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Maya Angelou

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Lama Rangdrol

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Mahabharat

Justice League

The Originals

Journalism

Scriptures



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EDITORIAL

Ever since Christopher Columbus discovered America on October 12, 1492, human interest in the United States, the land of “limitless opportunities” has not waned. Tempted by the dazzling glitter of the great American Dream, hopeful wanderers and bold adventurers from all parts of the globe have rushed in from time to time to make America their home. The great mosaic of many people coming from divergent cultures and climes and yet eager to be assimilated into the American mainstream may have inspired Walt Whitman to state poetically: “One’s-Self I sing, a simple separate person,/ Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse. / ... / I say the Form complete is worthier far,/ The Female equally with the Male I sing./ Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,/ Cheerful, for freest action form’d under the laws divine, / The Modern Man I sing.”

Whitman probably anticipated what in 1920 Israel Zangwill, an immigrant Jew from England, epitomized through the metaphor of the “Melting Pot,” a term that gained currency in early 20th century to explain how all immigrants could “melt” and be transformed into Americans. The “Melting Pot” theory conveniently reflected the latent American desire to bring about a total assimilation, either by choice or compulsion, of divergent cultures and communities into the national mainstream.

However, as a scholar of American Studies for over three decades now and through my firsthand experience as a senior Fulbright scholar of the land which Columbus discovered, I could not help reflecting on the glaring contradictions and the dilemmas that seemed to challenge from time to time the very veracity of the avowed American ideals of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” enshrined in the *Declaration of Independence*. In this context I am reminded of a statement made by H.L. Mencken: “Under democracy one party always devotes its chief energies to trying to prove that the other party is unfit to rule—and both commonly succeed, and are right.” Mencken’s statement seems to have found ample justification in the mutual mudslinging duels that passionately engaged the two presidential candidates during the recent elections in the U.S. Though the Nineteenth Amendment to the American Constitution had sanctioned “Votes for Women” way back in 1920, the 2016 election result indicated that America was not yet prepared to see a woman in the White House falsifying, thereby, Whitman’s ideal: “The Female equally with the Male I sing.”

Contrary to popular expectation and media speculation, Donald Trump found himself comfortably ensconced in the coveted White House. In the wake of Trump's triumph, the mosaic of social and cultural diversity and assimilation that America is known for seems to have come under a cloud of suspicion and doubt. I was a little dismayed to receive several mails from both Native American and Immigrant friends in the U.S. who were quick to express their anxiety and dread at the victory of Trump. A Spanish friend wrote: "...we have the menace of Donald Trump around.... I am so worried and sad about it!" Likewise, this is what an African American friend based in Washington D.C. had to say: "Much happening in our world these days—much of it isn't good. I fear the creation of a new World Order. The problem of the 21st Century is religion. The issues of the 'color line' must now take a back seat. I fear the new Trump administration is leading the New Crusades.... May the work we do only be seduced by the truth."

In order to get a clearer picture, I wrote to Professor Jonah Raskin, an avid lover of *Re-Markings* and a dear friend, soliciting his views as an insider on the issue. His insightful and fairly objective response, included in the current volume, reveals the veracity of Winston Churchill's remark: "The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter."

No less relevant in the democratic discourse are the issues highlighted by Lama Rangdrol in his elaborate conversation in this volume. In the light of dilemmas that continue to haunt human conscience in the world's most powerful and the largest democracy respectively, Rangdrol rightly suggests, "As victims of dogged oppression, Dalits and African Americans must reckon the mutuality of their struggle."

Before closing the editorial note, I wish to offer, on behalf of the *Re-Markings* fraternity, heartiest felicitations to Bob Dylan for bagging the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature. May his lyrical utterances continue to inspire humanity to move beyond borders and boundaries of conflict zones! Our heartfelt condolences are also due to the two stalwarts—Comrade Fidel Castro and Bharati Mukherjee—who recently departed from Planet Earth for their eternal abode. The rich legacy of their lifetime contribution that they have left behind will surely inspire us to continue with our struggle to create and sustain viable democratic spaces despite constant threats from contending camps.

Nibir K. Ghosh
Chief Editor

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‘BRIDGES BETWEEN OPPRESSED PEOPLE’: A CONVERSATION WITH LAMA RANGDROL

Nibir K. Ghosh

Lama Rangdrol, born a Negro in American Jim Crow, is today founder of Rainbowdharma, an international Buddhist collective. His pioneering book, *Black Buddha*, is a classic in American Buddhism. His Cambodia pilgrimage film, *Festival Cancelled Due to Heavy Rain*, was honored for filmmaking excellence (HIFF). He is a career counselor with a degree in music and advanced certificate from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (London). His teacher Khempo Yurmed Tinly, was abbot of Zilnon Kagyeling Monastery (Dharamsala). He is the first African American to travel and teach Buddhism in Europe, lecture on the Sri Vijayan Empire, travel throughout Maharashtra, and lecture at Columbia University's 125th Ambedkar celebration. In this conversation, Lama Rangdrol dwells at length on his firsthand experience and perception of African Americans in the U.S. and the Dalits in India.

Ghosh: On his return to India after his educational trip to U.S.A., Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had inspired and encouraged several Dalit scholars to go to the U.S.A. to study African American literature and to interact with activists in the field. How were you first drawn to Dr. Ambedkar?

Rangdrol: I am not, nor have I ever been an activist per se. Instead, I became aware of Dr. Ambedkar after realizing the shortcomings of Western psychiatry. Occidentalism has an inherent inability to heal the human condition, especially those who are multi-generational descendents of Occidental conquest. I came to this conclusion after a quarter century of work (1973-2000) in psychiatric nursing and counseling. Over the decades I found the Western model to be resistant. Its approaches disallowed an assertion of humanism that challenged Western exclusionism. There was no room for so-called "Alternative" approaches such as African religions, indigenous Shamanism, or Ambedkar's Buddhist model of individuated liberation.

Many of the hundreds of cases I worked, especially those involving people of color, hit the "Occidental Wall." The "Wall," in a capitalist society, begins and ends with financial coverage for treatment. If an approach is not covered by insurance it may as well never have existed in human history. Then as now, the Western system lacks the ability to lead an African American to the study of Ambedkar as a form healing the vestige of multigenerational racial oppression. It chooses to

differentiate the generalized Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) from the Afrocentric specific Posttraumatic Slave Syndrome. The latter inferring Occidentalism is a perpetuating factor of past and present psychosocial injury. To the Occidental system, a lifetime of being Black in America is not a contributing factor to stress-sensitive illness such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, Alzheimers, liver & kidney disease, mental disease and so on. In fact, to assert the contrary can be the cause of professional disrepute and employment termination. Consequently, even the most privileged well-resourced African American in need of relief meets resistance.

Ghosh: What ways did you visualize to counter this kind of resistance?

Rangdrol: Over the decades it became clear the Occidental model had to be transcended. The matter, for me, was one of integrity at a deeply personal level. I thought about the psycho-spiritual escape velocity necessary to exit Occidentalism itself. A revolutionary contemplation for those who've spent centuries isolated in Occidentalism due to generations of slavery and Jim Crow and an Abrahamic biased Civil Rights era. Then as now, there remains no Western Ambedkarism approach related to alleviating slavery's lingering in the African American mind. In fact mere discussion of African America's "vestige of slavery" among Western psychology proponents can evoke rousing debate among Occidentalists. They resist the notion. By resisting they perpetuate avoidance of Occidental accountability for its legacy of heinous acts against humanity.

In response to the controversy I left the profession. I began a deeper search. One that was capable of healing me and my people. Buddhism stood out among many. I investigated it. After 2 years of forest retreat and three years of supervised practice in Oakland California's African American community, an African American Buddhist colleague sent me a copy of an Ambedkar speech. I don't recall the title. The writing piqued my interest. On first read it was obvious Ambedkar's writing was a master plan for Dalit psycho-spiritual liberation from the internal onus of Untouchability. What was seemingly unconquerable in the Dalit mind was put asunder one didactic sentence after another. Ambedkar's brilliance leapt from the pages like a blazing light. After recovering from his stunning rebuke of Untouchability, I immediately engaged my word processor's "Find/Replace" function. I substituted "African American" for "Dalit", "Occidental" for "Hindu", "slavery" for Untouchability, and so on. The result was both liberating and suffocating. The processor translated Ambedkar's passion for Dalit liberation into an awkward yet

tantalizing discourse on African American liberation from the ill effects of Occidentalism. The fatal flaw of so-called "Western Buddhism," "Engaged Buddhism," and all of their Occidental variations were laid bare. The unadulterated linguistic reframe of Ambedkar revealed vestige of Occidentalism in the African American mind that was synonymous to Hindu Untouchability's vestige in the Dalit mind. Ambedkar's model ridded sovereignty of Untouchability in the Dalit mind. Hence, ending the sovereignty of Western Eurocentrism in the African American was logical.

I felt choked. It was clear such writing was blasphemous to Western Buddhism's full-on effort to define migration of Buddhism to the West as Eurocentric dominant. From their point of view, liberating the African American mind from Occidentalism is anathema and reprobate to the Western world's notion of Occidental supremacy. Though Ambedkar had made this Dalit-Negro connection early on, its truth was beyond Negroes immersed in the Jim Crow era to fully appreciate, let alone act upon. Nor does it fit today's Western model of Buddhism's migration to America by Eurocentrists.

Despite the perennial defense of Occidentalism in Western Buddhist thought, the thrilling truth is African America's map to the "Ambedkar Underground Railroad" has been found. The Black Mind can finally encounter the sensibility of Ambedkarism through readily available technology. This revelation is conspicuous to anyone that directly reframes Ambedkar into the African American idiom. Discovering this was my consummate "Aha!" — one that defined Babasaheb's contribution to African America's emancipation from the psycho-spiritual and cultural vestige of Eurocentric conquest.

Ghosh: You consider yourself a student of Ambedkarism. What aspects of the life and teachings of Dr. Ambedkar impressed you most? What led you to undertake a 1,000 mile journey teaching and traveling throughout Maharashtra?

Rangdrol: Occidentalism has defined Buddhist meditation on behalf of its own interests. I've abandoned the need to find Ambedkarite intersection with them. My approach is very different from Western Occidental Buddhist converts. Their effort is to selectively absorb Ambedkar into newfound Western Buddhist traditions. However, at best, the relevance they find in Ambedkar leads African American Buddhist practitioners to a dead end.

Ghosh: In what way?

Rangdrol: African American practitioners seek Buddhist liberation that includes relief from the trauma of living among descendents of their enslavers. This is true even among the Occidentalists sponsored “Buddhist of Color” movement affiliated with Western Buddhist organizations. The epitome of African American practice, in particular, includes de-fanging the Western world’s vestige of racial dominance in their minds. Ambedkar’s respite for the African American meditator in no way perpetuates servility to discriminatory and oppressive forces born in Untouchability or the American slave experience. Any meditative practice to the contrary is a dead end for emancipator relevance of Buddha’s teachings in the African American mind.

