BBC)

Mukherjee's latest novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002) revolves round the life and adventures of its protagonist Tara Chatterjee. The novel begins with the description of the bridal procession of Tara Lata, an ancestor, whose life-history becomes a focal point of Tara Chatterjee's family chronicle, and symbolizes how weakness can also lead to real life choices. Bedecked in her bridal sari, her arms heavy with dowry gold, five year old Tara Lata is being carried in a palanquin borne by four servants to marry a tree (5). On her wedding day the groom had died from snakebite—perhaps Jaikrishna Gangooly, Tara Lata's father, had not sufficiently appeased the goddess *Manasa*! Jai Krishna Gangooly decides to marry her daughter to a tree, as otherwise she will be a person to be avoided, "a despised ghar-jalani, a woman-who-brings-misfortune-and-death-to-her-family." (15) Married to a tree she will at least "remain a wife, a wearer of vermilion powder in her hair part, and not a widow." (15) Tara Lata spends her life in her ancestral house in Mishtigunj, an imaginary town in Bangla Desh, till attracted by the revolutionary fervour of freedom fighters. She is taken away by the British soldiers after she organizes famine relief for villagers and is never again seen. Journeying to her roots, Tara Chatterjee visits this ancestral house and can feel the chilling loneliness of the child-bride:

I cannot imagine the loneliness of this child. A Bengali girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. Even constructing it from the merest scraps of family memory fills me with rage and bitterness. (4)

Tara Chatterjee, the narrator of the story, had always treated this family story with a distant dread. Only after her divorce from her Bill Gates-like genius of an Indian husband Bishwapriya Chatterjee, she becomes curious to know more about the trauma of the Tree-bride. She comments in the beginning of the novel, "until last year

when I finally yielded to that most American of impulses, or compulsions, a "roots search," I had never seen Tara Lata's house in Mishtigunj." (17)

Tara and her two elder sisters had spent their childhood and early youth in Calcutta—their affluent background of the Calcutta *bhadra lok* had guaranteed a privileged life style to them. In their insulated world, to be a native born Calcuttan was to be a Londoner, a Parisian, a New Yorker, at the zenith, but to be Calcutta *bhadra lok* was "to share a tradition of leadership, of sensitivity, of achievement, refinement, and beauty that was the envy of the world." (22) The three sisters—Padma, Parvati and Tara—have been described as being incredibly beautiful. They were featured on the annual "Miss Brains and Beauty" cover of *Eve's Weekly* (22). Padma, the eldest, was coerced by her father to turn down Satyajit Ray's movie offers. They were sent to prestigious convent, groomed to attend parties, to entertain people, passion and recklessness was unknown to their family till they grew up (27). The sisters however follow divergent paths when they grow up. Parvati lives in Bombay after her love marriage, while the other two move to the modernist society of the West. When Tara is nineteen years old, "holder of a B.A. Honours and M.A. First class from the University of Calcutta" (23), she is married to a software genius, a first son from an outstanding Bengali family of the same caste. After her arranged marriage Tara is shifted to a segment of American Society, viz. Ather-ton, California, where her husband Bish tries to carve out a semblance of Indian traditionality in all respects. They settle down, have a son Rabi and live like several other Indian couples. Her conventional background compels Tara to admit that she isn't, perhaps never will be, "a modern woman." (27) Tara and her sisters were protected from any probable indication that the sheltered existence they had led was suddenly turning into a fragile myth (26). The novice of a nineteen-year-old traditional Indian girl is absolutely unpalatable and amusing to her American friends. Looking at the contemporary version of Tara, "a thirty-six-year-old divorced kindergarten teacher," they wonder "how could any woman, even a nineteen year-old submit to someone else's choice, even a loving parent's," and label it as a "recipe for disaster." (27) Bharati Mukherjee

constantly juxtaposes the images of Tara's adolescent life ["My life was one long childhood until I was thrown into marriage" (28)] with her impressions of a liberated society. Jopi Nyman comments in the context of *Desirable Daughters* that Bharati Mukherjee's fictions "rewrite the traditional immigrant story, imagining new spaces and forms of identity as a result of travel and dislocation." (53)

Tara's husband Bish represents the traditional psyche of an Indian male which thinks that gender roles within marriage should not be affected by social changes or difference of perceptions. Though he, along with a friend, has developed a system of electronic communications called CHATTY without which "nothing in the modern world would work," (24) he is unfazed in his uncompromising preference for traditional Indian values and a life-pattern dictated by them. Like many of his Indian friends, he also believed that America made children "soft in the brains as well as the body," and weakened the moral fibre." (154) He also wants his son to be an exact replica of him, in terms of his choice in food, dress, and discipline. Unable to find a school like the one he had known in Calcutta he creates one as another example of his repudiation of modernity:

Rabi spent his first six years of education in an Atherton school, a California school, that prided itself on the English model, with a "Commons" for lunch, prayers in the morning, Greek and Latin, and hard-fought sports whose rules, vocabularies, and passions were unreplicated anywhere on this continent, and perhaps any time in this century. Indian millionaires were the new monarchs of snob, and the old school masters took note, spiking their vocabularies with Indo-Anglicisms of the 1920s ("Let's take a dekko, shall we") and their lunches with "curries." (152)

Tara starts having her first misgivings around this time. Her anxieties for her artistic son mingle with anxieties about her own self. The existence of distinct personal and social slots in life which Bish has taken for granted in his attempts to recreate tradition against modernist background first bewilder her and then reinforce her resolve to lead an independent life. She does not want to treat her American experience as an extension of the traditional role of a daughter or wife. In an imaginary conversation with Didi, Tara comments:

I don't blame Daddy and I don't blame Bish and Calcutta, and the nuns might not have equipped me for San Francisco but they're all gone, that world is gone, we're here, we have to stop pretending, we have to stop living in a place that's changed on us while we've been away. I don't want to be a perfectly preserved bug trapped in amber. Didi, I can't deal with modern India, it's changed too much and too fast, and I don't want to live in a half—India kept on life—support.  
(184)

One of the major drawbacks of the studies which talk about changes in immigrant women's lives is that they do not place gender roles in a meaningful context (Rayaprol 19). Sydney Stahl Weinberg has also commented that many of such studies leave unexamined the texture of women's lives (33). Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* in a way fills up this gap by providing an intimate glance into women's life, albeit from the viewpoint of the upper middle class Indian society. Tara wants to create her own mistakes, gain her own experiences. In order to reconstruct her identity she leaves her husband, shifts to a not-so-fashionable-area, chooses a school for her son which is "slanted to the arts" (153), and shares her house with her lover Andy, a Zen quoting, Hungarian-American retrofitter. This process also generates anguish and uncertainty, which she tries to overcome by regularly writing and talking to her family members in India. She tries to keep herself busy by doing some voluntary work at a local primary school. She has at least symbolically rejected her old cultural values, yet one can sense the presence of a deep-rooted nostalgia in her narrative. The past becomes a constant refrain not only to compare things, but often also to pass judgements. The loneliness, which is mentioned as a causal factor in her divorce, has not been filled up by any other overpowering emotion. Her home in San Francisco does not become an image of autonomous self-hood to her, rather it reminds her, "not unhappily, of mountain resorts in India." (24) While she enjoys her American invisibility that frees her to make herself over by the hour (78), she is unable to really belong to its society. Torn between the demands of two cultures she comments:

The moment I step outside the bookstore on to crowded Haight Street,  
I lose the heady kinship with the world that I feel through me reading.

... I am not the only blue-jeaned woman with a Pashmina shawl around my shoulders and broken down running shoes on my feet. I am not the only Indian on the block. All the same, I stand out, I'm convinced. I don't belong here, despite my political leanings; worse, I don't want to belong. (79)

At moments Tara is uncomfortably conscious of this schism, "Out of structure, Bish created greater order. Out of order, I created chaos. Out of chaos, one hopes, Rabi will create something resembling a new American consciousness." (155)

The portrayal of Tara's estranged oldest sister whom she simply calls Didi also exhibits the rupture between tradition and modernity. While Bish wants to perpetuate gender roles within the family and retain a traditional identity for himself; and Tara challenges his proclivity for the status quo; Didi changes her gender and her identity as a Bengali *Bhadra lok* into a commodity in order to derive financial gains. She successfully runs a community channel television programme "Namaskar, Probasi," and uses the newly created cult figure to sell her products. She also involves Tara in her venture, all the time astutely ignoring the presence of an illegitimate son. Instead of trying to redefine her role as a woman in different relationships in an open society, she uses her gender and background to sustain herself.

Tara represents the dilemma of an average migrant. The demands of tradition and their hold on one's psyche are never ultimately rejected, the temptations to accommodate in the new culture are also plentiful. She tries to create a personal space for herself through compromise. Rejection of her husband and associated security is a bold step for an Indian girl of Tara's background, but she is equally conscious to hide it from her ailing and retired parents and other Indian family friends. Despite an obvious diffidence she questions, at least for some time, traditional notions and shuns the cliched answers provided by conventions. She wants to redefine herself and create fresh gender relations according to her new experiences. Nyman has quoted Susheila Nasta's *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (2002) to authenticate similar argument in her essay, "For diaspora does not only create an unrequited desire for a lost homeland but also a 'homing desire,' a de-

sire to reinvent and rewrite home as much as a desire to come to terms with an exile from it." (Nyman 56) Nyman herself has termed Tara's struggle as a desire of constructing hybridity and forming new forms of identity and culture in space." (*Ibid.*) Strangely though, Tara's struggle to redefine her gender role ultimately sounds hollow. Despite a conscious fight, liberated attitude, acceptance of her son's gay sexuality and live-in relationships, she is unable to transcend the traditional priorities of an Indian woman. In her interview with Dave, Bharati Mukherjee has termed Tara as a "very cosmopolitan character," who somehow "doesn't have the focus." The Indian traditions do not support her at all during her struggle to redefine herself. Tara has left Bish in "a huff," as Mukherjee herself comments in her interview with Dave: "because she has fabricated an image of him as a kind of father figure, and she's decided in her quest for freedom that the gated community in Atherton is a prison. I had no idea when I started out that she would try to woo him back in that scene in Rivoli street." (Powell)

The scene in Rivoli street categorically suggests that Tara's rejection of traditional gender-roles is incomplete. When Tara meets Bish after nearly three years, her first reaction is that he is "desperately in need of a makeover." (259) During a reminiscence of her divorce settlement, she feels amused and indebted to Bish's "generosity," as he had paid all the bills of household repairs, even though he had no legal obligation. She broods:

Bish had not taken the simplest corporate precaution against personal liability. American contingencies like divorce simply had not occurred to him. You married, you had a son, you provided for the family, and if you provided very well, everyone was happy. Or at least unhappily bottled up. As for me, the traditional Hindu marriage ceremony did not include a preen up. (260)

Tara also finds his "roundabout acknowledgement" of his curiosity about her "unimaginably charming." (262) The previous complaints are forgotten and she finds that it is impossible not to love him, "How can you not love such a man?" (263) Bish's admission that he has failed in the "basic duty of a man in the householder phase of his life, to support and sustain his marriage," (265) evokes the hopes of compromise in Tara's heart:

I might very well have been the only appropriate woman in the world for him. And, because of his rectitude, if only I could bend it or dent it just a little bit, he might have been the only man for me. I think we recognized that. All we had to do was reach across an ever narrowing gulch. He would know to include me in his world. I would know not to expect from him things he couldn't deliver. (268)

The constant refrain of *Bishey bish khai* (only poison delivers us from poison), which she takes up after her house has been bombed, and which is also a pun on her husband's name, suggests that she is trying to seek emotional sustenance through her attempts to revive a gender relationship on traditional lines.

In her interview with Book Reporter.Com on 28 March 2002, Bharati Mukherjee has remarked that she writes "in the tradition of immigrant experience rather than nostalgia and expatriation." (BRC) However, the conclusion of *Desirable Daughters* has been made nostalgic by the fact that Tara is not completely able to restructure conventional gender roles—cross-cultural transactions have not equipped her with the strength to eschew eschatological gender roles postulated by traditional norms.

## NOTES

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## Aldous Huxley: Now More Than Ever

A.A. MUTALIK-DESAI

**A**ldous Huxley's birth centenary was observed in a fitting way at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster, Germany, which held an international symposium on the occasion. *Now More Than Ever*, comprising the proceedings, is introduced here. Huxley continues to be the prophet and the keeper of conscience the cussed modern men and women need direly now more than ever. The title, if only incidentally, is ironic. While it is the name of a recently located play by Huxley, the words are from Keats: *I have been half in love with easeful Death, / Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme, / To take into the air my quiet breath, / Now more than ever seems it rich to die.* The youthful, romantic poet's apparent resolve to cease, to disappear from human commerce contrasts with the sage, philosophic humanist's ceaseless search for a fulfilling life. Edited by Professor Bernfried Nugel, *Now More Than Ever* is made up of twenty-one essays contributed by delegates from Belgium, England, France, Germany, Canada, USA, India and Singapore—attesting to interest in Huxley worldwide.