Ambedkar’s Buddhism in the West is not and will never be one of patronizing Occidentalism in the African American mind. It doesn’t have to. Favoring Eurocentrism over African American awakening is antithetical to Ambedkarism, particularly in light of his well-documented championing of the American Negro interest. My work has been one of defining Ambedkarism transcendent of Occidental superiority in America. I study Ambedkar from the standpoint of his inclusiveness in the most humanistic way. He was born a Hindu. But he worked on behalf of all Indians subjugated by Casteism. The term “Dalit” is defined as any Indian subject to hegemonic oppression based on caste. His definition of Casteism included oppressive caste forces among Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, tribals, and so on. “Dalit” is therefore an inclusive term. When he outlawed Casteism in the Indian constitution it was an admonishment of hegemonic caste dehumanization regardless of religious or secular justification. Occidentalism is therefore more akin to Caste by virtue of its analogous interest in perpetuating hegemonic oppression of disparate groups. Both Occidental and Indic hegemonies lack intersection with liberating oppressed people from their respective hegemonic oppression.

Ghosh: What common traits did you notice between “Ambedkar’s caste critique” and the African American viewpoint?

Rangdrol: Ambedkar’s liberative writings are applicable to African America’s quest for equality and justice under the law. The breadth of his intent is the most impressive aspect of Ambedkar’s writing. He laid down comparative analysis on Untouchability and American slavery. The American Negro was included definitively. In my view this demonstrated intent to reach beyond Indic and Eurocentric applicability. Ambedkar’s discussion of Untouchable/Negro symbiosis

proved his concern was for the inclusive liberation of humankind. As victims of dogged oppression, Dalits and African Americans must reckon the mutuality of their struggle. Ambedkar suggests working together is the means to shirk the cloak of hegemonic oppression on both continents. Indic and Western civilization remain absolutely in control of information concerning the condition of their oppressed masses. The only true source of discourse is face to face among the oppressed. Considering the distance between us, one quickly realizes the role finances play as a tool of oppression. Poor masses of the world do not have financial means to meet. Consequently, when the opportunity arose to visit the Dalit world I took it.

During my journey I met as many Dalits as possible. I travelled throughout Mumbai, from the height of Dalit society to slum neighborhoods noxious with burning heaps of trash. After Mumbai, I travelled by car, bus, motorized rickshaw, train, plane, and on foot. I also spent time meditating in ancient Buddhist caves such as Ajanta, Ellora, and lesser known holy places. In addition to visiting ancient auspicious places I visited museums that displayed Ambedkar's personal artifacts, and of course Deekshabhoomi where his ashes are interred. Along the way I taught about Buddhism and African Americans in open air Dalit community settings, homes, Buddhist centers, and slum viharas. The experience moved me greatly. It was the only way to meet the living legacy of Ambedkar face to face. Throughout the journey I felt I'd escaped Occidental hegemony to visit a renowned community who understood what escaping hegemony means. It was the most liberating experience of my life.

Ghosh: During your travel through Maharashtra, did you notice discrimination on Caste lines to be a reality even in the contemporary context of "India Rising"?

Rangdrol: Not only did I witness discrimination in the present sense of day to day life, I met the legacy of Untouchability face to face. By legacy I mean the elders, women and children whose stories were written in their affect as human beings. This was particularly true in the slums. My career experiences with long-term incarcerated individuals in American mental institutions were incomparable to the severity I witnessed among the most downtrodden of Dalit India. The human condition of India's Dalit slums were even worse than the poverty I encountered during my travels in Cambodia where American president Nixon had vowed to bomb back to the Stone Age. In India for example, the question of barbarity toward Dalit women was not whether it

occurred, but how persistently horrific its extent was. The sunken-eyed shuffled walk of a speechless elderly Dalit woman was so resonant with barbaric victimization, it defied need for discussion. African American Buddhists need to appreciate that Zombie-like life exists in Dalit India. Not from exotic neurologic flesh-eating diseases. Rather, from inconceivable brutality meted out by lawless individuals who enjoy the protections of Caste privilege. If not for resilience of the Dalit community I fathom no individual could survive Untouchability's several thousand year crush of humanity to dust.

The safety of Dalit slum life is welcomed relief compared to the vulnerability of life in rural India. This is similar to relief American slave's sought by huddling around Christianity and seeking sanctuary in plantation life rather than risking violent retribution for affiliating with African culture or trying to escape from slavery altogether. Dalit migration to the sanctuary of slums correlates to the metaphoric reason Harriet Beecher Stowe's character became "Tom" living peacefully in plantation life.

Whether one accepts the comparison of American slave conditions to Dalit slum living or not, a unique distinction stands out in the Dalit Buddhist slum experience. On the skewed door of many a plywood-walled tin-roofed hovel the blue Dharma wheel persisted. It was a symbol of hope, of connectedness to the aspirations of Ambedkar. It was there among the broken rock-shard paths cackled by chickens, feral dogs and goats that I met Ambedkar's Buddha. In fact, it is the only time I experienced levels of devotion that transcend the onus of humanity's worse degradation. This is not to say progress hasn't been made. It is simply fair to point out such progress has occurred against the odds in the face of dehumanizing resistance. As such I think the presence of Ambedkar in India's slums epitomizes our world's indomitable yearn for human salvation in the face of unthinkable duress.

Ghosh: What insights did you gain from such interactions with reality of Dalit life?

Rangdrol: What I learned from this journey was the sincerity of Ambedkar's aspiration to uplift the human condition. His call for human dignity was so significant that today's "India Rising" cannot be realized without including his aspirations. The great struggle being waged by Casteists and Occidental forces to appropriate Ambedkar's legacy is based in this. They cannot claim to have achieved democracy, equality and liberty without him. It's also clear, having met the Dalit world

personally, that no hegemonic force on earth is powerful enough to claim uplift while dismissing Ambedkar's contributions.

Ghosh: The activist model provided by the Black Panther movement inspired the creation of the Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra, India. What were the salient features of the Black Panther movement?

Rangdrol: I was born during America's Jim Crow era. My teenage years were spent during the time the Black Panther Movement came to prominence. I saw Huey Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, Angela Davis, Malcolm X and all other activist icons of the era speak on television as it happened. They along with others such as King, JFK, etc. inspired me. It's fair to say, at the time, the Panthers were a small part of a larger less-credited grassroots movement. Television shows such as *Soul Train*, Alex Haley's *Roots*, R&B music's Soul impresario James Brown's "I'm black and I'm Proud," writers such as James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) and so on were part of an African American political, artistic and sociological full court press. Sports figures such as Jim Brown and Muhammad Ali were also inseparable from what author James Baldwin described as a societal wide "slave revolt." The Panther's activist model has gained notoriety over time but their role was a cog in a much greater wheel of mass activism. The scale of activism was in fact so massive it garnered vehement obstruction by America's most powerful surveilling, infiltrating, discrediting and disrupting domestic political organization — Cointelpro (COunter INTELligence PROgram).

In context, the Panther Movement was concentric with Black America's attempt to set limits on racially justified harm to Black America. Limits were established as an expression of self-determination, survival and self-directed uplift. During the era, the Panthers' contribution inspired my generation to create our own identity. They made identifying with Blackness popular, if not revolutionary.

The Panther's interpretation of Black identity was very different than those presented in our school's history books. Like India's protection of upper caste children's shame, dominant culture America's rendition of history was presented in a way not to shame its dominant culture children. My 2016 testimony before the California Department of Education spoke to the issue of dominant culture protectionism that leaves minority children to discover the truth of Eurocentrism and Occidentalism outside the secondary educational system. India's dominant culture attempt to soft pedal Casteism in American textbooks was subsequently defeated. A generation of students was saved from

what for African Americans had been little more than a primer for later encountering the reasoning of Woodson's 1933, "Mis-Education of the Negro." Panther's promotion of Mao's Red Book was revolutionary in its time. But it lacked the deeper discourse on African Americana by Woodson, Dubois, Frederick Douglas, Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes and so on. In context, the Panther's were propagandists. They understood the shock value of heightened rhetoric, public stunts, and media manipulation. Some might say they were more Edward Bernays¹ than their intellectualist and artist predecessors.

African Americans in my generation were traumatized when we found out our textbooks had been soft-pedaled on the heinous severity of slavery and Jim Crow. It was as though we'd been taught America's Grand Canyon was a modest valley, only later to find out it was an immense expanse. My testimony before the Department of Education questioned the validity of similarly traumatizing the present generation of Dalits in America. What possible reasoning, knowing the injury of my generation, could there be to soft-pedal the barbarity of Casteism to a generation of Dalit American children and their peers?

Protecting upper Caste Hindu American children from shame offered little mercy to American Dalits and barred conspicuous truth from American children on the whole. Effecting California Department of Education's deliberation on text book language was an example of Dalit/African American commonality spoken of by Ambedkar. Racial segregation in America and India's Casteism share common ground. The Panthers played a pivotal role in articulating oppression for both communities. Their voice resonated internationally, including Dalits' struggle against Caste oppression. But it was Ambedkar's writings that served as the portal through which I and perhaps many others can deepen cross-cultural mutuality.

The vestige of discrimination passed from one generation to another is the common element between segregation and Caste. The mentally-discursive story line of oppression woven into both communities from birth is consequential. African American James Baldwin adroitly asserted, "Just put me next to an African and you'll see the difference." By this he inferred persons of African heritage are not inherently afflicted with the vestige of inferiority to Eurocentric dominant culture. Baldwin proposed Blacks raised in the Occidental American experience are victims of a unique Occidental psycho-spiritually racialized hierarchy imposed upon them from birth to death. In other words, Blacks born into Occidentalism live in a condition analogous to Dalits

born into Caste oppression and synonymous with all oppressed people born into similar conditions. The common relevance of Ambedkar's liberative discourse is easily seen from this point of view.

Ghosh: What common elements do you find between the effects of segregation on the basis of color in America and that prompted by the Caste divide in India?

Rangdrol: Defeating discrimination in the political sense is not a remedy for the underlying psycho-emotional legacy. As long as the vestige of oppression's injury is passed through generations, its ills live like a dormant flower bulb in the earth waiting for its next season to arise. The mind afflicted with oppression, particularly when passed to children, is the common element between the effects of segregation on the basis of color in America and that prompted by the Caste divide in India. It cannot be healed by political camaraderie with Casteists, Occidentalists, Secularists or any other legacy of brutal subjugation however earnest the ideology. This is particularly true of Marxist/Leninist (Communist) leaning Panther ideology. Ambedkar attests to this in his November 20, 1956, World Buddhist Conference speech, "No doubt the communists get quick results.... But I have no doubt about it [The Buddha's way] as I said...is the surest way." Babasaheb placed Buddhist persuasion through moral teachings above Communist means of abrogating fraternity and liberty for the sake of expediency. Dalit activists that advocate the Pantherism nexus are out of context with Ambedkar's clarity on the issue. Secondly, Dalit American Pantherists, contrary to Ambedkar's advisement, invite the same anti-Marxist invective to America's Ambedkarite Movement that destroyed the American Panther organization in the first place. However consternating Ambedkar's adherence to Buddhism may be to expediency of the Dalit cause in America, his culminating refuge in Buddhism remains inseparable from Ambedkarism's core values.