Section I (Biography): David Bradshaw analyses Huxley's intellectual life, notes his initial literary elitism and his highbrow contempt for mere material progress and mass society. But with the early 1930s a radical change comes about and he metamorphosed into a pacifist. Some like Cecil Day-Lewis saw a contradiction in this and did not hesitate to ridicule him as a faddist. But with *Encyclopaedia of Pacifism and Ends and Means*, the Pyrrhonic aesthete faded. It was at this stage that he, in a Wordsworthian manner, distanced himself from the unabashed pursuit of Mammon and the clamour of the masses. His fear of unethical science, too, became solidified. David King Dunaway takes up a narrower aspect of

Huxley's life, namely, his friendship with Gerald Heard, his growing transcendentalism, and how his earlier cynicism made way for a new strain of faith and Tolstoyan optimism. His political outlook matured. Robert Payne's tribute is personal. He begins by noting Huxley's appearance (a young archbishop, saintly, ascetic), his elegance, his voice so grave, calm, gentle, resonant and so penitently modulated. His opinions (on goodness, mercy and understanding) are quoted. His distaste for advertisements and his encyclopaedic knowledge are noted. In moments of despair, reports Payne, he spoke about Mahatma Gandhi with hope. This is a salutary prologue to *Now More Than Ever*, except for one jarring note. It is said that judgements on the East expressed in *Jesting Pilate* were hopelessly immature and adolescent. Nothing could be further from truth. Huxley's views on Indian society, social mores, the political scene of the 1920s, Indian leaders of the time have showed him to be remarkably accurate, concerned, sagacious and prophetic.

Section II (Genre and Beyond): Werner von Koppenfels regrets that Huxley who wrote essays on personal, factual and abstract-universal themes is largely ignored. His best ones use anecdotes, subjective beginnings and bring in to play his associative mind. He notes too that the principle of Themes and Variations is employed beyond formal considerations. While he writes on weighty subjects, he always returns to the here and now. Like the Renaissance man he was, he advocated *ars bene vivendi*. James Sexton, turning to *Now More Than Ever*, begins with a plot-summary which is about the economic and political crisis of the age. *A roman a clef*, however, the play does not limit itself to portraying contemporary shysters and their chicanery. Freud and Marx are indicted as enemies of the world of the soul (as Sexton says). Human beings are seen as inclined towards evil even when good is within reach. Such were the ways of politicians that Huxley seemed to vacillate, we are told, between the need for expediency and the sanctity of means. The stage often became a lecture theatre. Peter Firchow's look at Huxley's poetic modernism is as compelling as it is thorough. Tracing T. S. Eliot's early phase alongside, countering negative criticism (by Ruth Z. Temple, Malcolm Cowley and even Eliot), Firchow defends Huxley and commends his views on poetry and poets from the sev-

enteenth century to the twentieth. His role in ushering in modernism in English poetry is acknowledged. It is noted that his poetry is better appreciated beyond the English-speaking lands. In a way Jerome Meckier picks up where Firchow has left off. Just as erudite and articulate, Meckier covers a challenging terrain to include varieties of poetry, differing schools of philosophy and mysticism. In a condensed and terse style, Meckier deals with ancient and modern poets, Joyce and Lawrence, art and its relation to modern life, poets vs. anti-poets and philosophers, the aesthetic and the spiritual, satire and parody, correspondences and counterpoints and Greco-Roman Vitalism. So prodigious a canvass that one wishes the critic had given us a fuller exposition of the numerous strands involved. But, nonetheless, Meckier's contribution is enlightened, insightful and weighty. (What function does music serve in Huxley? Jean-Louis Cupers discusses at length, which subject-matter is, alas, too unknown for this reviewer to assess.)

Section III (Society and Politics): Analysing Huxley's women characters, Guin A. Nance steps out of the strait jacket of feminist criticism. According to her, they (modelled after his first wife Maria Nys) are intuitive and supportive and they have important roles to play. Through Elinor Quarles her husband gains self-recognition; to the readers, revelation is by her presence. Huxley's men may be afflicted with knowledge without love; but the women are not. Through the latter, incomplete men achieve completeness. There is variety too: sirens, dragons, femme-fatales, virgins, ideal wives and mothers, the diabolical and the angelic and ones destructive even in their detachment. As Nance has noted, the Huxleyan woman is a perfect animal and a perfect human, as exemplified by Mary Rampton who achieved equilibrium as well as vitality. Sanford E. Marovitz notes at first a series of contrasts and ironic juxtapositions (such as: seriousness conveyed through amusing portraits; the Mahatma's assassination and the Holocaust) and through them he examines *Ape and Essence* as a satire of Hollywood. Misapplication of technology is a central concern. Names and allusions make Judaism too a part of the novel's theme. Huxley has mixed genres, narrative methods, high-tech. societies and barbarism, eroticism and abstinence, mother-love and ritual infanticide, baboon theatre and Shel-

ley's transcendent poetry. But, does it all work? Most critical reaction was negative: the medium and the message did not mesh. Ambivalence over the merit of *Ape and Essence* remains. Gerd Rohmann continues focus on utopian matters. Taking a cue from Aristotle Huxley went after an impossible dream inspired by the teachings of Buddhism which believes that life can be paradise on earth. In Rohmann's view, *Island* is not so much about an ideal community where politics and religion will have changed; it is rather about human ecology, about reconciling biological facts with human values. Huxley has repeatedly warned that the basic problem is ecological and we must give up anachronistic politics of nationalism and military power. *Island*, with whatever weaknesses, appeals to Rohmann as it represents understanding, not merely knowledge. Charles M. Holmes's reactions are negative, and it is most difficult to agree with him when he questions the political opinions and observations (in *Jesting Pilate*). Even the ghost of Fascism is revived and held against Huxley. But Huxley's comments on the Hindu ascetics and their unclean habits are fully justified, even today. Worse yet are Holmes' appalling omissions. No mention is made of his prophetic words about India's non-violent struggle for independence from the English, which he supported. Despite his displeasure over Taj Mahal, he endeared himself to the Indian intellectuals. His assessment is accurate and heartening. Elsewhere, too, Holmes' comments are needlessly dismissive and condescending. Holmes is unfair in expecting Huxley to work out every idea or suggestion to the last detail. After all, he is in the tradition of visionaries (like John Ruskin, Henry David Thoreau, Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi) who strike a sensitive chord or cause a spark, and then leave it to the mundane world to devise a plan. Huxley, especially in the later years does not help us at all is Holmes' conclusion, as negative as ever.

Section IV (Aldous Huxley's Critique of Pure Utopian Thought): Hans J. Rindisbacher is in an esoteric zone, the olfactory in *Brave New World*. After comprehensively using many sources, he presents his case with seeming casualness, saying, the old world stinks, the new one is full of pleasant scents. The Indian reservation is a stinking hell, whereas the brave new world is a scented para-

dise. In contrast, smells play a less prominent role in *Ape and Essence* and *Island* although in the latter enlightenment is supposed to have heavenly smell like champaks and gardenias. Bernfried Nugel turns to an imperative aspect of literary studies, a technical one. When a literary work has undergone revisions and there are many versions extant, Nugel argues, with concrete illustrations, that these different versions affect the structure of the work in question. If the text is shortened while revising, it may be at the cost of clarity and depth, narrowing of range and diminishing the emphasis. This essay needs to be discussed at length, and not briefly. I regret that for sheer lack of space more cannot be said about Nugel's admirable scholarly and painstaking effort. While assessing Huxley's dystopian narrative, Robert S. Baker weaves a web bringing in the Frankfurt School, Marquis de Sade and the problem of modernity. His exegesis contains perceptive observations, but this reviewer has his reservations. Apart from whether, Huxley who is too diverse, ever changing and complex to be encapsulated in any formula or ideology (including postmodernism), vital points are missed. In *Point Counter Point* the moral centre gravitates around Mark Rampion and Philip Quarles and not Illidge Babbage, Maurice Spandrell or Everard Webley (providing as they do a counter-point). *Brave New World* advocates that science and technology, like the Sabbath, must be used *for* men and women and not the other way. Huxley mentions Marquis de Sade, but only for his insanity, his interest in universal chaos and destruction. Does he *appropriate* de Sade as an exemplary figure? Likewise, his novels are not dominated by de Sade. In *Ends and Means*, the focus is on ends and means; that is its *raison d'être*.

Section V (Religion): Kirpal Singh reconsiders *Time Must Have a Stop* from an Asian perspective. The East and the West view time differently, fundamentally. To the former, life is beyond time; to the latter, time is fixed, linear; time as known by the human heart and time measured by the clock. Rontini views it in the Eastern way and Miller and Propter, like, Hotspur, in the Western. To the first, this is Huxley's strength, to the second, his weakness. In a brief but cogent analysis Singh further states that the West demands confrontation, opposition; it refrains from juxtaposition, parallel experiences and

fusion. In Hinduism good and evil are not mutually exclusive just as reality is neither good nor evil. Windmills do exist. Singh concludes by saying that *Time Must Have a Stop* provides a link between the East and the West. Philip Thody discusses Huxley's agnosticism and mysticism. It is argued that his earlier experiences and ideas were not integrated. If they were, his novels of the time would have been altogether different. With fusion of life and ideas, would they have been effective novels? The question of the process of literary creation remains. Open-minded, unafraid of opinions currently in vogue, Thody writes with enviable clarity. One may disagree with him, e.g., when he says that Huxley might have deluded himself in thinking that mysticism offered all the answers, that there is discrepancy between the contents of *Do What You Will* and the manner in which *Point Counter Point* concludes, that *Island* is less successful than *Brave New World* and that his creativity worked better when he dwelt with horrors and absurdities of the human condition. Nevertheless, Thody acknowledges his sincerity, intellectual honesty and his gifts as a novelist. Kulwant S. Gill explains how Huxley's works illustrate the split in Western consciousness and the need to reconcile the rational with the spiritual. His protagonists, like their author, intellectually Voltairians and emotionally Bunyanites, feel that the division has reached the core of their existence. Despite this, Gill contends that the Arnoldian yearning for values exists. Gradually Huxley felt the need for realizing the final end of man in the unitive knowledge of ultimate reality, although he did not surrender his intellect: which might be an index of his honest self, and is best summed up when he says that he remained an agnostic who aspired to be a gnostic. Gill's essay is thorough. It is well-informed and it has commendable balance.

Section VI (Philosophy): Pierre Vitoux begins by noting the introvert Lawrence's influence on the extrovert Huxley in *Point Counter Point* and *Do What You Will*. Later the spell is cast off. In one, sensations and emotions dominate while, in the other, the intellectual and the analytical. So it is balance that both must strive for. Without it there is no civilization. Vitoux continues drawing upon the subsequent works of Lawrence and Huxley, the latter trying to understand what the former really stood for—not merely

while writing and talking about his ideas but while living his life. In the meanwhile, Huxley's search for Unity in Multiplicity continued. The paradoxes of life kept haunting him. He remained obsessed with them, and Lawrence was never far from his thoughts. He eschewed the excesses and nursed those elemental, seminal ones. Christoph Bode studies the epistemological inconsistencies in Huxley's last phase. It is accepted that any attempt at expressing the absolute in terms of the non-absolute will only lead to paradoxes and *non-sequiturs*. Bode quotes from *Ends and Means* and *Adonis and the Alphabet* to note Huxley's lapses with regard to what he has claimed for science. When he is into obtuse phenomena (ESP, psycho-kinesis, yogic levitation, etc.), he vacillates and loses credence. In the end, there is no empirical brand of mysticism. Why did he undercut himself? Bode's own findings are disturbing: he claims that Huxley was never really interested in philosophy, let alone epistemology. Such a conclusion can be challenged only by those who have specialized in these offshoots of philosophy. Except for an avoidable sardonic comment or two, Bode's essay deserves to be studied carefully and, one hopes, a rejoinder will be provided. Keith M. May's analysis is yet another portrait of contraries and paradoxes. Remembering Socrates' injunction that evils can never be done away with, as the good must always have its contrary, May poses the first of his questions: did Huxley believe in the Socratic wisdom? In the engaging discussion, a caveat is sounded (namely, that the metaphysical and social aspects of *Island* do not fit), and other issues are raised. Unlike Zola, for Huxley knowing was all, not getting entangled in it. In his conclusion, does May give up when he says that *Island* is admirable theoretically and graphically but the conclusion is not convincing philosophically? Huxley, he states, should accept that his vision is for the few, enlightened ones. This exciting and disquieting essay raises questions which must entice us. The fragmentation of the self is what appeals to Lothar Fietz. The epistemological premise on which Huxley's concept of selfhood (the personality model) stood is owed to Hume, only to be transcended later. The basic attitude he was to assume that there is no such thing as indivisible self and that man is multifarious, inconsistent and self-contradictory, came about in *Do What You Will*

(which was the impact of Blake and Lawrence). In *Point Counter Point*, he says that barbarism is being lop-sided. Christianity and science simply produce different types of barbarians, of the soul or of the intellect. With *Brave New World* and *Eyeless in Gaza*, his dilemma had become an existential trauma. Still later, he gave up on the unifying principle.