Ghosh: Could you please elaborate?

Rangdrol: I believe Babasaheb knew the very nature of oppressed identity needed to be undone in afflicted communities. Whereas changing the mind is the most difficult endeavor a human being can partake, need for liberating from oppressive identities stands out among Dalit and African communities. The questions must be asked, "Who are we outside what has happened to our families? What is the universal approach that will liberate people of the world from carrying the iron ball of oppression as an identity? Do we, as a human experience, have the will to become more than the politic of what has

happened to us?" However existential these questions may appear, I believe Ambedkar's approach in theory and practice, including the moral teachings of Buddha he ultimately turned to, are globally significant.

Ghosh: According to you, to what extent have the numerous legislations brought about in both America and India helped curb discrimination on racial and Caste lines respectively?

Rangdrol: In my view the Constitutions of both countries are sufficient to curb discrimination respectively. Legislations derived therefrom are incidental. Each Constitution has pith language on equality, justice, fraternity, liberty, citizenry, individual human rights, and so on. The problem is enforcement, not derivative legislations. Both countries have extremists who mete out injustice whether they are in power or can levy influence on those who depend on them for political and financial relevance. By extremists I mean individuals who believe their personal, religious, financial, racial and Caste/class interests supersede constitutionality. Their goal is to perpetually circumvent constitutional principle and law. Therefore, the Upper Caste that cites ancestor worship of Vedic and Smriti as reason to circumvent constitutional law is no different than the American White Nationalist who claims supremacy of European ancestor's Biblical principle to the same end.

The structure of legislation is persistently vulnerable by design. Its democratic principle of majority rule is subject to dismissal, undermine corruption, reversal and disavowal to say the least. History, not I, records this in fact. In America we know this from a long history of violating constitutional legislations (Treaties) with our indigenous population. Contemporary African American Scholars' claim of a New Jim Crow era in America is another example.

Ghosh: How, in your view, did Ambedkar address this issue while framing the Indian Constitution?

Rangdrol: I believe Ambedkar became aware of this through trial and error that included authoring India's Constitution only to see it abused and disregarded by entrenched Upper Caste extremism. Without the uphold of constitutional rule of law, legislations offered little hope of liberating the common Dalit from the intimacy of day to day dehumanization. His final assault on Untouchability was rebuke of Hindu ancestral worship of the Vedas and Smritis. To onlookers this appears to be religious conversion to Buddhism. However the Buddhist world knows there is more to Ambedkar's reasoning. He added tenets of

Refuge for Dalits that were in direct rebuke of Vedic religion and ritual including, "18. I shall renounce Hindusim." His public demonstration of the ability to divest oneself of oppressive childhood conditioning was as powerful as the Refuge ceremony itself.

This is why it's appropriate to say Ambedkar's Buddhism is not the only religious destination for humanistic uplift. The world will never be entirely Buddhist. I think he knew that. Ambedkar's contribution, more profoundly, was the ability to point out where the mechanism of perpetuating oppression persists. It is in the individual mind and demands to be carried forward as an identity. Therefore, Ambedkar's solution for himself and Hindu Dalits *en masse* was only a model. It was something to show that the impossible was in fact possible. The work now, and for future generations, is for people of various faiths and beliefs to find Ambedkar's model in the context of their own situation. Applying Ambedkar's model to one's own situation is the ultimate legislation.

Ghosh: For over a half-century now, there is no leader worth the name who can take the place of either Malcolm X or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Would you agree that there is a severe crisis of leadership in the African American community?

Rangdrol: What we learned from King/Malcolm was movements' vulnerability to undermine via assassination. Since then there's been a loosely knit decentralized leadership structure. Some leaders are public. Others work in the micro-cultures of community, faith, and legislative settings. Locally based low profile leadership is a modern strategy based on survivability. No one is in a hurry to claim a dominant leadership role because of the proven history of subversion through fatality. Increase of technological surveillance has also played a role in lowering the profile of leadership. Today, all transmittable communications are subject to metadata capture. African American political activity has a history of being intensely surveilled for the purpose of political undermining. It's smart for African American leadership survival to no longer seek mass exposure of the highly public King's Dream speech or Malcolm's blistering Harlem Street corner rant. The community benefits from return to low tech means, informal one to one chats, couriers and the like. Unfortunately, those outside America no longer have access to African America leadership discourse. To them, there may appear to be a void of leadership. Yet leadership of the Black vote has been instrumental in electing and re-electing America's first Black President. Some say the first female

presidential candidate was unsuccessful due in part to decrease in the Black vote. These results suggest Black leadership is influencing African American participation in a strategic and meaningful way. To say there's a leadership crisis or that African American participation in the American democratic process is happenstance may not be accurate. African America, like all oppressed communities in the world, operates within the conditions it finds itself. Necessity dictates it must evolve. High profile oratory leadership once thought essential to the global reach of Black politics is a bygone era.

Ghosh: Dr. Ambedkar had reiterated through his own life that "people don't sustain the struggle for life until they get educated." If one were to go by current statistics, there are more African Americans in jails than in schools today. From the standpoint of an African American and a Buddhist, how do you think can such a dismal situation be overcome?

Rangdrol: Faith. The future is filled with hope. President Obama, a Black president, commuted over 1,000 sentences. Some of the incarcerated African Americans had multiple life sentences without chance of parole. They now have an opportunity to make tremendous contributions to humanity. There is concern the incoming administration may undermine its predecessors legacy. The same was said about Ambedkar's legacy following his untimely death. Yet, today we are in discussion of his most intimate thoughts. As a Buddhist, I cannot succumb to the notion of permanence. Things are impermanent, they change. Many in my generation never imagined an African American president possible. It happened. In my view, there is no dismal situation. There are only endlessly changing circumstances. One might recall "Detroit Red," an ordinary incarcerated Black man. While "doing his time" he studied world culture and African history in the prison library. The fact that street thug Detroit Red emerged as Malcolm X is the kind of miraculous turn of events Buddhists believe in. Malcolm was not Buddhist. Nonetheless his metamorphosis was miraculous and inspiring. Buddhism is not a faith of pessimism and foregone conclusions. We acknowledge potential for change no matter how it manifests.

Ghosh: So, you feel one can find inspiration in such metamorphosis?

Rangdrol: I find humanity's themes of imprisonment and redemption inspirational. Consider Beethoven's German opera, *Fidelio*. It tells how a wife disguises herself as a prison guard to rescue her husband from death in a political prison. *Les Misérables'* French story begins after its

protagonist is released from a nineteen year prison sentence for stealing a loaf of bread. In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a wrongfully imprisoned Frenchman escapes and acquires a fortune. And of course, in *The Man of La Mancha*, its storyteller saves himself from merciless Spanish dungeon prisoners by telling the story of woeful knight-errant, Don Quixote. America's beloved song of hope, *The Impossible Dream*, hails from its Broadway production. England's Shakespeare tells the story of Othello (Act I, scene iii), "Of being taken by the insolent foe./ And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence." All you have to do is look for these themes. They're everywhere. Ambedkar's comment that the struggle of life can be sustained through education is excellent advice. I follow it. In my meditations, I envision Future Buddha (Maitreya) in an American prison huddled among Black inmates. He's doing his Bodhisattva work until he alone decides to miraculously emerge into our world of civil freedom. In my mind, the indefatigable Tara is also there among her imprisoned Black beneficiaries of Bodhisattva work. She similarly will emerge at a time known to her alone. Whether this is true or not, it staves off any sense of dismal futility.

Ghosh: If you were to address a joint congregation of African American and Dalit youths, what would you focus on?

Rangdrol: Fraternity. Here's a sample plenary speech:

"Dear Friends, colleagues, and future leaders of human liberation. African America is a formerly enslaved people. They were stolen from their native land to be physically and psycho-spiritually marooned in Abrahamic Occidentalism forever. Upon being "broken-in" to slavery, they were forced into believing old world desert religions of Abraham (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) were their core beliefs. They speak English without knowing it is the language of Germany's Angles descended from Viking conquerors. As descendents of slave culture, their lives today are governed, from birth to death, by descendents of their enslavers. Therefore, the African American identity has become synonymous with "god fearing descendents of slavery" rather than the dignified identity of humanity's most ancient people. Few experiences within or outside their community reinforce the nobility of their antiquity. There are no church songs in Swahili or any other languages of Africa. They have no native land of their own. Direct cultural links to Africa are no more. The past has simply dropped away from their consciousness. Like most utterly conquered people of the world they make up stories that symbolize reconnecting with their native land.

However, most among them would quickly perish in the African deserts, jungles, or bush they romanticize to be their own.

The only freedom African Americans experience has been granted in the land of their maroon by descendents of their enslavers. At the end of America's 19th Century Civil War, African America was emancipated physically. But they remained psycho-spiritually plundered by Occidentalism just as Dalits were by Untouchability prior to Ambedkar. Even when 20th Century African American leaders arose, they did so as proponents of Occidental Abrahamism. Despite playing to the hand of Occidentalism their voices were silenced by cultural warfare waged against them, incarceration, and assassination under suspicious circumstances. Consequently, African Americans act as though they have no power to be anything other than Occidental Abrahams, even when they convert to Buddhism. This is for sake of survival. The culture of formerly enslaved people acts this way because of being, 1) totally isolated from the world for centuries, 2) wholly immersed in Occidental dominance on land, and 3) surrounded by oceans on both borders. Despite this, the idea African America has no power to liberate itself from Occidentalism is no truer than Dalits who thought they had no power to liberate themselves from Untouchability.

The reason for African Americans reluctance to take destiny in hand is because no leader has come for them like Ambedkar came for Dalits. Lacking a leadership model to confront Occidentalism, African Americans remain afraid of what has and continues to happen to them. They fear Occidental backlash that destroys confidence, wrecks families, ends careers, and can terminate a life. This doesn't mean African Americans aren't courageous people. It means concern for safety and multigenerational survival causes them to remain in the fold of their legacy as slave descendents. They say there is a New Jim Crow. But they've never challenged Jim Crow self-subversion to Abrahamic Occidentalism like Ambedkar challenged Untouchability. There is no African American reprieve from relentless Occidental repression. It continues to be forced upon them in every way including the Western interpretation of Ambedkar's Buddhism. Despite all that's happened to them in slavery and Jim Crow, the American government deemed them enemies of the state during the Civil Rights era. Why? Because the Civil Rights Movement threatened the very fabric of Occidentalism. Leaders at the highest level of American government felt Black liberation was an act of cultural war in need of a warring response.