Such is the varied canvass of *Now More Than Ever*. It is a timely reminder of the worth of Huxley's life and work. His creative writing (so often dismissed as merely didactic), his humane, perceptive and prophetic voice shall remain perennially vital and relevant.

Dharwad

## Treatment of Cross-Racial Relationship in Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story*

SUREKHA DANGWAL

**A**frican writing, in its modern sense, began in the 18th century and developed inevitably as a protest literature. The primary impetus was derived from the dehumanizing institution of slavery. Whether he is African or American by place of birth, the black writer, by the condition of his existence, has been made intensely aware of a white civilization which, whatever its virtues nevertheless does impose its domination on the black mind and body. This domination may be of the openly aggressive sort, such as the jailing of black leaders or the socio-economic imprisonment of black people in ghettos, or it may be of the covert sort whereby values accepted by whites are invoked by them in opposition to important black values.

Since modern African literature has developed out of the colonial experience, it is sometimes wrongly assumed that generalization can be applied to the entire continent without taking into account the different cultural, historical and social background to each nation's writing. Such generalizations ignore the relative ability or inability of different tribal cultures to sustain and survive the colonial experience. Each region of Africa has had a different historical experience and this is reflected in the variety of literary models and themes. The literature of English speaking Africa is independent of European intellectual movements. In English speaking West Africa, where there was no settler class and independence was gained early, there is little explicit political protest in literature beyond the pan-African militancy found in Ghana. South Africa, on the other hand, has a long history of foreign occupation, settlement and urbanization which has resulted in de-tribalisation of the Africans. This led

to a literature of protesting inequality and discrimination under apartheid rather than a literature about African values:

Even at its most militant, black South African writing is basically liberal in lamenting the loss of an integrated multiracial society. In South Africa the socio-political life presents the kind of challenge that produces writers.<sup>1</sup>

The colonial experience of South Africa has produced a large volume of verse and prose which portrays these relationships and in which the black man has to give an account of what the white man has done to him. There is a direct relation between the political perspective and literary creation in South Africa. In this relation the political perspective has tended to dominate. South African literature in English begins, as does the literature of Canada, Australia and the United States.

The white writers of South Africa who are internationally known are Jack Cope, Dan Jacobson, Olive Schreiner, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer. When these writers refer to black protagonist, they do so as outsiders with an even more limited knowledge of the native's everyday experience than the black writers have. But the black writers are always between "The fear of expression and the need to give expression."<sup>2</sup>

As a native-born South African, Gordimer elected to stay in a country ruled by a single political party, whose policies shattered all her beliefs and feelings, and she experienced the consequences of that choice. A lifelong interest in politics led Gordimer through modifications of an essentially liberal and leftist position. When the Black consciousness movement-rejected the involvement of whites, she registered her reaction in the essay "Where Do Whites Fit In?" While she has always publicly denied any political ideology, she today describes herself as "socialist" in outlook.

Apartheid has been her main subject throughout her career. She explored not merely its cruelty and dehumanizing effects on blacks, but also the costs of that cruelty and dehumanizing for the whites who superficially benefited from it by law. She also examined the negative effects of apartheid even on those who opposed it, such as white liberals, who dedicated themselves for the cause of blacks, the

whites revolutionaries, who gave their lives to this mission. Apartheid has provided so much material for her fiction that cross-racial relationship become main theme of most of the stories. While Gordimer has brilliantly mastered the short story, her novels, given the greater scope of the novel form, stand out for their exploration of life in South Africa in particular and in newly emerging African nations in general. Her first three novels and her early short stories document the inception and early years of apartheid. The works explore the insidious effects of an ideology grounded exclusively in skin colour and demonstrate its impact on all South Africans. In these texts we experience the traditional relationship between Prospero and Caliban in the acceptance within the European world and the native African margin. The idea of returning to England also finds open expression in the early works of Gordimer.

Gordimer has described herself as a "romantic struggling with reality."<sup>3</sup> And it is Gordimer the romantic who is aware of western man's longing to soil beyond the ambit of his own world, beyond his conscious identity in search of a vital centre, a primal wholeness and vigour, within the limits of Africa i.e., within his own psyche. As a white liberal, Gordimer has always found herself an outsider in her country. In her *The Late Bourgeois World* which had been banned in South Africa and got Nobel Prize in 1991, she has attacked apartheid. Gordimer knows that any form of slavery degrades oppressor as well as the oppressed. "It would be uncritical to study the works of African's and non-Africans," says she, "without reference to each other and neither group has a monopoly on the truth."<sup>4</sup>

In Gordimer's fiction, her white characters are questing for their individual identity and their western-European selves as well. They are luckless Europeans who found only graves, not gain and glory in Africa. They all are taking a self-preservative flight into Exile, Isolation and Alienation. In one of her novels, *Occasion for Loving*, Jasse Stilwell insists on seeing herself as "intact alone."<sup>5</sup> James Bray, the Englishman, in *A Guest of Honour*, returned to Africa to set up a modern educational system in the country, "fades away behind the insect-stained wind-shield of the car carrying him to a violent death."<sup>6</sup> The Booker Prize winner novel *The Conservationist* is

about the longing of Mehring, whom "no one'll remember where he is buried."<sup>7</sup>

From an overt concern with the dilemma of whites in a changing South African society, Gordimer shifts her focus in *My Son's Story* to the experience of coloured South Africans and their cross-social relationship. Like *Burger's Daughter*, *My Son's Story* is a novel of development. In the narrative, Gordimer also makes use of metafiction, which is apparent in both the title of the text and in the epigraph, taken from Shakespeare's sonnet 13: "you had a father, let your son say so." This tale, then, is a son's telling of both his own and his father's stories. The challenge, therefore, falls to the reader to trust the son to be a reliable narrator of both stories.

In the novel, Will recounts how his adulterous father, Sonny, betrays both his family and the resistance movement when he has an extramarital affair with Hannah Plowman, a white activist. Will's accidental discovery of the affair draws him both into his father's deceit and into the limited but safe harbour of storytelling. However, Will is also loyal to Aila, his mother and Sonny's wife; he also gradually assumes the central position in the family as they become increasingly involved in the resistance movement independently of Sonny. Worse yet, Sonny has lost touch with the family so greatly that state is able to destroy the unit before he realizes that they are at risk. In addition, he loses Hannah when she accepts a United Nation's position outside South Africa. Sonny's isolation and marginalization is significant. His ultimate condition speaks to the utter sufferings of the black community. Sonny's early orientation toward colonialism, his initial detachment from the anti-apartheid movement, his liaison with Hannah and his increasing loyalty to her at the expense of his family and the resistance indicate the conflict and dilemma of cross-racial relationship in *My Son's Story*. However, the need for personal and political commitment of the idea of the healthy and unified state is also, a hidden message of the novel.

In the novel the narrator is not established as a black but as a member of the 'coloured' community, which occupies a kind of 'middle condition' between those of the blacks and the whites. This symbolizes the split situation of Nadine Gordimer herself. She is by race and upbringing white, by conviction of the black cause. To

Will, it offers the possibility for maximum contemplation. He is in a position to experience both the false sense of superiority of the whites and the outcast sense of being black, but also to regard both blacks and whites as 'other.' It also stands for the divided vision of South Africa.

The novel depicts the active involvement of 'coloured community' in the freedom movement. The father Sonny is a liberation leader who became involved with the woman, a human rights worker, when in prison. The affair continues, causing suppressed tension among all members of Sonny's family. The son, Will, who is struggling to reach sexual maturity, is filled with bitterness against his father. Will's sister Baby takes drugs, attempts suicide, then finally leaves home to join the armed struggle. Surprisingly, when the security police at last raid the family home, it emerges that even Sonny's wife, the shy and submissive Aila, has become a freedom fighter.

Like E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, *My Son's Story* also indicates that once black and white stand on the same level, only then will healthy cross-racial relationship become possible: until then they remain complicit in the false consciousness which racial taboo engenders. Furthermore, it is Baby and Aila who most readily make the saving transition into involvement with the cause. Even Sonny and Hannah whose relationship was forged out of their political activism move tentatively to a less sterile relationship, that of "common goal outside self"<sup>8</sup> under the stress of Aila's arrest and trial.

Nadine Gordimer has for many years been a great and gallant keeper of the white South African conscience. She continues to fulfil this role in *My Son's Story*. At the same time there are hints in this new novel that in the liberated South Africa both black and white could live in harmony. The end of racism was the realization of the dream of South Africans for equality. Now in the free nation the main task is to build a society in which all South Africans, black and white, would be able to prosper. The political freedom of the blacks of South Africa through a peaceful electoral process is the most significant event in the annals of human history for self-rule since the independence of India blazed a trail of departure of colonial powers from Asia and Africa. The case of South Africa is even

more significant. Elsewhere on the continent the formal colonial masters withdraw to Europe. But the whites of South Africa who gracefully accepted a democratic dispensation, knowing full well the consequences of being a minority community have earned the gratitude of all who value democracy. Of course, the credit goes to Gordimer who has already predicted and hoped for these circumstances in *My Son's Story*. The momentous choices that are made by Sonny, Baby, Aila, Hannah, except Will, between private and public, are without apparent inner conflict. The characters stroll unaffected at any deep level through the crisis of their lives. This is to a large extent because Gordimer, engaged by the political struggle, has not been concerned to capture those inner lives which according to the logic of the narrative have been so affected by that struggle. The only little inner conflict we do see is in Hannah's reference to promotion above her relationship with Sonny. Undoubtedly, it is a reflection of the emancipated western woman. The novel is not entirely without its moments of tension, of heightened emotion, of insight into the complexity of the human condition, but it is perhaps appropriate for Gordimer to contemplate for a society having divided vision but at any cost unified.

The final 'event' in the narrative, the burning-down of Sonny's family home, can also be seen in this light. The temporary home of the native, which features prominently in several well-known post-colonial novels, serves both as a symbol of insecurity and displacement, and as a sign of a personal integrity and comparative well-being which is both contrasted with public degradation and to some extent infected by it. In *My Son's Story* the conflagration has a complex significance as well as being an act of white racism it serves as punishment of Sonny for his misdeeds. It also stands for the earlier break-up of the family. At one point Will observes, "Just like Dad. My sex life has no home."<sup>9</sup> But it is also a sign of hope for the future. And it brings the personal and the political togetherness of South African Community:

And then of course the old rhetoric took the opportunity. We can't be burned out, he said, we're that bird, you know, it's called the phoenix, that always rises again from the ashes. Prison won't keep us out. Petrol

bombs won't get rid of us. This street this whole country is ours to live in.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

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## Quest for Self-Realization in T.S. Eliot's Plays

AMUKTHA MALYADA and SUMITRA KUKRETI

T.S. Eliot, an eminent personality in the sphere of English literature, had an innate zeal to help ordinary people move towards some awareness of the depths of spiritual development which forms the central theme of his plays. In spite of living among adverse conditions and various kinds of temptations the protagonists of his plays ultimately reach their goal of self-realization. Eliot inherited many qualities of his forefathers who were inclined to help the society and to educate people with their excellent scholarship and puritanical thinking. Born and brought up in a religious family atmosphere with its strict code of conduct, he was all the time occupied with concepts like salvation, martyrdom, redemption, Original Sin, purgation, confession etc. His basic upbringing as a Unitarian, which was more concerned with the man and his obligation within a society and the courses he had opted in his University education had helped him in developing a universal and liberal attitude towards all religions. Although he was a devoted Christian who visited the Church frequently, his works prove that his temperament could not be confined to any specific culture, tradition and religion. All his works are found to be reflections of his personal beliefs and thoughts. They chiefly have social and spiritual concern. It is only in his first three plays that he deals with the Christian themes like sainthood, Original Sin, martyrdom, etc., though not strictly in Christian terms. In his later plays, the contemporary world comes into the foreground making renunciation turn into an acceptance of life and austerism into tolerance. He tries to explain the relationship of sainthood, martyrdom and spirituality to the lives of common people. His plays renovate common man's interest in religion and show how it is relevant to our lives in the modern world with moral perplexity and uncertainty.

If we take a closer look at his major works they seem to have self-realization (spiritual conflict and growth) as their major theme. Raymond William calls *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, "the dramatization of consciousness, the dramatic realization of mind which shrinks from the commitment of action. *The Wasteland* is a dramatization of the consciousness of Europe in a framework of myth. In *Sweeney*, is a modern, sensual man whose spiritual growth is stunted by the parched soil of the wasteland. His poem *Elegy* is about a mismatched couple, the man's awakening sense of sin and lessons followed by expiation and then hopefully bliss."<sup>1</sup> The self-realization of the protagonists of his plays becomes possible only after intense spiritual conflicts, strenuous fights and moral awareness. Many obstacles and distractions come in the way of their spiritual journey, which are dispelled finally.

To arrive at solutions to the problems of his protagonists Eliot exhibits an awareness of a number of religions including his own faith in Christianity, which makes him a universal writer. He had "rationalized Christianity as intensely as he did other beliefs."<sup>2</sup> The chief characters of his plays attain spiritual liberation and balance of mind only after self-examination, self-exploration and heart-searching, which is very similar to the Hindu belief as explained in Patanjali's Yoga-Sutras. As we can find many of his ideas regarding "salvation, rebirth, pre-destination and the importance of detachment in attaining salvation are similar to those of Indian philosophical literature and his works show "the influence of Indian thought and sensibility."<sup>3</sup> While achieving the final absolute of human perfection (self-realization), the East emphasizes the importance of inward contemplation whereas the West gives importance to the outward activity. The Hinduism has many equally valuable ways to salvation or union with Eternal Brahman and in Christianity there is a single way prescribed, that of Christ. But at the same time the Western suffering and confession are considered to be similar to concentration and renunciation of Patanjali in the Eastern Philosophy. Because of ignorance (avidya) people are attached to the materialistic world of flux and changeable forms (maya or illusion). With an 'interior awareness' (anubhava) we can realize the Absolute truth and attain release (moksha). The primary requisite to attain moksha

or salvation is *atmavalokana* or looking into one's own self. The concepts of Karma, *prarabdha*, the dual nature of Time-time and Self-self which are considered to be impediments in the way of final liberation gain importance in Eliot's plays. Harry in *The Family Reunion* and Lord Claverton in *The Elder Statesman* try to flee away from their pasts (Karma) and later realize that only by accepting it in true spirit they can make their redemption possible. Thomas in *The Murder in the Cathedral* with his *niskama karma* (performing actions, without any desire for the fruits) transforms into Yogi following the preaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The plays written in his later life manifest the contemporary spiritual condition of his humanity where people find it difficult to comprehend each other. He shows us two different ways to glorify one's life responding to the divine call. *The Cocktail Party* is about the quest of Edward, Lavinia and Celia who search for their identities and vocations considering their potentialities and temperament. The play exemplifies two kinds of love; the one that is human and the other that is divine. Not only the spiritual element is touched upon by Eliot in this play, but also the incomprehensibility of married relationships in the modern world resulting in lovelessness, boredom and horror of life is given an admirable psychoanalysis for the solution. "No other English comedy has linked these two kinds of spiritual quest—the quest for love in marriage and the quest for the love of God."<sup>6</sup> With proper spiritual guidance, Edward and Lavinia find solace in humanity, whereas Celia finds the path leading her to devotion and divinity. The former one leads to a harmonious life within the community whereas the other leads to martyrdom and beatitude. They are shown to be equally valuable ways for self-realization similar to the various ways shown by Lord Krishna (in the *Bhagavad Gita*), taking into consideration the temperament of each human being. Edward and Lavinia show that the ordinary way of life is not wholly inferior to the way of religion and suffering in a deranged society. Celia's destiny is something very different from this. She is capable of receiving the nobler call and chooses the vocation of suffering through actions to fulfill her power of love. *The Cocktail Party* is charged with a sense of the mystical destiny of a soul chosen for something greater—the soul of a society girl unfore-

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seeably called upon to lay down herself for others in a far off, primitive and heathen place and die unknown, the death of martyrdom."<sup>7</sup>

Colby Simpkins in the play *The Confidential Clerk* strives to trace his true identity (inheritance) and to find out his true vocation. His spiritual quest culminates in his self-realization that one is "nearer to God than anyone." (485) He tries to "search for a way of integrating the outer world of action with the inner world of spiritual being (the two kinds of reality)."<sup>8</sup>

His conscience does not permit him to lead a life of fragmentation into private and public worlds which are equally unreal. It is only through the recognition of one's true identity that one can follow the true vocation leading to the integration of the two worlds. Here one would be accompanied by either a loved human being or God Himself. Prior to this realization, he strives to search for his belongingness which leads him to the Divine father. To attain this kind of self-knowledge (finding out who one is) one should comprehend one's relationship with other people and with God which in turn depends upon one's understanding of others. With this newly acquired understanding of his own self as well as the others he finds out that he cannot find solace in the presence of his earthly parents. He decides to relinquish the human bonds and relations to live nearer to God. Colby treads the path of his self-realization with a feeling of alienation from the rest of the people and recognizes the need to follow God to go closer to Him. By following his true vocation, he acts in conformity with the will of God and seeks divine bliss. "A revelation of the past prepares the ground for a probe into the self in its relations with a world of make-believe, a world of waste and time."<sup>9</sup>

In his last play *The Elder Statesman*, Eliot tries to show the importance of stripping off the mask one wears concealing one's real self. Lord Claverton who had been a successful public person moves around wearing a mask that stands between his real-self with its sinful past and the external world. With a fear of his real-self being exposed to others, he had imposed seclusion upon himself through self-deception. His redemption becomes possible only through self-realization and self-revelation to his daughter, Monica. The re-

demptive power of love acts as a catalyst in the process of self-realization of Lord Claverton. This play is also found to be largely autobiographical as human love became a mode of freedom both for Eliot and for Lord Claverton in their later years.

Eliot believed that although men cannot reach perfection, they can definitely accomplish acts that take them closer to perfection. After being acquainted with various ancient philosophies other than his own from all over the world Eliot chose some ideals among them; which could fulfill his purpose of showing the right path to his contemporary society and to the whole human kind. Eliot's quest is for individual moments of spiritual illumination which are equally valuable for a Christian, a Buddhist or a Hindu.

## NOTES

1. David Jones, *The Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 26.
2. T.S. Mathews, *Great Tom: Notes Towards the Definition of T.S. Eliot* (London: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 75.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
4. T. S. Eliot, "A Commentary," *The Criterion*, XVII (Oct. 1932), p. 78.
5. David Jones, p. 60.
6. T.S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*, Nevill Coghill with Notes and Commentary (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 237.
7. *Ibid.*
8. David Jones, p. 159.
9. C.R. Visweswara Rao, *Eliot's Plays* (S. Viswanathan, 1989), p. 141.

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## Viewing Tendulkar's *Kanyadan* through Reader Response Framework

SUBHASH CHANDRA

Vijay Tendulkar's play *Kanyadan* presents the problematic of the politics of reception. What actually is the governing or the structuring idea? And how does one respond to it? In other words, does the play seek to foreground the plight of dalits, who have undergone centuries of suppression and exploitation at the hands of the higher castes and have been made to wallow in dust and shit literally? Or does it concern itself with the inevitable gap between the idealistic rhetoric and actual removing of casteism and the attendant evils from society? Or does it focus on the plight of woman, who becomes (or is made) a guinea pig by an idealistic father politician (a genuine and authentic individual, though a politician)? Where do the sympathies of the writer and the reader lie: with Arun Athavale, the dalit (whom Jyoti marries) hailing from a scavenger family) or the tortured father (and also the mother) who unwittingly has largely become instrumental in pushing his daughter into a living hell, where she has to support a husband who is a drunken lout, a parasite and violent torturer to boot.

It will take an exceedingly longwinded essay to answer all the questions outlined above? Therefore, I would like to approach the text through the framework of Reader Response theory which postulates "an active participation on the part of the reader to construct meaning from a piece of writing" (Wolfreys: 139) and locate the text in the consciousness of the reader, as against an authoritative, humanist author. Reader Response theory is in accord with the post-structuralist thrust towards deferral and proliferation of meaning/s in a text, inasmuch as diverse identifications of selves of the readers drive them to use different entry points to make sense of the text. And since the diversity of self-identifications is the result of the

structuring forces operating in different temporal spatial locations, a piece of writing may make sense in what is known as "horizon of expectations."

I would like to read or "experience" the text from two opposing points of view—from the point of a dalit and from that of a high caste brahmin. These two viewpoints are represented in the play by Arun Athavale on the one hand and Seva and Nath on the other and attempt to show how the socio-cultural location of the reader would determine the validity of one perspective at the cost of the other. For this exercise, one would have to hypothesize one's position as a dalit and then a high caste Brahmin, that is Arun and Seva. The playwright presents Arun as belonging to that class which has been victimized, exploited, and discriminated against, causing their degradation and misery through centuries, whereas Seva is presented as a member of a reasonably well-to-do, intellectual Brahmin family. By adopting this approach, I hope to demonstrate how, positioning in the consciousness of one or the other shifts the meaning of the play.

I would first like to introduce the characters in the play. We have Nath Devlalikar, approaching sixty and appearing active. He is a member of the Legislative Council and subscribes to the socialist political ideology. Though a politician, he is an idealist who upholds edifying principles of Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Narendra Dev, Yusuf Meherali and Sane Guruji. Tendulkar conveys this fact to us metanomically through the pictures of these personages adorning the walls of Nath's drawing room. Seva is Nath's wife who is a social activist, working for the cause of women. Jyoti is their daughter, about twenty. She does some secretarial work for her father. Jayaprakash is the son, about twenty three years old, with a mechanical bent of mind. Arun Athavale is a young, dalit boy, who falls in love with Jyoti and the two, after a very brief courtship, get married.

Tendulkar wants us to know that Nath and Seva's is a happy and cheerful family. The love and affection of the husband and wife is reflected in the teasing, light banter that goes on between the two. When Seva comes back home from her engagement in social work,

Nath is on the point of leaving home for a political meeting. A snatch of conversation between the two is noteworthy:

NATH: Thank God she has arrived on time. [*Gets up eagerly*] [*Jyoti walks to the front door. Seva enters.*] . . .

SEVA: [*Patting Jyoti's back as she looks at Nath.*] I thought you would be gone!

NATH: I beg pardon for dashing your hopes. But the bus leaves at one-thirty.

SEVA: Ah! So the bus is late and that's why you are still here.

NATH: You're absolutely right! You think I'd wait for a mere wife! The call of the nation is far more important than the call of a wife. [*Jayaprakash enters with the luggage and goes inside.*]

SEVA: Not the call of the nation, Nath, it is the craze for speechmongering! . . .

SEVA: He, a democrat! Ask me. If he had been democratic, would I be his wife?

NATH: Wait. You had total liberty to make your own decision!

SEVA: Yes. But if I had refused him, this fine gentleman would have shaved off his hair and journeyed to the Himalayas. (5)

The tenor of conversations between the parents and the children is the same, but I would not like to excerpt them here. My purpose in quoting this extended passage (as is Tendulkar's) is to underscore on the almost idyllic state of this family. It will help me later in the essay to contrast this situation with the utter misery and grief into which the family falls on account of the marriage of Jyoti with Arun.

The catalytic event which complicates the plot is Jyoti's sudden announcement to her parents that she wants to marry Arun Athavale, a dalit.

The responses to the announcement are significant: Nath is pleased that it is a dalit his daughter has chosen to marry. It conforms to his democratic, idealist, socialist principles. But Seva is sobered by the news and she reacts like a mother when she asks Jyoti: "What does he do? Where does he live?" (9) Seva is informed that he is a journalist of sorts working for *Sramik Samachar* and is a member of the Socialists' Study Group where Jyoti met him. Arun's parents who live in a village called Chiroli near Karhad have seven children, he is the second and none of his other brothers, older or younger do anything. In short, he is extremely poor.

What becomes the driving force for the action of the play is Nath's own socialist ideology and his "authentic" progressive ideas: caste is immaterial—in fact lower caste is better for Jyoti, as it would demonstrate his and the family's progressive practices of their belief system—poverty is no disqualification (why should lack of means reduce a man's worth) and his democratic principles are to be cherished which make him override Seva's resistance to Jyoti's decision.

Unfortunately, Nath is proved wrong. Seva's misgivings come to be correct. The marriage Jyoti enters into turns out to be a disastrous experience, causing immense grief to Jyoti and to her parents. Seva suffers like any mother would at the plight of her daughter, and Nath cannot sleep at nights, because he feels guilty of having ignored Seva's objections to the marriage. They suffer because Jyoti gets violent beatings from Arun. She had got a foretaste of it even before her marriage in her own house, when Arun had twisted her arm causing her pain. But then he profusely apologized and Jyoti forgot about it. Arun turned out to be incompetent in earning a sustained livelihood and supporting himself and Jyoti. Though he wrote an autobiography which became a literary success, but not much money came along. He turned into a sluggard, drank and lost control, giving vent to his pent-up rages. Jyoti takes up a job, but Arun's cruelty continues. Eventually she comes to live in her parents' house and decides to separate from Arun. Ironically, it was on her insistence that the marriage took place, even though she admitted to her mother, that she had not known Arun for a sufficiently long time, and that she was even not very confident about her loving him to the extent of marrying him. This sounds like perversity on her part, and a bit improbable, too, for she is shown to be an intelligent girl, otherwise.