This was brought out in March 2016's confession by President Nixon's aid, John Ehrlichman. He said the government knew they couldn't make it illegal to war against black people. So, according to him, they flooded black America with heroin and criminalized them for using it. Millions of Black lives were negatively affected. Ehrlichman said the goal was to disrupt African America. They arrested black leaders, raided their homes, broke up their organizing meetings, and vilified black people night after night on the evening news. I am personal witness to that war. I saw American tanks, armored personnel carriers and mechanized battering rams roll through my neighborhood smashing homes and lives without concern. The Nixon administration called their scheme a "War on Drugs." But that was actually a lie concocted by descendents of Abrahamic slave owners to war against Abrahamicized descendents of African slaves. The March, 2016 Ehrlichman's public admission also said, "Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."

In light of this my hope is Ambedkar's dictate of fraternity will speak to your hearts during this precious time you share together. What do youth from a community that's stood up to Untouchability have to say to a community descended from slaves who've yet to confront their identity born in the brutality of Occidental Abrahamic enslavement? Who among you can articulate why Ambedkar abandoned his birth religion to African Americans in a meaningful way? Whatever you say will be history. But it will not be easy. Why? Because it is not easy to speak to a community insulted by the thought that participation in enslaving religions perpetuates their own oppression. Unlike Ambedkar, African American hero Martin Luther King Jr. remained in the religion of those who enslaved his family. Likewise, Malcolm X converted from one enslaving religion into another responsible for enslaving millions of Africans in Asia. Ambedkar, c. 1951, wrote of African Americans' amnesia concerning Asia's enslavement of Africa, "Negro slavery in America and in the English Colonies has had a sorrowful history which has made people forget the importation of the Negro as a slave in Asia...because Negro slavery in America carried on by the Europeans was a most revolting thing."² In so saying, Ambedkar asserts the trauma of enslavement in America induced an amnesia typed forgetfulness so significant that the concept of being born in an enslaving religion without dying in one is yet to be fully appreciated. However blasphemous to Occidental Abrahamism his assertion may be, the question today is whether Ambedkar's observation remains relevant.

It's also fair to note Dalit identity has been injured by millennia of dehumanizing brutality under Untouchability. Despite Ambedkar's great leap, the vestige of inferiority remains. Wealth and power of African America can be daunting to the Dalit community still ravished by poverty, systemic repression and thousands of years in dehumanizing subjugation. Despite conditions of Untouchability that persist today, Ambedkar said the Dalit experience is on equal ground with all human beings. This includes wealthy and prosperous American youth. The Dalit voice of liberation is in no way inferior to the discomfort African Americans may feel about what needs to be discussed. Ambedkar's decisive disembark from his birth religion is gravitas. It is the authority that grounds the Dalit voice in global strategic relevance. Besides, according to Buddha, no one is better than anyone else. So get on with it. African American youth have much to offer in substantiating Dalit peers as equal on all accords. Each of you has something to share and gain from one another.

Fraternity, therefore, in this moment means creating a bridge. A bridge created by summoning words of mutuality through persuasion of moral force and love. The bridge I speak of is one of hope. Not just for you. But a bridge that can serve as a model for building bridges between oppressed people throughout the world. It is legendary work. Just as Ambedkar's legendary work uplifts us in this critical moment.

Make no mistake. What I'm asking you to do is make history. Human history. A history that will inspire an irrevocable awakening. One that will, for the first time in history, acknowledge your preeminence in the contemporary voice of Ambedkar. Recognize the joining of your forces. Acknowledge awakening that will allow you to see one another as allies in the resuscitation of the human spirit.

What young man or young woman among you, given the catastrophic injuries your communities have suffered...what young persons here today have the conviction to speak and listen as a team of cultural architects working to bridge your generation? In a few moments you will break into smaller groups. The cultural and communication obstacles you encounter are the vestige of your oppression incarnate. They will attempt to impede you in every possible way. But every obstacle can be defeated as long as you keep an open mind and love for one another in your heart.

One last thing to say to the African Americans present here today. That is, Dr. King gave his life to inspire hope among you. Your presence here today is consistent with his moral and civil aspirations. As some

of you know Dr. King visited India. The experience changed him forever, though he could not make the case for Untouchables in the context of his liberative Jim Crow work on the American psyche. Nonetheless, in June of 1965 he gave a speech titled, "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution." In it he said, "...the destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of India and every other nation." Go forward into your discussions with this in mind.

This concludes my discussion on Fraternity. I look forward to your comments at the end of this historic day.

Ghosh: A very inspiring speech, I must say. Thank you.

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POINT COUNTERPOINT: TWO ESSAYS

Jonah Raskin

TRUMPED AGAIN: THE 2016 AMERICAN ELECTION

It's challenging to make sense of Donald Trump's victory at the polls, not only for Americans but also for readers in India who are thousands of miles away from the U.S. and in a different time zone, country and culture. But perhaps the opportunity to write about the 2016 presidential election for *Re-Markings* will make it possible to have a degree of detachment that might lead to insights. I hope so. This account is personal, though it's also based on conversations with friends and acquaintances, close to home and in far-off countries too, who shake their heads in disbelief.

In 2000 the U.S. Supreme Court handed the election to George Bush. In 2016, the FBI handed it to Donald Trump when it announced it would reopen the investigation of Hillary Clinton's emails. That's a simplification of a complex set of circumstance but the FBI drove the final nail into her lackluster campaign. Then, too, no candidate for the presidency ever used TV as adroitly as Trump has used it. He had the public in the palm of his hand and played it like a gambler for all it was worth.

Other observers would no doubt write other accounts with different points of view about Trump's election. Still, all of us might agree that American presidential elections are important to people all around the world. After all, the United States is the wealthiest and most powerful nation on Earth not forever but perhaps for the foreseeable future. What happens in the White House has an impact on Paris, Moscow, Shanghai, Tokyo, Buenos Aires and Delhi.

At the age of 74, I have survived the administrations of twelve U.S. Presidents: Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush I, Clinton, Bush II and Obama. I have not loved any single president, except Roosevelt and I was too young to appreciate him. He died when I was three-years old. Still, I grew up in a family that revered Roosevelt. As a young boy I basked in that reverence, especially in the 1950s when anti-communism became all the rage in the United States. For much of that decade, radicals and

liberals lost their jobs. Americans talked about using nuclear weapons against the Russians, and the national mantra seemed to be “conform, conform, conform.” If the present seems bad, it’s not the first time.

Every time there’s an election Americans seem to go through a kind of organized mass-hysteria that they forget about until the next election. Then there’s yet another round of mass hysteria, as there was this year. Americans have a kind of collective amnesia when it comes to politics that makes them susceptible to the rhetoric of demagogues like Trump whose election did not surprise me. I saw it coming months ahead of time and said so, though I don’t go around telling my neighbors, “I told you so.” For months and months, it seemed to me that Trump appealed to the basest of sentiments and to all the ugly isms, including racism, jingoism and sexism that many Americans liked to think the nation had transcended. I did not vote for Trump. I called upon everyone I knew to vote for Hillary, though I thought it unlikely that she would win.

If this election has taught me anything it’s that fear and hatred of minorities, immigrants, gays, lesbians and transsexuals is alive and well in much of the country, though not in the part of California where I live. (That’s a small consolation.) Moreover, on Election Day millions of American voters expressed their rejection not only of Obama but also of Bill and Hillary Clinton, who are probably as corrupt as any contemporary American politicians.

Trump supporters, who include white working class men, but also some women, some African Americans and some gays, feel excluded from the American Dream. They lost their jobs and their homes and for the most part they blamed others, including Mexicans just over the border, and Muslims whom they would like to keep as far away from borders as possible. Trump capitalized on their fears and ignorance.

Americans have a long history of blaming others for their misfortunes. The seventeenth-century Puritans pointed a finger at the Indians, whom they called “barbarians,” and at some of their own kind whom they accused of witchcraft and whom they burned at the stake. If there’s a constant in American history it’s this: there is always a witch-hunt, though sometimes it might be called a lynching, or just ordinary persecution.

In many ways, discontented Americans were deceived by the mass media that failed to report accurately on the Trump campaign in part because much of the mass media, including major newspapers, magazines and TV stations, didn’t want Trump to win. *The New York*

Times, for example, saw what it wanted to see: the election of Hillary Clinton. It turned myths into the news.

The morning after I read *The New York Times* article that said that Trump would be the next president my head felt heavy, as though under a great weight. But my spirits were soon lifted by three women friends who held a peaceful vigil in the town of Sonoma that's close to my home. I joined them briefly. A small crowd gathered. Candles were lit, songs were sung; the cloud of despair that hung over our heads seemed to lift.

In other parts of the U.S., angry, young people immediately took to the streets. I was not tempted to join them, though I might have driven an hour or so to Oakland, California, and rioted there. Nor have I condemned the rioters. I do not believe in the efficacy of their actions, but I understand their anger, their hurt and their disappointment. Sometimes the only action one can take, or so it feels, is to go into the streets to register one's dissatisfaction.

I will not soon get over the notion that the future of the United States is grim indeed. Maybe it will last the rest of my life. Immediately after the election, Trump has already surrounded himself with some of the most unsavory political figures in American public life, including Chris Christie, the governor of New Jersey, Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York, and Newt Gingrich, who made a name for himself by combatting Bill Clinton and his administration in the 1990s. Since then, he has appointed men and women to his cabinet who are against labor, against the environment, and against civil rights and civil liberties.

Trump and his crew, including members of his own family, would like to turn the clock back to a time that only exists in their imaginations: when Republicans ruled as though appointed by God; white men cracked real and metaphorical whips; women knew that their place was in the kitchen and the bedroom; and children were taught that their fathers knew best.

Will Trump & Company become as reactionary as they would like to be? That remains to be seen. Let's not forget that Reagan and Bush both aimed to undo the achievements of the popular movements of the 1930s and the 1960s that helped working class Americans and women and minorities, too. That they were not entirely successful is due to the efforts of organized political movements and ordinary citizens.

Two things always seem to work in America. (And elsewhere, too.) One is the carrot and the other is the stick: material rewards and the weapons at the disposal of the police respectively.

I have no doubt that Trump (and his crew) will use them again, perhaps in new and innovative ways if only to remain in power and to fatten their pockets at the expense of the very people who voted them into office. The policeman's nightstick and the gun intimate and kill; they also lead to protest. The next four years promise to be a time of discontent and defiance that will find expression in acts of civil disobedience, political campaigns for public office and in poetry, music and film. On the day Trump was inaugurated as president and the day afterward, millions of American citizens protested peacefully in the streets and from one end of the country to another. There's a lot to protest against, including the building of a wall that would separate the U.S. from Mexico and prevent some from entering illegally. Those who demonstrated are a harbinger of protests still to come. The anti-Trump forces are already talking about impeachment and the 2018 elections for Congress. It's going to be a very lively and unpredictable time.