Now, let enter the consciousness of Seva (and Nath). The reader would recall her objections to the marriage. The fact that Arun came from an altogether different socio-cultural stratum had made him an incompatible match in Seva's eyes. She had some kind of pre-science that the marriage would not work out. She turns to be right. Arun's behaviour is inhuman. An extremely accommodating wife, Jyoti, in stead of receiving appreciation for her hard work to sustain

the family, is abused and thrashed in drunken fits. And the violence is continuous. There is no respite. Even when she becomes pregnant. In one of his drunken fits, he kicks her on the stomach, causing her grievous injury, after which she has to be hospitalized. He is a failed husband, with no regular income. His professions that he could not live without her notwithstanding, he inflicts physical and mental tortures on her, taunting her all the time, that she comes from a high caste family. His behaviour becomes still more inhuman, when one considers the non-retaliation from Jyoti. All she does is leave him. There is no explanation for his cruelty towards Jyoti. We have no situation in which she is shown even protesting, let alone retaliating. As an inter-textual comparison, one can think of Savitri and her daughter Binny in Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House*. Savitri asserts herself. Leads her own life. Talks back when Mahendranath accuses her of irresponsibility. As far as Binny is concerned, she leaves Manoj at the drop of a hat. She perversely defies him. If he wants her hair long, she cuts them short. The problems Savitri and Binny face in their marriages are understandable to a certain extent. But it is completely incomprehensible why a girl like Jyoti should be subjected to shattering torture. In Jyoti's words to her father: "Come and watch Arun at night when he staggers home roaring drunk, if you have the guts. There is a savage beast in his eyes, his lips, his face . . . in every single limb. And bestiality is something which cannot be separated from him." (68)

Not surprisingly therefore are Savitri, Nath and Jayprakash, Jyoti's brother, enraged, disturbed and angered respectively. Here is a low caste good-for-nothing fellow heaping misery and grief on their daughter, for no ostensible fault of hers. From the perspective of Seva, this kind of behaviour was expected from a low-caste like Arun. They are an uncivilized lot. And uncultured, too. You could not expect them to behave any differently. One is a prisoner of one's socio-cultural environment. So is Arun. You could not expect any better from him. Nonetheless, it causes anger, grief and misery, all around. Bhai's (Nath's) condition is worse. He is the one who had gone all out to facilitate the marriage. He is the one who had prevailed upon Seva not to interfere in prospective bonding between Arun and Jyoti. So his suffering, coupled with guilt, is more intense.

He feels responsible for having pushed his loving daughter into this hell. He suffers mentally, and also gets unwell physically. On top of that, he has to do what he has abhorred all his life. He makes an insincere speech on Arun's book, a novel. (Nath finds it to be just autobiography) at a function. He praises the book, while he hates it and also hates the author of the book. This is what he says about the book in private: "The book is not a novel, it is an autobiography. It depicts a real person's life. And it is the responsibility of the author to stick to the truth. But the book has not an ounce of truth in it, it is a hoax. It is a crafty, sanctimonious, artistic hoax. Nothing is real in that book. Neither the man nor his values." (60) And yet he has had to praise the book. He does it on Seva's advice, to save Jyoti from more beatings and more violence at the hands of Arun. So, Nath has consciously told lies in his speech, and he knows and Jyoti knows. Jyoti confronts him with the lies and he has to cover those lies with more lies. Nothing could be more pathetic for a person like Nath—an idealist, honest politician, not rapacious, nor guileful, not scheming and indulging in underhand political strategies. Seva suffers and fumes, but remains as helpless as Nath.

Seva seems right. Arun deserves all the censure. The play is an illustration of the consequences of a mismatch. Dalits like Arun need not be mingled with. They should be kept at arm's length. Any contact with the likes of them will necessarily lead to defilement—in the sense of disturbance and deprivation of one's peace and calm. A closer bonding with them is like committing suicide. One feels for Seva, and Nath, and feels with her that Jyoti ought not to have insisted on marrying such a scum of the earth. It is all very well to spout clichés about improving the lot of dalits. But when it comes to the practical level, one should keep away from them. Or else, the result would be the same as it has been for Jyoti, Seva and Nath. Despairing parents, unable to help their daughter, unable to punish the culprit who tortures their beloved daughter. Arun and people from his class should be shunned. Arun needs to be chastised. Such feelings seem valid and justified, keeping in view what he does to the innocent Jyoti.

But let us now get into the consciousness of Arun Athavale. He is a sensitive person, who carries within the scar of the indignities

his forefathers suffered at the hands of the high castes. His ancestors, who carried shit on their heads, were treated worse than dogs. They wallowed in such demeaning poverty that they had to subsist on the flesh of dead animals. They suffered the scorn of the high castes all the time. They were not treated part of society, part of humanity. They were considered that rotten part of humanity, which stinks. And also literally. Because when a sweeper passed, people covered their noses. A sweeper's shadow was considered polluting. Only another bath by the brahmin could cleanse him of the filth that had entered into his system through the shadow of a dalit.

They were a frustrated lot. They could not express their rage against their masters, who were high castes. They could not do anything to alleviate their condition. So, they suffered and got angry, but this anger was directed not at the society, or the high castes. It was directed against themselves and against their own. They let it out on those who were weaker than them. They drank excessively, and harmed themselves. They beat up their wives, who were weaker than them. They committed violence on their own family.

They were not educated. They did not have the means to give education to their children. So, they abused filthily and used physical force to express themselves. They could not verbalize their rage in sophisticated, intellectual words. So they used physical force, and violence, which articulated their deep-seated hurt. Their children pursued, for generations their forefathers' vocation of cleaning the lavatories of the rich and the high caste and carrying filth on their bodies. This category of society had no voice. They could not protest. Any protest was met with derision, and scorn. At times with violence, too. Therefore, they knew better than to speak out. Silent suffering of indignities, hurts and humiliations was their lot. They were shackled by their lot.

Arun Athavale comes from this cultural background which had no "culture" according to the "cultured" of the society. But he is one of the few who has acquired education. He carries within his "collective unconscious," all the hurts and indignities heaped on his forefathers. He rages, like his ancestors, against the high castes, who have been instruments of torture for them. Jyto becomes the symbol of all the castes and all the excesses committed by them towards

their socially unprivileged dalits. In drunken fits, when he loses control over himself, the rage gets vented on Jyoti as the representative of her class. Besides, she is a woman, and his wife. Like his ancestors, he finds an easy object of the rages which rock him. He continues the practices of his forefathers.

It is not that he does not love Jyoti. He loves her intensely. Perhaps, it was this intensity of his love, which got across to Jyoti when she agreed to marry him and remained unshaken on her decision in spite of the opposition from her mother, Seva. At that point of time in the play, her decision seemed sudden and inexplicable. Herein lies the explanation. She senses his sincere love for her. Love has this power to communicate itself and stir a chord. Arun's love does simply that.

Again, Jyoti's decision to leave with Arun, when he comes to her parents' house to claim her, appears strange and without any explanation. The parents are shocked, and confused. Logically, her decision cannot be accounted for. But again the same reason is responsible for her action. She knows that deep down, Arun loves her and loves her intensely. When he is not drunk, he is all apologies. He is full of remorse. He entreats her to forgive him. He truly loves her. He professes it and means it. Jyoti understands. But nobody else in the family does. So, she leaves with the man who beats her, inflicts violence on her and heaps abuses on her. She is right in going with the man who is her husband and lover.

Hence, could Arun be condemned? Obviously, no. Looked at from opposing subjectivities, the meaning of the play radically shifts ground.

## NOTES

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# National Integration and the Political Doctrine of Rabindranath Tagore

SHANKAR BHATTACHARYA

**N**ational integration has been one of the main objectives since independence of India. We all admit that this integration remains incomplete as yet.

India is a country of many religions and different languages. India is as big as continental Europe. In spite of the amazing outward diversity and infinite variety of her people, India has shown through the ages infinite capacity to absorb and assimilate various races and varied cultures.

Indeed, the spirit of India lies in 'unity in diversity.' This vision of a united and integrated India inspired Tagore to call India a sacred land of pilgrimage where the different races—the Aryans and the Non-Aryans, Dravidians, the Chinese, the Saks, the Huns, the Pathans and the Moghuls became one. Above all, our national anthem "Jana Gana Mana" is the supreme example of Tagore's vision of a united India.

As a poet and man of vision, Tagore's impact on Indian political development was not direct but nevertheless pervasive and far-reaching. Though Tagore was not in favour of the interference of politics directly in his creative works, he could not afford to be indifferent to his environment. He realized that the link between art and politics is an organic part of the consciousness of every artist of integrity. At the same time Tagore believed that a writer could only serve art when he stood above factions and lobbies and set himself apart from political struggle. He was never interested in involving himself with agitation politics. He was an ideal poet and as such he kept himself away from political movements although he was all the time intensely aware of political movements raging in the country. Primarily a creative artist, nevertheless, he continuously evinced a

keen interest in social and political issues and in his works these matters are taken up in great detail and depth. In some of his political essays and in his presidential address at the provincial conference at Patna (1906), Tagore drew up programme for rural reconstruction of our country which is even now far in advance of any outlined by the Government of the present day. His views on politics are scattered in his letters and articles. In a letter to Maharaja Bahadur of Darbhanga (a candidate for the election in 1937) written on 15 November 1936, Tagore wrote: "For various reasons, chief amongst which is my general apathy towards and ignorance of the present day politics in the country I had long ago decided not to be identified in any way with coming elections. Quite deliberately I have not even registered myself as a voter. Various parties have already approached me to support their favoured candidates and I have denied the request in every case."

Earlier, Tagore was requested to be the President of the Indian National Congress. In a letter to Tagore on 5 October 1918, Annie Besant wrote:

Dear Sir Rabindranath Tagore,

I wonder if you will let us have the great joy of electing you as president of the congress. Your words would go everywhere and you could claim India's freedom as none other can. The subjects committee can be taken by some ex-President and thus spare your strength. It is the speech that matters. Would it be of any help if I become one of the Congress secretaries for the year?

Please let me know if we may propose your name.

Yours ever

Annie Besant

We do not know what Tagore wrote to Besant but we are sure that Tagore never became the President of Indian National Congress. This 'general apathy' started in him after the partition of Bengal.

Tagore's writings are the varied and continuous expressions of a distinctive systematized outlook. As a keen observer, he could not fail to see the intellectual poverty of modern life. Whether we agree or disagree with his views on Politics or purely literary standpoint, he never talks without saying something worth. Some of his early critical writing and suggested alternatives were offered in *Atmash-*

*kati* (1905), *Bharat-barkha* (1906), *Swadeshi and Samaj* (1906). These writings were further developed and elaborated in *Nationalism* (1911), *Creative Unity* (1922), *Kalanatar* (1937), *Crisis of Civilization* (1941) and other works.

Tagore was not primarily a political leader, but at every moment of India's political nemesis, he was one of the most outspoken spokesmen of the nation. When in the first decade of the century Bengal was partitioned, he was one of the first to protest against the act. His patriotic songs and poems inspired men to acts of heroism and sacrifice, and for a while he took a leading part in the political struggle that swept through the land. In that famous anti-partition movement of 1905 in Bengal, Tagore marched on the streets along with others to register the protest of the people against the imperialist machinations of the British rulers. He condemned the British Policy of divide-and-rule. While at Dacca, Lord Curzon had dropped a hint about a Muslim-dominated separate province. This was strongly resented. Tagore was deeply involved. In his essay on *Swadeshi Samaj*, he analyzed the grassroot problems of a truly Indian social polity. As the time of partition drew near (October 16, 1905), the attitude of the people strengthened. A slogan was given to boycott British goods. In Calcutta's Town Hall Tagore read a Paper "The Situation and the Remedy" in which he strongly recommended the setting up of a Parallel Government.

For all his love for the country, Tagore was averse to violence and the Politics of assassination. He made his statement clearly for which he was often criticized. The unfortunate massacre at Jalianwala Bagh came on April 13, 1919 when the Police fired on an unarmed crowd at Amritsar. Tagore was the first among those who reacted against the atrocities committed by the British. He condemned the inhuman and the repressive measures of the government. Eventually, he renounced the Honour of Knighthood declaring that an incident like the one at Jalianwala Bagh could take place only because of the gulf of separation between the rulers and the ruled.

Tagore's active involvement in politics, from which he later broke away, had made him deeply aware of the sources of Indian culture and creativity. Out of this appeared his illuminating essay

"A Vision of India's History." Tagore's major concern in this essay is that Indian history belongs to all who belong to India. The poem "Indian Pilgrimage" reflects Tagore's wonderful vision of cultural synthesis of India.

It is worthwhile to mention that the two basic facts of our political life since independence are that India has decided to be a regular democratic state and has accepted for her constitution a federal form, which recognizes the value and contribution of all constituent units of her national life. The secular nature of the state flows from equal regard for citizens of all religions and communities. According to Tagore, India's democratic ideals can be fulfilled only on the basis of social, economic and political equality among all citizens. The existence of many communities with differences in language, custom and religion is one of the fundamental problems of Indian life. Tagore recommended that they should all have the fullest privilege for all-round development of many communities in India, the two largest being the Hindus and the Muslims. Tagore gave much emphasis on the cordial relationship between Hindus and Muslims. Tagore reiterated that it is only if they attain a unity of purpose on the basis of equality and amity that there will be an actual unity among them. So long as there exists inequality between these two communities, there will be a narrow wall of doubt and suspicion. The purpose for life, in Tagore's view, is to acquaint man with the character of his own powers. There is no denying the fact that all aspects of Tagore's life, thought and action were dominated by his deep sense of the unity of life, it was natural that Tagore's views of religion should be synergetic and not sectional. He accepted life wholly and without any mental reservation. Tagore tried to synthesize religion and politics of enslaved people who were under double threat of political and cultural domination. Intensely aware of this twin danger of enslavements which eventually led to the rise of nationalistic forces and onslaughts on the religious rituals and practices of the people, he was particularly moved by Raja Ram Mohun Roy who was engaged in extricating Hindu society from a morass of dead beliefs and obnoxious customs that had latterly come to be referred as Hinduism. Though not considered a systematic thinker, Tagore with his sure intuition and maturity over the

years, had a very clear grasp of various ailments that plagued the Indian mind.