BOB DYLAN: NOBEL PRIZE REFLECTIONS

Right now, I'm listening to Bob Dylan on a CD in my house in California. I'm also remembering that I heard Dylan perform live on July 25, 1965 at the Newport Folk Festival. That's when he first played an electric guitar in public before a large audience and sang one of his classic songs, "Like A Rolling Stone." The chorus to that song goes, "How does it feel, ah how does it feel?/ To be on your own, with no direction home/ Like a complete unknown, like a rolling stone." A lot of Dylan is in my head. I don't have to play a CD; I can hear him on the tracks I've recorded and stored inside.

I'm also thinking of the fact that recently Dylan was awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize for literature and that all around the United States, my own country, there have been cheers and boos. Dylan fans argued that he was a great poet and a great songwriter on a par with Shakespeare and that he deserved the award. In *The Washington Post*, Adam Bradley, a college professor said, "It's about time." Others insisted that what Dylan mostly wrote wasn't really literature and that he didn't deserve the Nobel.

Writers from all over the world were far more deserving, they claimed. In *The New York Times*, columnist Anna North insisted, "Bob Dylan

does not need a Nobel Prize in Literature, but literature needs a Nobel Prize." Perhaps so, but why not rejoice with his many fans, listen to his music and not try to guess the reasons why the committee chose Dylan above so many other worthy artists?

No doubt, the topic will be debated for a long time, much as many of us will go on listening to Dylan for a long time, perhaps until we die. There's a lot to listen to: more than 50 years of music and song. When I do listen to Dylan I listen to early Dylan, the Dylan of the 1960s, the Dylan who was a folk music performer and who stood with and helped to swell the ranks of the Civil Rights and anti-war movements. The Dylan who sang, "Ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more," and "You don't need a weather man/ To know which way the wind blows" from the immortal song, *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, which captured the feelings of the Sixties counterculture.

My Dylan was overtly political and a radical, too, rough around the edges, without a polished voice and a musician who was outplayed on the guitar by many another guitar player, from Jimi Hendrix to Jeff Beck. I like the youthful Dylan who sang, on the album *The Times They Are A-Changing*, "Come gather round people." That ballad became for a time the anthem for a generation that wanted to change the world. I sang it with friends on picket lines to end segregation. Dylan himself grew less interested in changing the world and more and more interested in changing himself, his image and his sound.

Reborn again and again, Dylan himself was like the proverbial rolling stone, though after 1965 he was never "a complete unknown." Nearly everything he did and said made its way into the mass media. I'm not sure why he went on reinventing himself year after year, decade after decade, except that in these times artists who want to stay alive and be relevant seem to feel that they have to reinvent themselves constantly or be tossed on the junk heap of old records, old movies and old books. Reinvent or die: that's the watchword. The boy born Robert Zimmerman had to morph into Bob Dylan and then Dylan has to morph into two, three, many Dylans.

Still, I usually go back to early Dylan, to a song, for example, like "Masters of War," that's as passionate a cry for peace, though it emerged from anger and bitterness as any song written by an American in the twentieth century. These are the opening lines that still stir my blood and that are as timely and as relevant now as they were in the 1960s: "Come you masters of war/ You that build the big guns/ You that build the death planes/ You that build all the bombs/ You that

hide behind walls/ You that hide behind desks/ I just want you to know/
I can see through your masks.” That’s brilliant!

Dylan captured a time and a place and helped to change it. A prophet and a visionary, he followed in the tradition of Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, those two geniuses of American poetry whose work inspired him.

Surely there are other novelists and poets who deserved to win the Nobel Prize in 2016. Hopefully, the selection committee will get around to some of them next year and in the years ahead. Meanwhile, we have our current Nobel Prize winner, a popular American troubadour with integrity in a time of great hate and political ugliness in America. Bob Dylan reminds us that there’s more to the nation than flag waving, bullets from policemen’s guns, politicians who grope and harass women as well as utter racial epithets. Indeed, more to the nations than the masters of war who go on and on ordering others to drop bombs, for them, on civilians around the world.

I wish that Dylan would reach into his bag of tricks, recycle his old topical songs and sing a ballad that might inspire us today and give us hope. But as the Irish poet and singer Van Morrison sang, “Don’t look back to the days of yesteryear,/ You cannot live on in the past,/ Don’t look back.” Dylan seems to have lived by those words. He didn’t look back. He didn’t live on the past. Good for you Mr. Dylan. You did it your way.

In a grand American tradition, you declared your independence and you kept on declaring it all through your life. Once, years ago when I was down, down, down, deeply depressed I listened to your song, “Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues Again” that has the lines “Oh, Mama, can this really be the end/ To be stuck inside of Mobile/ With the Memphis blues again.” I wasn’t anywhere near Mobile, Alabama or Memphis, Tennessee, but I had the blues and I felt that I was stuck in the place that Dylan sang about. Thanks, Mr. Dylan, you helped me work my way through the blues to a brighter day. After all these years, I’m still grateful. And I’m not angry with you for not going in person to accept the prize. You did it your way and that’s okay with me.

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VISITING EMILY DICKINSON

Tulip Chowdhury

Living in Amherst in the 21st century and reading Emily Dickinson's poems, I get lost to a mystic union of our lives. Her visions of nature and life bridge our times in our aesthetic beings. There is an inevitable soul connection to nature that nurtures our souls in a similar way. I find contentedness in truth and beauty in spirit when I stand on her home ground. Between her times and now, I envision her poems flowing in waves of literary geniuses as we embrace her on the crossroad of times. Our life styles are different, yet her poetic reflections, like countless hues of a kaleidoscope, mesmerize me.

Much as the poet absorbs me with her poems, visiting her house recently on Homestead was like touching the wings of a bird and feeling the tremors of its body before a flight. But the wings were mine, excited to fly with words about Emily as the tour guide showed us around the Emily Dickinson Museum. Walking in the same house as she had done, seeing objects that her eyes had seen, I lost the present to the past for those moments. A soul-connection transcended beyond physical presence as I entered her bedroom. My soul lay bare, willing to see the world as she had seen, beyond the biased, with the purity of a flower. When we connect with nature, we touch innocence in its true form. Emily and I seemed to hold that truth with our love of sky, land and water. I could almost sense her presence with me.

As I stood near Emily's writing table in her room, sunlight penetrated through the windows like echoes from her times. The streaming light was a reminder that it's the same sun that fills us with delight, a testament to how life wraps us with time. She had crafted words of life of her times and I was trying to do the same with my times.

Appreciation of life and its giving are messages in Emily's poems in her words of the small things and big. Her writing and her dedicated caring of her ailing mother were her giving to life. Memories filled the poet's room that was small in size but held life larger than itself. The furniture whispered tales woven by the woman who had experienced life mostly within walls of her home and yet whose heart roamed with the bigger world outside. Her perception of the outside world was none the less wise than those venturing out in it regularly. In her times when women were bound by social etiquettes and norms, Emily had the

courage to remain aloof from what would be normal for a young woman. She did not socialize or get settled down with family life as would have been so like a woman of her times.

Emily's serenity in the memories of her quiet presence at Homestead was perplexing to me. I wondered if she would have been able to live her secluded life if she had been bombarded with the present world of media and Internet. Would she have sought life beyond the boundaries she held around her if there was a computer in her room? If a solitary life held her captive, perhaps sights and sounds of distant lands would have roused her curiosity and she would have explored the outside world. Reading about her sister Lavinia's outgoing nature, I assumed that though Emily had choices, she chose the solitude of her home. The magnolia tree on her home grounds, standing firmly on the roots and giving its flowers seemed to symbolize Emily's life.

Emily was of immense strength in her personality, no doubt behind the tenderness of her creative soul. There were no computers or E-mails yet her train of thoughts found their places on paper in her organized handwritten work. And they have found ways into the wheel of eternity as we sigh with delight over the treasure left to us in her poetry. In her homebound life, Emily was able to accomplish writing nearly 1800 poems and save them without folders on computers. How passionate she must have been about her work to have accomplished that great feat! Scraps of papers holding her writing bear witness that she wrote on what was near hand and saved them all and went to re-writing them as well. When she had poetic inspiration, she wrote on tiny pieces of paper but write them she did.

Walking on the grounds of the Homestead and looking at old trees, I wondered how many of them had witnessed their times with Emily. Nature, silent and simple in its language filled me with a mystery that lifted the veil between the poet and myself. Beyond the chaos of the human world, life flows like the susurrus of the river. In the sea of a challenging life, she was the wave that rode her times and broke into surfs with glee. She was no longer among us in body and yet there I was, a follower on her steps for she had left a blazing trail for all poets.

Emily's work is the beacon to show us the way to one's passion in life. Death is not sorrow, nor life a joy unless one holds the courage to accept life for all it is. Life is like a carriage that passes on and to experience the ride one must board it. As humans we can be passive watchers or be explorers in life. Our vocations bring different lives to us. As one must dive under water to see what lies on the seabed,

humbleness and dedication to our belief bathe them with true light. The age of science and technology has changed our lifestyle in myriad ways. The virtual world has taken over the real world in ways unthinkable in Emily's times. Her times had its own markings on mankind and Emily made her place above many of her contemporary literary personas.

Life becomes magnanimous with fractions of seconds that combine together. Each stroke of a brush is responsible for the whole picture the painter paints. As poets and writers, we take life with its darkness and light, with sorrow and joy. Life remains incomplete unless we explore each station we cross. Life is a journey that begins with small steps. In many of Emily's poems I find mentions of the small leading to greater revelations. As in "Bee in his burnished Carriage":

*A Bee his burnished Carriage
Drove boldly to a Rose —
Combinedly alighting —
Himself — his Carriage was —
The Rose received his visit
With frank tranquillity
Withholding not a Crescent
To his Cupidity —*

Or "From a narrow Fellow in the Grass":

*The Grass divides as with a Comb —
A spotted shaft is seen —
And then it closes at your feet...*

Emily's discovery of uniqueness in trivial is like the lessons of micro and macro concepts of the present to me. The ease with which truth finds ways in her poems can be seen from the way death is mentioned in one of her poems, "Because I could not stop for Death/ He kindly stopped for me..."

Emily did not have titles for her poems, a humbleness of her soul it seems, not speaking of herself but of others present in her life. Much later her poems found titles through her well wishers who helped publish her works. Revolutionary in the world of the poets I would say, Emily found her own expression moving away from the traditional rhyming and sending courage to countless poets after her. She has left not only poetry but badges of courage to write what comes to our minds and hearts. She was Emily Dickinson, a poet in her own rights.

Long after visiting Emily Dickinson Museum, the poet's dedication to self-expression reaches me and I find wings with my words. An immigrant from Bangladesh, English is my second language, yet I feel a close affinity to her as I read her poems on nature, life and death. We are of different nationalities, culture and upbringing, yet our unity of souls hold me in similitude more than our differences. Emily then and now stands to the present world in the light of what she left for us: euphoria of life. Emily's poem, "Nature is what we see" ends with words that connect us through times:

*Nature is what we know—
Yet have no art to say—
So impotent Our Wisdom is
To her Simplicity.*

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JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE: THE TWAIN SHALL NEVER MEET...OR WILL THEY?

Brij Khandelwal

Each year when I interview fresh students for the mass communication course, I am told by many that they are writers, that they have written poetry and short stories. Therefore, it is natural that they join the course. Yes, in the good old days creative writing and journalism were thought to be a common discipline. But now the perception is changing.

Many journalists, Hindi and local languages in particular, seem to believe that anyone who can write is a man of letters. A large number of journalists are poets and authors. They have illusions about being "sahityakaars." But in the past two decades, after the IT revolution began, journalism and literature have become two diverse streams with a remote possibility of their converging at some point in future.

I can straight away think of four major differences.

Literature is universal, eternal, most often imaginary with lots of masala and flavour for effect and generally a means of self-expression and satisfaction. While literature has an enduring or lasting quality, the appeal of journalism is temporary or superficial. A literary work may or may not have been targeted for a particular section of readers but a journalistic piece is always produced keeping in view the tastes and limitations imposed by the owners and the markets. A newspaper or a channel has to be user-friendly.

Literature too often is the product of a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions, but journalism is said to be a prosaic, rational, laboured and too technical an exercise. However, at times a reporter essaying a human interest story may play up on the emotions of readers going lyrical with lurid details of an event as in a fashion parade or while describing the first monsoon showers. Some of the humorous pieces, or the "middles" in dailies are such creative efforts that they may shame a modern-day Charles Lamb or A.G. Gardiner.

But journalism is tied to the market with a defined audience and target group; its geographical limits are identifiable and its life is short. Imagination has no place in journalism. However these days there are quite a few speculative stories, doctored reports, "rumourous news."

Often journalism has been defined as literature written in a hurry. The dividing line is thin as the two share a number of common features. In the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, journalism and literature overlapped and crossed each other's frontiers, despite differences in respect of content and style.

Although journalism appears to have degenerated into a crass pen-pushing profession from the starry heights of the pre-independence era when it was considered a mission, there is little doubt that over the decades literature has grown the richer with inputs and insights gained from the mass media.

Some of the best literary talents have at some time or the other been associated with newspapers which serve not only as organs for projection of politico-economic postulations but also help build up esthetic sensibilities and refine tastes of the readers. Some of the novels of Charles Dickens were serialised in newspapers.

Regular publication in print media of reviews, essays, poems and stories of dare-devilry, romance and adventure have helped bridge the gap between the writer and his readers. Today mass literature, a byproduct of assembly-line type of literary output, is heavily dependent on journalism. All that is enlightening to read, written for the man on the street either to inform him or brainwash him, forms part of our popular literary heritage.

The difference between literature and journalism is so marginal that in days to come it would become difficult to distinguish the two. More so, as journalism is becoming a routine technical exercise devoid of passion and literature fast losing its romantic flavour, the revolutionary fervour and in an effort to take on a realistic hue, is getting bogged down with mundanities. The focus today is on grassroots journalism and realistic literature.

Journalism is essentially a vehicle of mass communication for diffusion of messages at a breakneck speed, resulting in the evolution of a mass society, mass culture and a "mass man," in the emerging globalised context. A message once catapulted into mass orbit through technological intervention becomes free of the sender. It no longer needs a support system to sustain it, requiring proximity of the sender and the receiver. The original message could undergo fundamental restructuring and acquire new dimensions and hues in a record time.

But unlike a journalist a creative writer may often not have the opportunity to gauge the feedback instantly from his readers. This gap can infuse a sense of detachment and aloofness in him. A media man on the other hand has to be always conscious of the likely repercussions of his writing and therefore can not claim the same degree of freedom of thought or expression that a literary person enjoys.

The invention of the Guttenberg printing press in the 15th century was a revolutionary event in the history of literature. From class the focus now shifted to the mass. It at once signalled a change in style, format and content. The creative writer could now make money and reach out to a bigger audience. Millions of copies of literary works are now published in addition to internet editions. Mass global readership of books has changed the literary scenario in a fundamental way.

Literature today has come out of the closet of the elite, the admirals of the libraries and has acquired a pop dimension thanks to pocketbook or paperback editions which have put the printed word in the easy reach of the masses.

It is through the columns of a newspaper that a common man is first introduced to a book or a writer. The interviews and reviews bring mass recognition to new authors. The monopoly of a few has been demolished and we hardly hear of any major literary movement these days, as we did before independence. In Hindi, for instance, the era of movements came to an end with Ageyey who too in his last years joined journalism becoming editor of *Everyman's Weekly* of the Express group. Great poets like great authors have been lured by the film media, as happened in the case of Gopal Das Neeraj whose "Karvan gujar gaya gubaar dekhte rahe" brought him instant recognition. Poets like Gulzar or Javed Akhtar have penned lyrics that are imbued with pure literary nuances. The latest literary persona to make it big in the film medium is Chetan Bhagat.

If literature appears to be losing its quality-sheen and the old world elan, it is largely because of the negative influences of the mass media. The process of independent thinking, analysis and opinion formation has been dented by the media which dishes out ready made opinions and pressures the audience into accepting a certain way of thinking. Consumerism has impacted human relations reducing humans into use and throw items. Often a literary critic of a newspaper can make or unmake the literary career of a budding writer. The inputs the media provides can distort free inquiry and evolution of tastes.

Having said that, let us accept that the single most permanent influence of journalism on literature has been its democratisation which many critics call vulgarisation of tastes. If literature is becoming so popular as evidenced in the frequency with which literature festivals are now being held in all parts of the country, it is because of journalism which allows free scope for experimenting with new ideas, forms and styles. We today see distinct categories of middle class or working class literature, thanks to journalism.

Journalism today is a technical art with huge scope for experimentation while literature continues to be inspired by human values of a universal nature with poetic fancy, imagination and fictional elements continuing to dominate its processing. Thanks to internet and the social media sites, we now have instant literature occupying space and attracting notice through the evolving variants called Twitterature and Faciterature, blogs, listicles, etc.

A few centuries ago in the west, journalism was looked down upon. In fact, a newspaper writer was addressed as a "liar." Literary personalities kept a distance from hack writers and pen pushers. But today, journalists are high profile, much in demand, and a respectable breed. From its complementary nature a century ago, media has become a parallel vocation, serving very often as a stepping stone to aspiring authors and poets. Journalism in our country has given a stream of distinguished writers and also politicians. "Good journalism," wrote Bernard Shaw, "is much rarer and more important than good literature."

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SCRIPTURES IN DIRE NEED OF RELOOK

Sushil Gupta

Complexities of science (structure of atom, double-helix of DNA, spatial dimensions of receding galaxies, black holes, dark energy etc.) pass over my head. I am awed with the extent of human knowledge. Even though I don't understand much of it, I am overwhelmed by the leap of human imagination. I trust the scientist and his expertise. Failure to grasp the intricacies I attribute to my limited IQ and lack of effort and motivation.

The discourses of godmen and preachers, on the other hand, underwhelm me. I get the feeling I am being taken for a ride. The preacher looms as a glib talker who takes advantage of my perfunctory acquaintance with scriptures and makes me look an ignoramus. His pseudo arguments and obscure quotes irk me.

The mainstay of all discourses is scriptures which derive their authority from God and are therefore question-proof from mere mortals. Most scriptures are embedded in hoary past when man had barely learnt the charisma of language and had yet to discover the felicity of the written word. All religions vie with one another to push the antiquity of their scriptures. The presumption is the older the text, the more authentic its message. Terry Eagleton puts it this way: "...what millions of men and women had found fit to believe over the centuries seemed a surer guide to the truth than the fancy notions some eccentric loner had dreamt up overnight" (33).

In the *Rig Veda* one finds the earliest phase of religious consciousness indicating the expression of poetic minds struck by the immensity of the universe and the inexhaustible mystery of life. Not only *the Vedas*, by and large it is true of all scriptures. That scriptures are poetry is readily conceded. And poetry is best enjoyed with a "willing suspension of disbelief." Magic, miracles, supernatural phenomena and super-being too need suspension of disbelief for their full impact. Poetry and miracles impart immense joy to mankind. But to make them the cornerstone of morals and metaphysics is a blunder.

Scriptures were the inventive product of the precocious brains of their times. Given the limited reach of early man's grasp the scriptures were the apogee of knowledge in the domains of philosophy, science, ethics and metaphysics, besides being history and literature. The utterances of those thinkers appeared radically profound to their followers who held on to them tenaciously for centuries. The modern man with the

advantage of hindsight finds them jejune. "*Paradise Lost* is a monument to dead ideas." What Walter Raleigh said of Milton's epic could be extended to the entire corpus of scriptural texts.

They are suffused with fabulous imagination and are rich in poetry but short on reason and lacking in conviction. Replete with moral-laden narratives they pander to a wide array of visceral responses. The world-view offered therein is simplistic and full of clearly outlined binaries. Pseudo arguments are liberally preferred to win over the barely literate masses with a high quotient of gullibility.

The scriptures alternate between two posthumous scenarios. One threatens man with the wrath of God and an eternal damnation of his soul; the other sings hosannas of His compassion and the lure of perpetual bliss in His backyard. Karma leading to successive births is the oriental version of the same old carrot-and-stick syndrome. Nirvana or Moksha as the ultimate goal of life is as vacuous as the lure of heaven and the threat of hell.

At my Boggle threshold "the point at which the mind boggles" both the preacher and the scientist stop making sense to me. But I trust the scientist while I find the preacher dubious. The scientist wears the aura of profundity while the preacher seems enveloped in a haze of verbosity. He is trying to con me having conned himself in the first place. Anachronistic and out of sync with modern thought, scriptures perpetuate gender bias, foster feudal outlook, and impute moral motivation to an amoral universe. Karen Armstrong adds, "Secularist opponents of religion claim that scripture breeds violence, sectarianism and intolerance, that it prevents people from thinking for themselves, and encourages delusion" (3).

Scriptures are god-centric. But man of late has excluded God from rational discourse. He is kept out of intellectual deliberations as a long held delusion of mankind. The popes of all religions put a brave front to preserve His relevance and to save the God industry from going bankrupt.