In his essay "The Vision," Rabindarnath Tagore writes, "For it is evident that my religion is a poet's religion and neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channel as does the inspiration of my songs. My religious life has followed the inspiration of my songs. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life."<sup>3</sup>

## NOTES

1. *Rabindra Bhavana*, Aug.-Sept. 1984, Tagore Research Institute, Kolkata.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Rabindranath Tagore, "The Vision," *The Religion of Man*, (1931; London: Unwin Books), p. 67.

**J.B. College, Lunglei**

## BOOK REVIEWS

Pashupati Jha, *Cross and Creation*, Prestige Books, New Delhi, 2003, 62 pp. Rs. 150.

It is a matter of pleasure to note that Indian English poetry has been growing fast these days. Every year young and new poets come on the scene with their poetic outpourings. Pashupati Jha is not a young poet, but a senior academic who has been nourishing his creativity secretly for his own pleasure. His *Cross and Creation* may be said to be a belated bloom in that it has been collected and published a bit late in the day. But belated poetry has its own advantages over the adolescent poetry on account of the ripe experience and maturity of thought that go into the making of it. Pashupati Jha is easily comparable to academics-turned-poets like Shiv K. Kumar, T.R. Rajasekharaiah and others.

*Cross and Creation* is a slim but elegantly produced volume consisting of fifty poems, which are conspicuous for their contemporary consciousness, reflectivity and modernist technique. The poet deplores that "we have too much of technology now, there is so much of cerebral focus in life that head has completely overthrown the qualities of heart. The lop-sided development has marred down the immense possibilities of life to mere self-gratification at all costs, resulting into worst type of cruelty, killing, rape, corruption and communal violence." (9) He hopes and believes in the view that poetry will enable the human mind and spirit to enjoy life and stop indulging in further cruelty.

The thematic concerns of the poems in this collection range from birth to death; from identity/ego to cosmic consciousness; from family to the world; from science to art and religion; from pain to love and from suffering to acceptance and resignation thereby capturing the irony and paradox of human experience itself.

The first poem "Preface" highlights the symbolism of the forbidden fruit of knowledge created by God to test human fallibility.

But man is too weak to pass the test offered by God. After years of reading, teaching and suffering, the poet dares the dangerous plunge:

And taste the forbidden fruit;  
Fully well aware  
that a fall would be  
the only outcome,  
But who is not tempted  
By the trap of creation?

The poet dedicates his collection of poems to his own people who gave him acute pain in the past and to those unexpected few who gave him love also because poetry is born out of intense pain as well as intense love. In another poem the poet shows how poetry can bring about a remarkable transformation in the human heart only if the heart is alive. Jesus who stands for the heroic acceptance of death out of his love for mankind, is invoked by the poet:

But you accepted it all  
For the vice of others  
While we on earth  
Are so arrogant as to  
Gloat over our own sins  
As a sign of sure success  
That we can always go scot-free

The poet shows the contrast between Christ's greatness of sacrifice and Man's pride and fallibility.

There are a couple of poems about love, which are satirical of the modern society. Love is not a momentary affair of satisfying the itch, but a permanent bond:

Love is more than a skinny affair,  
It is more than seek and hide,  
Are you ready for a life-long dive?

asks the poet. His attack on modernity and so-called progress is very strong:

We're the real democrats.  
Our taste is completely

Cosmopolitan, free from the narrow  
 Confines of country, caste and creed;  
 Yet particular on one point  
 Of non-attachment—love and leave  
 Both quite quickly, with no  
 Complaint attached to it.  
 For we're young, we're modern,  
 The real harbinger of  
 Progress and growth

The poet's satire on the predominance of evil in the modern society may be seen in "Night in a City," wherein he suggests the helplessness of a beggar, a maid and an adulterine child and the nocturnal institution of prostitution:

Night is all awake in the next street  
 Bartering bruised bodies for hundred bucks each,  
 Squeezed lives soon wait for daybreak to sleep.

The satirical note and the prophetic strain of the poem easily brings to our mind Blake's poem on London.

In the last poem, "An Old Man's Wish," the poet shows the contrast between the past youth and the present old age. Whereas in his youth he used to demand things, speak as he wished thereby asserting his egoistic identity, in his old age he has developed a sense of acceptance and resignation. He, in fact, waits for his death of which he is certainly not afraid. But he waits for a death that leads to the cycle of rebirth rather than be a termination:

Yet my wishful eyes are waiting  
 For such a death  
 That leads to rebirth  
 And re-experience  
 The endless cycle.

On the whole, the poems in *Cross and Creation* are modernist—some reflective and many satirical in tone. Pashupati Jha deplors the degeneration of culture and values in the modern world. Evil, corruption, fake and commercial love, gender-inequality, plight of widowhood, callousness of children towards parents etc. have been rightly exposed. But the poet is not a pessimist at all. On the con-

trary, he affirms and believes in the beauty and mystery of creation of which mankind is a part. A modernist, Pashupati Jha is not bound by the rigours of rhyme, but allows a free play to his imagination, which is leavened with reflectivity. One may easily expect and hope for more poetry from his pen.

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*Basavaraj Naikar*

**Vijay Sheshadari, *Beyond the Walls: Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Margaret Laurence*. Creative Books, New Delhi, 2003, 200 pp. Rs. 500.**

Feminism is one of the most important discourses in Postcolonial and Cultural Studies. It attempts to examine, locate, change and re-shape cultural practices that are responsible for suppression of women as a result of the dominance of patriarchy. In its attempt at critiquing the subaltern status of women, it challenges both sexism and the capitalist system, which prompts and sustains phallogocentric culture. Feminism is not always and necessarily "anti-men"; but is definitely against any social system which ushers in female subordination. The cardinal aim of feminism is perhaps to create a dialectic where the question of power is thoroughly examined and the dynamics of society in terms of sexual politics is texted, pointing out the discrepancies in the power hierarchies, in a sexist culture. This, it seems, may help create a society, requiring both men and women to co-operate rather than confront and overcome their egotistical urge for self-assertion through annihilation of the other.

Keeping the above paradigm in view, Vijay Sheshadari's book aims to explore the concept of Marginality, its normalcy or deviance, a comparative exposition of the novels of a "first world" woman novelist Margaret Laurence and a "non first world" woman novelist Shashi Deshpande. Obviously, neither the works of Margaret Laurence nor those of Shashi Deshpande represent the status of women in the Canadian and Indian societies respectively in a paradigmatic manner. Establishing such a paradigm would have defeated the very purpose of an interrogatory and exploratory attempt

that Vijay Sheshadari has made in this brilliant study. He has rightly posited that these two women writers afford texts that trace the complexities, contradictions and paradoxes of being (m)othered/marginalized. In their works, insights take precedence over compulsions of technique, acknowledging the paradoxes in a given epoch, waging an artistic, cultural, ideological and philosophical struggle. In this sense, both Margaret Laurence and Shashi Deshpande are "modern" writers as they address the questions and problematics relating to ego, sex and love, freedom, identity, etc. Through their modern sensibilities, both these novelists grapple with contemporary issues and attempt a quest of variety of themes such as motherhood, (M)othering, marriage, individuation, class conflicts, marginalization, woman as wife, sister, mother, friend; and above all, woman as a human being and not as a sex object. They might seem skeptical, yet they discover in their heritage the trends which respond to the aspirations of contemporary times. Thus in spite of the fact that Margaret Laurence and Anita Desai have evolved entirely in diverse socio-cultural and literary milieu, there is a great deal of interconnectedness from the point of view of the commonality of their major preoccupations and concerns. Hence a comparative study of their novels undertaken by Vijay Sheshadari is apt and meaningful piece of research.

The book presents a systematic analysis of the theory and practice of 'feminism' in the major and mature novels of Margaret Laurence and Shashi Deshpande. The first chapter titled "Cartographing Women" defines the notion of the marginal woman in the Canadian and Indian literary contexts. It also cartographs various positions of "feminism" with the premise that there is a "first world" and a "non first world" bipolarity. The second chapter rightly called "rites de passage" focuses on a comparison of *A Jest of God* (1966) by Margaret Laurence and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) by Shashi Deshpande. There is an in-depth analysis of the question of how the women protagonists, in these two novels, come to terms with their "selves" and the "environment" in which they live. The third chapter titled "Installed in Silence" presents a detailed analysis of two major novels: *The Fire Dwellers* (1969) by Margaret Laurence and *That Long Silence* (1988) by Shashi Deshpande. It explores and

contextualizes the problems faced by Stacey Cameron and Jaya in their articulations and expressions to reach out to others in general and the marginalized in particular. In the fourth chapter called "A Sense of Space," Vijay Sheshadari takes up the question of exploring the "space" by a woman, the marginalized, in a sexist culture and a patriarchal milieu. The novels taken up for analysis are *The Stone Angel* (1964) by Margaret Laurence and *Roots and Shadows* (1983) by Shashi Deshpande. The fifth chapter called "Texting the Self" examines, in detail, the important but enigmatic problematic of Identity with reference to two seminal works : Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974) and Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* (1993). Both these novels have an autobiographical stance as the protagonists Morag Gunn and Urmi are also creative writers. The chapter, very appropriately, juxtaposes the two socio-cultural scenarios: the "first world" and the "non first-world." The last chapter "Towards Conclusion" draws together the various ideological, theoretical and analytical positions that find articulation in the novels of the two novelists. Authors' own views on and approaches to feminist issues have also been commented on, though briefly.

In *Beyond the Walls*, Vijay Sheshadari has examined the sensitive nature of the question of "marginality" of women as mirrored in the novels of Laurence and Deshpande. He has followed the post-modernist techniques and strategies which bring in new insights and enrich the emerging discipline of Comparative Literature. He has rightly opined: "Margaret Laurence's and Shashi Deshpande's novels can surely be read and appreciated individually, but thematically they are interlaced, focusing on the psychological complexities of female subjectivity as well as the overtly political themes of collective feminist struggle and women's community. It is in understanding this intrinsic connectedness and preoccupations with the above discussed issues, that a sense of unity of a holistic imaginative pattern is gained. In their struggle to partake in the process of individuation, the heroines of Laurence and Deshpande become permanent parts of a larger structure of symbolic meaning for female than the one in which they began." (196)

Thus the book has a wider context as it presents not only a pragmatic critique of phallocracy but also of an excessively growing

materialism. It engages the reader's attention to make him reconsider expectations regarding femininity/feminism. Though quite useful as a significant critical study for the general readers of Canadian and Indian English literature, the book will definitely be a welcome addition to the limited material available for research students.

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D.K. Pabby

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M.M. Kalburgi, *Fall of Kalyana*, trans. Basavaraj Naikar, Basava Samiti, Bangalore, 106 pp. 2003, Rs. 50.

Indian Drama in English Translation is, unfortunately very limited in quantity as compared to fiction. It is indeed regrettable that the rich regional literature of multilingual and multicultural India is not made available in English translation in large quantity even after the lapse of fifty years after independence. One of the ways of resisting the colonial hegemony and Eurocentric thought is the discovery of abundant regional literature through translation, especially English translation. The Indian dramatists who are available in English translation are so limited in number as to be counted on one's fingers: Tagore, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Mahasweta Devi and Gurujada Apparao. Basavaraj Naikar's *Fall of Kalyana*, an English translation of M.M. Kalburgi's original play in Kannada entitled *Kettittu Kalyana* is a welcome addition to the realm of Indian Drama in English Translation. Kalburgi, former Vice-Chancellor of Kannada University at Hampi, Karnataka, has compressed his research findings on the life and mission of Basaveswara in this play. Basaveswara happens to be one of the greatest free thinkers and mystics of the world.

The personality of Basava is so grand, noble and multifaceted that it has tantalized many a writer from twelfth century down to the present one. Recently a few fashionable playwrights of Karnataka have attempted to portray the picture of Basava in their plays, but alas! they have turned out to be miserable failures on account of the superficiality of their modernist vision. For example, P. Lankesh's play, *Sankranti* cleverly concentrates on the intercaste marriage inspired by Basava's vision of casteless society, but ignores the other

aspects of Basava's elevated personality and mission. H.S. Shivaprakash's *Maha Chaitra* highlights the reception of Basava by his contemporary *Saranas*. Basava, therefore, recedes into background. The point of view adopted by the ordinary characters is rather vulgar and irritating. Girish Karnad's *Tale-Danda* tries to reduce Basava to less than his grand and noble stature thereby making him a small and helpless man with a confused mind. Thus all these three playwrights have failed to portray a satisfactory picture of Basava's social, economic and mystic philosophy and progressive thinking as it emerges from his own *vacanas* as well as the poetry written by others on him.