I assume there is no breach of decorum if I quote from my own work. In my novel *The Fourth Monkey*, which dwells on the conflict between mysticism and skepticism, the protagonist listens to a discourse on *the Gita*. He muses, "It eludes me why the modern man is always advised to live by the learning contained in *the Gita, the Upanishads, the Tao, the Torah, the Gospels* or *the Sharia*. Granted there are some nuggets of wisdom in them, there is lot more of dross too. For the lesser mortals it is not easy to sift the two. They simply quote the

scriptures and damn one another for falling short of the obsolete code. They ignore the evolution of human thought over the millennia. They stick to the nursery-rhyming folk-wisdom enshrined in the moth-eaten papyrus of the sacred texts. Knowledge cocooned against inquiry in the wrapping of divine truth is the biggest pitfall. Man must constantly engage himself in reassessing the validity of inherited knowledge. Otherwise, his learning curve would resemble a circle, a cipher” (Gupta 169).

Once-glorious ancient texts that provided a spectacular springboard for the human imagination have become a millstone around our necks. They keep us mired down to a swampland and prevent us from soaring high in the sky. Sacredization is the culprit. *The Torah* is revered by the Jews and *The New Testament* by the Christians. *The Quran* is holy for the Muslims, *the Bhagvad Gita* for the Hindus and *the Tripitakas* for the Buddhists. *The Adi Granth*, *the Avesta* and many other texts have their own cult following. According to Roshen Dalal, “In Gurdwaras or Sikh shrines, *the Guru Granth Sahib* is the main object of worship and is kept on a throne under a canopy, wrapped in an embroidered cloth. Prayers and ceremonies are conducted every morning when it is opened and in the evening when it is closed. Devotees worship the book as the representative of god and the gurus and pay obeisance to it” (Dalal 169). Scriptures all over the world command similar veneration and rituals from their adherents. Any show of disrespect by way of speech or gesture inflames the ire of the hardliners.

Curiously, the text of one religion does not inspire the same awe and respect in others. At times it draws downright jeers. The knowledge enshrined in the scriptures of one group has only an esoteric appeal. It does not hold universal validity. World history is replete with instances of inhuman cruelties perpetrated to bring the cynics and skeptics round to the view propagated by the sacred texts of a particular group. Scriptures are thought-fossils etched in the rocks of human memory. They are significant indicators of what the people of that time thought about life and other mysteries of the world. With passage of time they look rudimentary, dated and in many cases irrelevant. They become the junk of past – rusty, broken and dysfunctional. Yet, not easy to discard. To live life according to them would be like ferreting out a rundown tricycle from the attic and hope to ride it on the highway of life. You will not only not make it but may end up making a fool of yourself in the bargain and a laughing stock among your peers.

Suggested alternative: Take the scriptures off the pedestal by deconstructing them and distil from them the essential nectar through

our state-of-the-art tools of logic and reason. Dispense with the dross. It will be discovered that the distilled wisdom is common to all of them while they vary only in the dross of details. If the scriptures are not thus sanitized they will prove to be the bane of mankind.

The biggest drawback of scriptures is that they are insular. They can't be tampered with and as a corollary can't be improved upon. They are hedged by laws of blasphemy which brook no dissenters. The moral code of a defunct society is imposed upon the present generation. A well-organized clergy thrives on practicing an archaic vision enshrined in their holy books. Miracles and supernatural interventions that form the staple fare of scriptures keep the laity enthralled. On the other hand the greatest virtue of Science, which is the epitome of reason, logic and observation, is that it is open-ended. The current hypothesis holds good only till a better explanation turns up. No theory is sacrosanct. No one ever has the last word. No one enjoys immunity from interrogation. There are no holy cows.

Evolution is the current touchstone of human understanding. It envisages that right from cosmic bodies, diverse life forms, and social mores to notions of morality, everything goes through a process of gradual change. Nothing ever remains static. "The only constant is change." Scriptures deny this basic tenet of human thought. They harp on the immutability of the divine revelation and choose faith to be the arbiter of truth.

Let us get it straight. In its journey from amoeba to man Life has acquired intelligence and honed reason over eons in the precarious struggle for existence. Undermining reason would be the secular equivalent of committing blasphemy which man would perpetrate at his own peril.

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**TRANSNATIONAL AS INITIATION:
IMRAAN COOVADIA'S
*THE TALES OF THE GREEN-EYED THIEVES***

Tanutrushna Panigrahi

Imraan Coovadia's narrator Feroze Peer in *Green-eyed Thieves*, chronicler of his family story of love and crime, of humour and insanity and of philosophy and shoplifting, approximates an initiation hero. His narrative is the unconventional, tragic-comic family memoir of the Peers and the Dawoods. Feroze predates the course and the nature of the narrative through this introduction of the family: "The Dawoods, Peers, Dahlavis of Johannesburg possess green eyes which remind people of those marbles with a swirl at the centre. If we believe the canons of poetry, our eyes are the cousins of jealousy, revenge, desire and treachery. But colours, according to Wittgenstein, bewitch the mind. Green eyes made us unclassifiable under old South African system of categories, where the search for racial precision extended to the cuticle and follicle" (*Green-Eyed Thieves* 16). The "unclassifiable" holds the key to the family's transnational qualities and their being in all places and their being in no places simultaneously as the family is under guises most of the time. The tale crosses boundaries, territories, nationalities and cultures and Feroze is, like the other members of the family, the author of transcultural experiences but unlike others he is the evaluator of the same and responds to the experiences differently. These responses build for Feroze the pattern of enquiring and questioning, learning and maturing, of losing and acquiring identities and the pattern of movement from prelapsarian to postlapsarian state.

Feroze's narrative of maturation does not subscribe to the initiation rites and rituals in the conventional manner of linear transition from childhood to adolescence and to adulthood. The ethnic, cultural and political conflicts in his transnational experiences shape the bildungsroman. His rites of initiation and bildungsroman are carried out in his mission of cross-cultural enquiries and knowledge, philosophical appropriation of events, ideas and realities and his journey from innocence to fall and then to redemption. He emerges from the rites with transformed experiences which are transcendental in nature. As an example one can read Feroze's reflections on the prison experience: "The long, low hallways, the African men who loom up behind each new set of bare, the stink of the wood-handled buckets, are of

considerable interest to me, perhaps because I am subconsciously studying to be a political prisoner in the United States” (GET 72). His narrative of Initiation, at another level, takes shape from the contrasting nature of experiences of his own and the other members of his family as well as their responses to those experiences.

The geographical movement, rather it should be called chase, of the novel takes Feroze from Johannesburg to Sun City to Peshawar and finally to Brooklyn, New York. Feroze is less cosmopolitan, a less natural adapter to new situations, locations and experiences. His brother Ashraf is, on the other hand, according to Feroze, a “keen adapter, with his chameleon’s tongue and kaleidoscope soul” and he “in Jo’burg ... sounds like the born-and-bred Johannesburger that he is.” In Pakistan Ashraf “swears, talks and mounts a camel like a proper nomad” and in Brooklyn he is “Brooklyn to the bone” (GET19). His mother Sameera, half philosophy professor and half compulsive shoplifter does not possess qualms about being at any place of the world. His father and uncle who are known as Ten percent Farouk are thieves and glide with ease from one culture to another with agenda, success, and pleasure. Feroze’s points of view as the narrator of the story of chase, his perspectives of other characters’ sub-narratives are contrasted with his own making the collective experience heterogeneous. From the disparateness emerges the identity of Feroze.

Feroze’s autobiographical tale of maturity begins with his exposure to the world of guilt, crime, adultery and brutality and his passive, forced participation in the processes. One can take his slaughterhouse experience as a dark sub narrative that brings the knowledge of human cruelty and hypocrisy that Feroze finds difficult to ignore: “Through the half-open Mercedes windows I listened to the dark music of the slaughter house. The saw, the voices of the boys at work, the slurring vowels of the prayers, made me dizzy” but Farouk and Ashraf both were “in a supernaturally good mood” (GET 30). In contrast to that and balancing that with a celebratory event of learning mathematics from a beautiful woman maths tutor Elena, Feroze is hopeful of a mixed experience and knowledge: “It was almost time for my first maths lesson. The author of these mixed up, comico-tragical and sexological pages, these starred-and-striped pages, this star-crossed and star-striped author who remembers the red water which seeped out of the parcels onto his short pants, confesses that his first halting steps up the spiral stairway of love were taken with the assistance of a Cypriot maths tutor” (GET 30-31). An intellectual with a philosophical disposition Feroze seeks as well as invests metaphysical meaning into

the acts of life. The Peers are Muslims and the act of killing the sheep is part of the holy ritual but Feroze experiences guilt in the process. He feels increasingly guilty, especially when he is trapped in the experience longer than he wants. The mix of guilt, pleasure and excitement he feels with Elena (his uncle's girlfriend who seduces him) strengthens and fortifies his adult and philosophical stand in the matter.

One part of Feroze's initiation rites lie in his love and sexual experience and other part in the knowledge of guilt whose ownership lies in his father, uncle, mother and brother. Feroze is not the performer of guilt and sin, much a moral participant as he is, unable to dissociate himself from sin. The "first ladder of the spiral stairway of love" was taken with Elena the same afternoon and for Feroze "prime numbers and squares and the square roots of negative numbers and the barely lingering effects of seafood on a sealish woman's lips are indissolubly linked to the joys of love" (GET 49). The second step on the ladder to knowledge was that of death in its most macabre form and the lesson was to be taken from uncle Ten Percent Farouk: "Looking back, I believe that Ten Percent took us with him for the same reason he took us to the slaughter house – to teach us some obscure lesson about life and death" (GET 50). As a witness to uncle Farouk's killing of Tarnofsky in the cinema Feroze's philosophical reflections on both slaughters are directed towards a dark wisdom of guilt, sin and crime. Feroze is a witness, dispassionate, detached, non-certifying and non-approving but as witness he is forced into the process of moral and emotional fall and he suffers the fall: "It's too painful for the writer of these pages to describe the expression in Tarnofsky's eyes when my uncle seized him from behind in the movie theatre...drew the edge of his Bowie knife across Tarnofsky's neck....It's painful to remember that Ashraf helped with the body. And it is far too painful to remark that I was reminded of the strange tenderness of a cut sheep when Tarnofsky's sighing head sank onto Farouk's shoulder" (GET 52). It is important to mark that the adult narrator Feroze looks back in time, in the family memoir, and provides the reader a back and forth movement of his narration, a feature associated with bildungsroman narratives. The heightened individual responses from Feroze to events and actions – thieving, conning, shoplifting, killing, impersonating, cheating and promiscuity(ing) – lead to the knowledge that Feroze as an initiation hero needs moral and emotional maturation.

A more explicit sexual experience later in the narrative, that has been contrasted with the same of Ashraf, Feroze's foolish brother, develops

the narrative further in the direction of moral growing up and losing innocence: "It's the strangest and most thrilling twenty-four hours of my life to date" (GET 82). Feroze and Ashraf visit the roulette in Sun City, a place, according to Feroze, "where South Africans, in particular white Johannesburgers, come to relax from Calvinism" (GET 82). Feroze does not play but watches Ashraf play and blow up money. The moral sanction needed to get sinful pleasure and to have sex with one of the courtesans in a Sun City hotel seems no issue with Feroze. It comes as surprise both to the reader and to the narrator Feroze. He finds it "strangest" not because of what happens with or around him but because he finds his moral dipping. He responds unscrupulously to their amoral experience in which both brothers have sex with two women in the same room at the same time, in front of each other. Feroze climbs another step in the stairway to the fallen land. "Strangest," moreover, connotes that somewhere in the subconscious Feroze's moral swapping with Ashraf has begun.