Kalburgi's play is far better in that it foregrounds Basava and his encounter with orthodox Brahmanism and King Bijjala and highlights Basava's protestant ideas like *kayaka*, *dasoha*, *istalinga* worship, caste and gender-equality, spiritual democracy, valorization of the mortal world, removal of untouchability etc. In the first phase of his life, Basava rebels against the orthodox Brahmanism by tearing off his sacred thread and by opposing animal sacrifice. In the second phase, he fights against the exploitative and dogmatic Saiva pontiffs of Kudala-Sangama. In the third and last phase, he fights with the royal order of King Bijjala controlled by the brahmanical dogma. Basava's departure to Kudala-Sangama hastens the fall of Kalyana wherein King Bijjala is conspiratorially murdered by his bodyguards who are inspired by Basava's progressive ideology and enraged by King Bijjala's authoritarianism and high-handedness. The picture of Basava that emerges from the present play is very comprehensive as it gives due importance to all the major aspects of Basava's liberal and humanist philosophy. It is neither idealized nor legendary as in *Puranas*, nor marginal and reductive as in the modernist plays mentioned above. But it is a realistic presentation of Basava's life of struggle and ethical nobility against the backdrop of religious dogmatism, political authoritarianism, communal segregation, gender-discrimination of the twelfth century Karnataka. The life of Basava depicted in the present play may be compared and contrasted with the lives of Christ, the Buddha, St. Augustine, Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar and Nelson Mandela in various aspects.

Naikar's translation of the play is admirable on account of its readability and crisp dialogues which appeal to the target-language reader. The play easily offers a challenge to the director who can present it on the national or international stage or even on the silver screen. The detailed notes offered at the end of the play help the non-Kannada reader to understand the technical terms, which are specific to the *Sarana* culture. The play offers ample material to religious philosophers, comparative critics and translation-theorists to codify their knowledge and sharpen their perceptions.

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R.M. Girji

**Mina Surjit Singh, *Six Women Poets: A Cross-Cultural Study*. New Delhi: Prestige, 2003. Price: Rs. 500.**

A compilation of six essays, the book examines the work of six representative poets who possess and nourish a faith in the possibility of poetry to offer practical, psychological and spiritual benefits, against the backdrop of their historical time and space. The desire for freedom from gender oppression is traced from its abstract underpinnings to its concrete manifestation in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Sarojini Naidu, Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das Surayya and Adrienne Rich and Manta Kalia. The author examines the construction of female identity through mythicized conceptions of women in the work of these poets and shows how their work, which reflects their cultural diversity, provides a sample of some fine writings by women who have made significant contributions to the tradition of women's poetry in India and America. Their shared project, the author believes, is to bring into being, the symbolic weight of women's consciousness and to speak for and interpret the truths of their sex. Singh is of the considered opinion that the narrative of these poets is bound together by the framework of a common engagement with communal obligation and commitment towards building and renewing a sense of collective life, since both men and women are mutually engaged in the important business of living balanced and meaningful lives. Their poetry, she suggests, thus re-

flects a movement from spectatorial detachment to the shared predicament of unscrolling a map on which gender intersects in a shared landscape.

Perceiving a definite ideological link between their lives and work, the author argues that the individual experiences of these poets have their validity in the universal context of collective womanhood, so that localized identities of race, colour and nationality are ultimately submerged in that collectivity. Brought up with all the visible trappings of emancipated women with a covert traditional agenda, these women were encouraged to be independent but also to fit into socially accepted roles. Straddling the two worlds of tradition and modernity, freedom and bondage, progress and regression, the author shows how they have braved the perils of a tightrope walker and emerged triumphant in their own individual ways. In this context their complexity can be traced to their attempts to strike a tenuous balance between the overlapping worlds of tradition and skepticism, of collective responsibility and individual choice. These poets attempt to move away from the notions of women as figures of exploitation and victimization and look instead, for a more challenging representation of women through different local experiences and traditions. With remarkable honesty and conviction they have helped create an entirely new poetic and opened up new poetic possibilities for women to recreate themselves as figures of power. Empowerment, which they perceive as an inherent strength, may either flow from within or without and may manifest itself in several ways in so much as it enables them to make choices. In their passionate concern for women as well as for a more humane society, they perceive themselves in roles of responsible citizens who can make significant contributions towards social reconstruction. Poetic strength comes from an ability to maintain a fine balance/tension between the private and the public. Transcending national boundaries, their poetry focuses on the many subtle ways in which the lived experiences of oppressed groups have been sieved out as extraneous, irrelevant and sometimes anomalous to sanitized accounts of universalistic histories, even while it makes them more cognizant of their own subordinate status and marginality. No maudlin autobiography, their work shows us the many small ways in which, small

acts of resistance that people perform can help change lives and perceptions. Their work is about inherent strength, about emotional and intellectual assertions that challenge existing power structures, about building positive structures on the negative foundations they have inherited and about new human and communal possibilities.

The book is divided into three sections entitled, "Whispers of Dissent," "Animated Disaffection" and "Charter of Freedom." The first section takes up the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Sarojini Naidu, emphasizing how both poets across cultures had to struggle to write poetry in an environment that was hostile to the imagination. If Dickinson is redefining herself as a poet and a woman by subverting the role of the Victorian woman and more importantly the role of *true* womanhood through her art, Naidu's poetic agenda is subtly discernible in the many ways in which she subverts and appropriates inherited literary and cultural traditions even while remaining within the cultural mainstream. Singh puts Naidu's poetry in correct perspective by emphasizing that its evaluation requires a historical rather than literary perspective as well as an insight into its underlying ideology of equality, freedom, peace and harmony. The second section is an insightful critique of two widely read poets—Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das Surayya. Singh believes that to assess Plath's poems as the pathologically disordered though clear outpouring of a father-obsessed and death-infatuated artist would be doing great disservice to her art. Her posthumous volume *Ariel*, written during the downward spin, which brought her to her suicide, assumes crucial significance in light of the complex nature of the relationship between the poet's troubled life and her brilliant work. Her cultural significance thus lies in diagnosing through her poetry: "the pathological aspects of our era that make death of the spirit inevitable." The paradox of freedom in confinement is what best defines the life and literary career of Kamala Das Surayya, the high caste Nayar woman from the renowned Nalapat clan of Kerala, who loves to court controversy. Sensationalism has always been part of her intent, need and strategy to jolt a complacent patriarchy and orthodoxy. Yet personal idiosyncrasies never out-weigh the public concerns of her art, which assumes greater significance through its rich subtext, says Singh. In the final section, the author explores the

poetic concerns of the major American poet Adrienne Rich and the fine bi-lingual poet Mamta Kalia, whose work has yet to receive the attention it so richly deserves. While Rich's art, she observes, reflects a major engagement with "trying to change the laws of history," Kalia's poetry provides ample evidence of the effort that goes into striking a tenuous balance between relational expectations and responsibilities and individual proclivities. Both poets, however, are concerned with creating artistic forms that would best express women's actual experience. If Rich's poetic vision lies in the exploration of new human and communal possibilities, Kalia's poetry reflects a keen social consciousness and shares a vital concern with the basic proposition of women's demands for an equitable life.

The book provides an accessible compilation of essays that would be of general interest to readers of poetry and women's issues and would cater to the special interest of scholars engaged in the study of Indian and American women's poetry. It adopts an approach that facilitates fresh insights into the literary and social relevance of the poets included therein, in a new millennium that lays great emphasis on the need for universal peace and harmony. The study thus makes a significant contribution to the fast-growing corpus of feminist studies.

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Suman Bala

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U.S. Rukhaiyar and Amar Nath Prasad, ed. *Studies in Indian English Fiction and Poetry*. New Delhi, Sarup and Sons, 252pp. Rs. 550.

Indian literature in English has made rapid strides during the last fifty years. It has disproved the doubts of those conservators who felt that Indians cannot write creative English. The classics of Indian literature in English in almost all its main branches—poetry, drama, fiction and general prose—have got not only recognition but also appreciation in the entire English-speaking world. Some of them have also been receiving prestigious awards both at home and abroad. The poetry of Tagore and Aurobindo has become a classic.

Some of the poems of the modern poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra and P. Lal have also made a mark in the world of letters. The output in fiction has gained even a wider readership. It has several generations beginning with Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao.

The novelists of the subsequent generations have been using some sophisticated techniques, the ones used by the psychological novelists of the west and that with a fair amount of success. The psychological studies in the novels of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur, to name just a few, have not received appreciation even in advanced literary circles. Similarly, the experiments of Vikram Seth and Shashi Tharoor shake our age-old reservations against the quality of Indian fiction in English. Some of the trends in modern Indian English fiction are in line with the fiction of the West.

It is necessary, therefore, that there be good criticism on Indian literature in English to help the reader in understanding and enjoying it properly. Books and articles are being written on them. Research is also going on. But let me kindly be excused for saying that fresh and deep insights are often missing in them. Most of the time we get superficial treatment, hackneyed material, without any urge on the part of the critic or scholar to deal with the complexities in the work concerned. The book *Indian English Poetry and Fiction* edited by U.S. Rukhaiyar and Amar Nath Prasad is a collection of more than twenty illuminating essays by scholars from the different parts of country.

The leading article by U.S. Rukhaiyar very well shows how in *Untouchable* Mulk Raj Anand has used the various tools of narration to make the work a triumph of narrative skill. His study of Narayan's use of imagery as an important means of integration in the novel is a fresh and laudable effort. He shows how a recurrent image like fire suggests theme of revolution and purification; the image of a lion in a mesh, the helplessness of the hero Bakha. His study of the various ways in which irony operates in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is also quite illuminating.

The essay "Foreign Foliage on National Root" by Amar Nath Prasad studies well what is commonly known as East-West en-

counter in modern Indian English literature. He has quoted copiously from the works of Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanian and P. Lal and shows how these poets, in their own ways, have dealt with this problem.

Radhakant Mishra's "Contrastive Study of the Aurbindonians and Anti-Aurbindonians" is a fine study of the difference between the two schools of Indian English poetry. He shows how today both the streams are flowing together.

Anupam Nagar's essay "Envisioning Tagore's Renaissance: A Study of Thought" studies the thoughts of the greatest figure in Indian English poetry. We know Tagore brought in a renaissance not only in literature but also in thought and culture. Nagar has quoted several relevant passages to prove his point. Such a study helps the readers in reading a writer in a broad perspective.

M.B. Gaijan's study of Tagore's treatment of the outcast shows a fine sense of discrimination. Gaijan has compared and contrasted Tagore's views of the outcast with that in the Indian sculptures. Such studies add new dimension to criticism. There are several other essays which add to our knowledge of Indian literature. I hope this book will be received well by those interested in reading and teaching Indian English literature.

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Ashwini Kumar Vishnu

S. Prasanna Sree, *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Study*. New Delhi, Sarup and Sons, 2003. 162 pp. Rs. 375.

S. Prasanna Sree's critical book *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* is a detailed study of the women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande who have to undergo trials and tribulations under the impact of conflicting influence of tradition and modernity. The book analyzes the feminine response to the emerging situation in life and their marathon efforts to seek their identity in a male-dominated society.

The book is divided into seven chapters. In the introductory chapter, the author gives a description of the history of women, their sad and dismal portrayal in the tradition and myths, their dignified

and respected position in the Vedic period etc. It also contains a brief history of Indian women novelists in English. The second chapter entitled "*Roots and Shadows*" deals with Indu, an educated young woman who brushes aside all the age-old beliefs and superstitions prevalent in the society. The author observes: "Indu's acceptance of western values and her search for liberty with a precondition of unfettered growth and maturity of personality, despite the insidious conflict between tradition and modernity, ultimately result in her emergence as a human being evolving basically as a woman of determination not yielding to the dictates of the patriarchal society." The third chapter critically examines Saru, the other woman character in the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* who neither surrenders to, nor escapes from the problems but accepts the challenges with great strength and vigour. The book also evaluates the other three great novels, *That Long Silence*, *The Binding Vine* and *A Matter of Time*. In all these novels the protagonists are women who are seen revolting against the traditions in their search for identity and freedom. Parasana Sree examines all these characters in a very lucid and succinct way. What matters most in this book is the interview of Shashi Deshpande with the author.

The "Foreword" by U.S. Rukhaiyar sheds light on the subtle shades of Shashi Deshpande's art and craft. His study of the various symbolical meanings of 'Binding Vine' and 'Long Silence' in the novel bearing those titles may help the readers in grasping the inner meaning of the novels concerned. Parasanna Sree's evaluation has a sense of discrimination and judgement. Her approach is analytical. I hope that the book will prove to be a great asset to all those students and research scholars who have not acquaint themselves with the women characters of 'Shashi Deshpande.

Jagdam College, Chapra

Amar Nath Prasad

## Book Shelf

**Gajendra Kumar (Rajendra College, Chapra) *The Indian English Novels: Text and Context*. Sarup and Sons, New Delhi, 2002.**

The book is a critical endeavour to explore comprehensively the origin, growth and maturity of Indian narrative art in the second language situation in both the pre-independent and post-independent era. The author examines the factionalist's quest for the poetics of the novel and the relationship between narrative art and contemporary society in cultural, sociological, mythic and stylistic perspective. It analyses the theoretical formulations of the Indo-Anglian poet and critics in their different critical frameworks. The Indian tradition of criticism is fundamentally and theoretically archaic in nature and character which requires thorough and thoughtful awareness of Indian insight and native heritage as preconditions for relevant and fruitful discourse. It is rightly pointed out that since the advent of Derrida, Foucault and others in the world of literary and linguistic theory, the school of academic criticism has got a lively pitch under the umbrella of postmodernism. The stage of amnesia now has gone into oblivion and the process of assimilation of western sensibility into Indian mind and art is a movement of coherence which demands theoretical diagnosis. The author has ably analyzed the colonial impact and the impact of the peculiar Indian environment on the language that the Indian writers have used with such skill and effectiveness. It is hoped that the lovers of Indian writing! in English and literary theory will read it with pleasure and profit.

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**Mithilesh Pandey (Hindu P.G. College, Ghazipur). *Akademi-Awarded Novels in English: Millennium Responses*. Sarup and Sons, 2003.**

The Sahitya Akademi (The National Academy of Letters) has acknowledged the excellence of several works of fiction over the years. Rooted in the native ethos, these novels manifest the cultural

plurality of our polity in the fascinating mosaic of marga and deshi tradition. This volume, comprising eighteen perceptive essays, focuses on the nine Akademi-awarded novels by noted writers to underline their thematic and artistic virtuosity.

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**Suman Bala (University of Delhi). *V.S. Naipaul: A Literary Response to the Nobel Laureate*. Khosla, New Delhi.**

V.S. Naipaul is one of the best-known English novelists of the modern times; his popularity reached its zenith when he received the Nobel Prize for literature last year. The volume, a collection of recent essays on his writings, aims at paying the fittest tribute to Naipaul, the novelist.

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**R.K. Dhawan, D.K. Pabby (University of Delhi) and S.S. Sharma (IGNOU, New Delhi). *India in Canadian Imagination*** Prestige Books, New Delhi.

The book explores the heritage of Indian thought and the image of India as a whole as depicted in Canadian literature. Writers like Uma Parameswaran, Rohinton Mistry, Anita Rau Badami and Shauna Singh Baldwin have reconstructed an image of India in their works as they imagine it to be. The book adds to the literature of Indian diaspora.

## CREATIVE WRITING

### To Lata

*A tribute to the renowned singer Lata Mangeshkar, the nightingale of India, who computed seventy-five years of her life this year.*

The conch, the rose, lotus and bow drawn  
Of Madhuris had all the at-  
tention of the applauding crowd  
Brought to the pointed point.

No one had the insight to see  
The chords of fine flesh that moved  
Deep behind the Adam's fruit,  
And alchemised sound and sense,  
Into supernal food of love  
Or rain of melting heart.

But flesh must have its day  
And as necessarily wane and wither  
The conch will crumple, rose decline  
The lotus dry up and bow break.

The sun will burn the loveliness  
And flames will join dust to dust  
And all the idols of the screen  
Will vanish like the morning burst.

But the airs risen from your throat  
Shall survive, shall live on  
Haunt the world like butterflies  
Dissolve age and grief in honey.

Like a branch you'll blossom forth  
Year after year, after year after year  
To shower *amrit* on the hearts in pain  
And the hearts that shall live.

R.S. Sharma, Varanasi

## Waiting at the Airport

So many people  
 Faces and Faces  
 Baby in his mother's arms  
 Pointing with glee  
 at the Servo  
 colourful signpost.  
 A boy of eight  
 enjoying his coke  
 secure by his mother's side  
 Talking cell phones, and more cell phones  
 and then the departure  
 was announced.

**Sushila Singh, Varanasi**

## Smile

Forget sorrows, let tomorrows  
 Be welcomed with a smile:  
 A line on lips, devil's wing clips  
 And he becomes docile.  
 Your winsome smile sans any guile  
 Makes a stoic lose heart:  
 Your sexy looks with fiery brooks  
 The urge of love can't halt.  
 A cue from you is bound to woo  
 Head and heart howe'er hard:  
 Whate'er you say all will obey  
 With love, awe and regard.  
 Vicious and vile good sense defile:  
 Elegance, grace show style:  
 Don't react, respond and the bond  
 Will scotch smirch and light smile.

**Kedar Nath Sharma, Gurgaon**

## Choice

I can choose to breathe  
or not to breathe, if I can hold my breath  
for whatever length of time.

I can choose any flower to deck  
my flowing hair or to fix it in my bun.

I can select any shade of lipstick  
or wear any perfume to define myself.

But I can't choose you!  
Why? Why?

One can love and fondle a pet  
One can be fond of one's brother, sister, father or mother  
But I can't love you!!  
Why?

Just because you and I  
are the same.

Synonyms exist  
so do reflections  
in mirrors or water.  
The former valued  
the latter loved.

But why can't I get my synonym to myself?  
Why?

I am choking.  
I am dying.  
Claustrophobia is killing me!  
I will throw open the closet.  
Break taboos.  
I will claim what is mine.  
I will smell you, touch you, inhale you.  
Will keep you by my side,  
in my bed and shout to the world:  
"Go to hell! Go to hell!! . . .

**Subhash Chandra, New Delhi**

## My Baby's Pet

You hop and cry  
'Mummy, mummy'  
Is all that is  
For you  
And I hope my child  
This is what you continued to be.  
Forget not  
Her strains and stress  
The situations  
She counters  
To bring the best  
For her  
Darling little pet  
She walks the ground  
A plate in her hand  
Trying to feed  
The naughty you.  
She runs to you  
When she hears you cry  
Your small hurt  
Hampers all task.  
She stands ready with a bottle  
Near your bed  
Lest you ask for food.  
She'll silence all  
My sieepy little heart  
Will you remember all  
When you grow up?  
Do not forget  
Her strives and distress  
At your littlest fall  
Love her with tenderness  
So she deserves  
For she is my baby  
My pet.

Harinder A. Singh, New Delhi

## I Need an Orthopsychiatrist

I'm a man of intellect  
 Don't mind, only chant.  
 Pardon me, don't know the perfect,  
 Be sure, unable to say the exact.  
 And fear to present the whole fact.  
 Hence only react to protect  
 My interest and sect.

Why do you expect?  
 I should be honest;  
 Either in fact or in act.  
 I don't act as per thought  
 And you may call me a hypocrite.  
 But isn't my tribute sufficient?  
 Which I all day parrot  
 For moral, value and fact.  
 And you must accept  
 It's not an easy 'tact.'

I can sing a song  
 To interpret a right as a wrong  
 And a wrong as a right  
 If I find gold in my sight  
     In between science and conscience  
     I don't make a choice  
     It's only my convenience  
     Which guides my competence.

I am a professor, but neither profess  
 Nor confess, as everything seems to be in a mess.

I'm a journalist but neither investigate  
 Nor discover but accept, craft and invent  
 Whether it is news, views or event.

I am a civil servant,  
 Neither 'Civil' and no way a 'servant'  
 But my inability is permanent,  
 To make national interest  
 Subservient to my interest.

I'm a lawyer  
You may call me a liar  
It is your will and pleasure,  
But my conscience is clear  
To trade off justice for silver.  
My disease is incipient and incessant,  
Don't you think, I need an orthopsychiatrist.

**Shiv Kumar Yadav, Begusarai**

## **To My Son**

With two smaller eyes on one small face,  
He lives a life of pitiable littleness;  
Adjusting now in the lap of an Auntie and then  
to the arms of an Amma  
He strives not to disturb his professional parents.

Told to be the father of man,  
He decides to lead a sacrificed existence;  
Fearing a more tyrannical attitude than merely a daily-desertion,  
He chooses to sob more and cry less.

Already burdened with the title of a good boy,  
He struggles in his tiny shape to maintain it;  
Resisting thus the irresistible often,  
He accepts a logic that convinces him not.

Attracted by this thing, that thing and everything,  
He fights with his little heart;  
Trusting however a hopeful tomorrow,  
He resigns himself to a soothing sleep.

**Sanjay Kumar, Pilani**

**To Him**

In an unmasked reality  
 I sense thy presence  
 No, not in the prayers of a puritan  
 But in the beatific smile of a child

Insurmountably raised topless mountains  
 Insinuate thy lofty heights  
 Oceans fathomless and profound  
 Suggest thy infinite depth

Thy freshness I smell in the  
 fragrance of a rose  
 Ravines quietened and bounteous  
 Reverberate thy charitable intent

Morning's rising star heralds thy buoyant glory  
 Soothing evening breeze whispers thy mystic message  
 Adorn thy gorgeous beauty

Cascading falls suggest thy vibrating pulse  
 Tiny droplets define thy benevolence enormous  
 Thee I vision in the lumbering leap of a monkey  
 And in the frantic nibble of a squirrel smitten

Amidst the pregnant pause of a precipice  
 When a puny quail shrieks her joyous littleness  
 I see that unnamed and unnamable merge  
 In melody of merriment and celebration

On moments such as these  
 My heart  
 O Lord!  
 Beats for thee

**Sanjay Kumar, Pilani**

## Vision

We have a vision  
 A vision for building an attar,  
 A desire for sacred heart.  
 We are in search of satisfaction  
 Both physical and mental, a bliss spiritual.  
 We are tired of darkness, we are in search of light;  
 Light that opens the petal of the lotus  
 With the first touch of sunrise.  
 Light that brings dignity and grace  
 Dispelling the shadows of lust and greed.  
 We have lost our sense and strength,  
 Hence a desire to restore our power  
 Like a honey—bee dancing around the fragrant roses.  
 We have a vision—timeless and eternal  
 That conquers death, disease and destruction.

## Response

My feelings unexplained  
 Like silent stars,  
 Appear in midnight sky  
 In search of a response.  
 The melted moonlight.  
 Showers tender and graceful  
 To console the bickering of my heart.  
 The shadows of my pain and sufferings,  
 Appear fearful like ugly monster;  
 At a distant meadow amidst dead silence  
 I am unable to bear the burden of isolation and despair.  
 My love, you will never know my pain  
 As you're confined to your melancholic songs  
 You're unwilling to respond to my feelings,  
 I don't want any price for my love.  
 Please don't conceal your feelings like a bud  
 With some art or tricks secret and covered  
 Is it possible for bud to hide?  
 The fragrance of love  
 When the windy night whispers in her ears?

Shankar Bhattacharya, Lunglei

## The Flower Girl

She begins her day  
 at the feet of Lord Shiva  
 pouring her opulent imaginings  
 like a cartload of water-melons.  
 Her soft, self-effacing liveliness  
 breaks into tete-a-tete smiles  
 when an in-flight video bursts  
 "Give me one more." The soft musings from a tea-stall radio  
 hangs on her shoulders  
 like the words of a contented lover  
 Atop a bird harshly calling  
 disarranges her feelings  
 like the old rusted scythe  
 lying in her father's mud-plastered shelf.

## In a Telephone Booth

The conversation continued for long  
 sometimes blasting like a tornado  
 or fading like a passing shadow.  
 Some faces crinkled into unleaving anger  
 as the falling sun dimmed the window.  
 Others threw up chunks of wry smiles  
 dwindling into a shadowy emptiness.  
 Now and then a sneeze, a cough  
 broke the spell within the doors.  
 The man at the counter died to embers  
 worked himself effortlessly  
 showing yellow battlements of defeat

**Krishna Bose, Balasore**

## **Reviving Touch**

**Like a lone camel**  
on a long, desert-path  
stretching to the horizon  
with never an end in sight,  
I was ever hunting for  
an elusive oasis where  
I could hardly hope to reach.

My body burnt by scorching sun,  
my limbs tired, dehydrated  
and dying for a drop of water,  
I was fated to drag onward  
furlowing the molten sand.

Then you touched me with a smile—  
and, after a long, long while,  
there was an untimely rain,  
and I was all poetry again.

**Pashupati Jha, Roorkee**

## **Is it really raining now? (Phallic Flames)**

Is it really  
raining now?  
or  
am I dreaming  
of the rain?  
The dew drops  
clothe  
the virgin leaves  
and  
leave them clad  
in a dress of pain  
The mist must lift

and  
show to us  
the earth  
without a fret or fuss  
The soil  
has held  
the blood of some  
and  
sweat of toilers  
who unceasing  
the droplets  
from their weary brows  
This very soil  
has soaked it all  
some released  
the phallic flames  
and others  
in a fit of woe  
tilled the soil  
with sparkling tears  
that left the chambers  
of the eye  
when  
all they saw  
was  
a stony vast  
and  
in their tear drops  
lay the way  
to an unforgettable day  
Is it really raining now  
or  
am I sleeping  
once again

**Shama Shukla**

# The Indian Journal of English Studies

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Editor-in-Chief: Dr. R.K. Dhawan

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