Ashraf is associated with things more gross; and here too, while Ashraf asks Feroze to choose his girl for sex, "there is a salacious expression standing on his enlarged lips that brings Mick Jagger to mind" (GET 84) and Feroze with more fine taste in things. He interprets this sexual pleasure in aesthetic and artistic terms: "If I could see the four of us from above, we'd look like two long iron frame beds each topped with a tortoise shell that bends and heaves and stretches. It is worthy of Botticelli" (GET 85). There is an emotional fulfilment in Feroze, evidently, and it is in this moment when he thinks "this Hasselhof brother and I could almost be friends" (GET 85). For Ashraf it is a mechanical process devoid of any emotion, "from what I can tell Ashraf isn't romancing either of these women..." (GET 85). But Feroze looks up to this experience with romantic adventure, a taste of art and almost some amount of devoutness. The references to Botticelli, Church mouse and doleful music mean differently than what Feroze signifies by saying that he was almost "friends" to his brother at the moment. An apparent conflict emerges from Feroze's dichotomical claims. To be in this contradiction, to be in this ambiguity is to take a step back in the maturing process and a forward movement from the narrator's point of view at the same time. Feroze's bildungsroman, ironically, will get fed from these simultaneous, morally dual realisations of Feroze. Secondly, conflicts act as representatives of his moral displacement.

Similar moral and ethical contradictions mark Feroze's relationship with Fazila, the woman from Pakistan. From what is known of Feroze's

moral standards, it is difficult to come to terms with the fact that he starts his life with Fazila as Ashraf after drugging him and impersonating him, putting him in the prison he was in for the guilt of his brother. Fazila was the woman Feroze has always been in love after their Peshawar trip. It is Ashraf who has been a trickster and had been grabbing things from brother Feroze, including Fazila. Assuming the position of husband to Fazila in this immoral, amoral and moral drama Feroze finds logic in the contradiction the readers try to sort: "I want to marry you very much, Fazila...You above all women. There's a poetic logic to it" (GET 264) and the deliberate use of "poetic logic" substantiates the contradiction. The dilemma exists here for the reader but he seems to be saying that the gap between what should happen and what happens lies in his moral truth, a piece of knowledge that give strength to him, make him more at peace, at least to himself: "With humanity and the cosmos I am briefly at peace" (GET 263). And a little later reflects, "A man determined to live as his brother's shadow and in his brother's name I can only observe that the colour that sings to me above every other slice of the spectrum is the leathery green of chameleons" (GET 265). Once again Feroze is dichotomical on ethics as the reference to "chameleon" implies.

Feroze's engagement with the USA in the Tocquevillian model turns out to be in conflict since his perceptions become more psychological engagement than social commentary and detached observation. His transnational migration to the USA acquires several dimensions that include their American dream. One of the ways Feroze realises his American dream is through writing, his natural ability, as he "has a real way with words." He writes, as a Muslim intellectual for the Republicans in the *Wall Street Journal*. His ascending path of success from "obscurity to the nation's editorial pages and the green drawing room at the White House" (GET 216) while he was writing the article and realising that he can be more hopeful of fulfilling his American Dreams, "those short months were the most thrilling period of my life"(GET 216). Feroze emphasises his American dream and its fulfilment when he announces: "Culturally speaking, I mean, it's not like anyone else in the world has a better idea. For me the real revelation in the reception of my article was that I had found my true calling as a writer" (GET 216). On one hand Feroze's American Dream finds a reality in his becoming a writer although for a short time and on the other, a modern initiation story comes to rest on the acquisition of knowledge, as Feroze demonstrates good amount of understanding and knowledge on the Islamic political discourses to the Republicans

in his article. Feroze makes an observation on America's practical and prudent approach to things that includes its writing and literature: "it's obvious that the worldly forms of discourse are the real literature of the United States....Novels, poems, philosophical flights of fancy may not sell like hot cakes, but polemics, confessions, memoirs, flagellations, sociological treatises, celebrity verse, any kind of self-help and connect-the-dots psychology, New Age textbooks, market analysis and enquiries into business charisma do very well..." (GET 216) and claims his kind of writing makes the best sense in such a scenario. His consideration of himself as a micro-Tocqueville and his authorship of utilitarian literature place Feroze in a position that make him declare a little later in the narrative: "You would have thought Ashraf was the type to prosper in a country of pure simulation and pseudo-occurrences but the truth is quite reverse. That sense of falseness which clings to an intellectual's mind makes him beautifully adapted to American society. It seemed to me that my brother and I are ever so gradually changing places with one another. In this country I was ever more the junkyard cynic and he, Ashraf, was the idealist, purist, transcendentalist and mystical dreamer" (GET 208). His responses to the life in the U.S. is different and contrasted with that of his brother only to highlight the twin brothers' shifting fortune and Feroze in a better position to negotiate with his American Dream. Flexible morality, as Feroze has been demonstrating lately in the narrative, once again accommodates the change, and while "gradually changing places with his brother" Feroze's becoming of Ashraf has implications other than adapting to the requirements. It prepares the ground where the narrative will give a final call on Feroze's realising his American Dream. He exchanges his intellectual, introspective, speculative qualities with his brother's practical, unethical and indecent knowledge. The process of redemption for Feroze begins.

In the rite of passage, while shifting from one continent to another, Feroze through his moral capacity, like most initiation hero, internalises experiences gained from the passage and allow his personality to undergo changes, both conscious and deliberate, unintentional and unconscious. When they arrive at their final destination, that is the USA, Feroze, as he claims, has adopted the qualities of Ashraf. How convincing the claims of Feroze are do not matter but what matters is the fact that there is a perception of change. He becomes confident as a writer: "My kind of writing helps people to believe what they already know" (GET 216). His writing takes him to meet the President of the U.S., the moment of pride: "The perfect separation of one's thoughts

and one's fate is a metaphysical fact. As for my fate, it was fixed at the very instant the official White House photographer snapped the famous portrait of myself..." (GET 229). Feroze's writing of the family memoir, besides the political article and advertisements for prison inmates, is the climax of his intellectual exercise and through it he would release his self from all kinds of confinements, moral as well as emotional. His being the author of a family memoir (although his considering himself the shadow of Tocqueville makes the reader expect a more promising social and political commentary than a family memoir) fulfils his dream of finding himself at his best in creative energy. Secondly Feroze has been in the trap of a doppelganger relationship with his twin brother; twins are used in literature to depict split personalities: "Ashraf is my cult leader....In the negative as well as the positive sense. How do I know where I stand unless he's around to disagree with?" (GET 244). He tries to remove himself from the trap, free himself from the other part of the personality and submits his confession of getting rid of the relationship. "The impression of easy going charm perhaps produced by the author of these pages will be dispelled by the confession that during my nights in prison I dreamed over and again of murdering that small, devilish brown brother of mine...I always knew Ashraf was a traitor to me but now I couldn't refuse to know that I knew" (GET 244). His resorting to *Meditations* by Aurelius performs the function of providing him composed power and determination to accept the truth and act accordingly. Ashraf could settle on the decision of taking revenge on his traitor brother. The reference to Aurelius is also to indicate Feroze's ability for self-reflection and introspection and lead to personal wisdom; a sense of finality, both in the process of maturation and in the narrative progress.

Feroze graduates through liberation from the relationship with Ashraf as well as from the moral and ethical confinements while writing. Writing as an intellectual and artistic exercise is an important feature of the contemporary fictions. Many contemporary American novels have their protagonists as artists, writers, culture or cult heroes, especially in diasporic writing. Portraying Feroze as a writer Coovadia and Feroze both participate in this literary exercise. Moreover, only the artist hero can make meaning of the contemporary existence better than a non-artist. He can accommodate the diverse, opposing, expanding, contradicting situations, relationships and other phenomena of the contemporary globalised world. Coovadia's hero, transcultural, transnational is the witness to the oddest of experiences: his father's robbing Agha Khan's wardrobe, his mother's shoplifting at the super

bazaars in Johannesburg, Farouk and Ashraf's cold-blooded murders, Ashraf's theft, treachery, sexual aggression and many more. His physical and moral exposure to sin and guilt is heavy. Like initiation heroes Coovadia situates Feroze in the quest for meaning. Feroze, the narrator, uses humour and very often the black one, to apprehend and appropriate the means of reaching wisdom. Readers would ask how the narrator interrogates the transnational, transcultural, migrant worlds and Feroze's being caught in between cultures. He, on the contrary, portrays a sense of a world that is displaced, not ordered, not straight, not fixed but relative, flexible, multi-historical. Depicting such a sense, such a consciousness requires a benevolent literary mode. Ironic humour is the best suitable way to express them.

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ALTERNATE SEXUALITIES AND SOCIETAL STEREOTYPES IN THE PLAYS OF DATTANI

Arun Soule

Mahesh Dattani's plays reflect life in the upper middle class of big cities. He is considered a bold playwright, as he takes up issues that are considered taboo or conveniently ignored: homosexuality, lesbianism, the plight of women and the girl child. This paper will examine these issues in the selected plays of Dattani: *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Do the Needful*, and *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*.

The Indian society likes to portray itself as a conventional society with patriarchal values and a harmonious existence within the family unit. Any deviation from the heterosexual pattern is considered unnatural and is suppressed. Anyone whose sexuality differs from the norm feels alienated and is forced to lead a life of fear and guilt; or if he is open about his sexuality, he is subjected to taunts, insults and even violence. This paper attempts to: a) examine the social set-up by juxtaposing these issues against the conventional patriarchal society of India which is so oppressive that it drives an individual towards hypocrisy rather than a dignified life of self-expression; b) examine this marginalized section of society and try to understand the alienation and fear that envelops their lives and how they cope up with this situation; c) examine Dattani's attitude towards this 'subaltern minority' and his desire to sensitize people to accept them as a part of society.

Dattani's play *Bravely Fought the Queen* deals with gender relations in the contemporary urban scenario of postcolonial India. The focus is on the modern advertising sector and its impact on class and gender relations. The play deals with three couples, each existing in a hierarchical relationship with others. The play centres on the Trivedi family, with its two brothers, Jiten and Nitin and their wives, Dolly and Alka. Jiten exercises control over the family, both as elder son and brother. Dolly and Alka are sisters. It is a joint family venture in terms of the domestic scenario as well as the advertising business. All the relations are maintained strictly under the dictates of patriarchy. The third family that interacts with the characters of the Trivedi house is that of Lalitha and Sridhar. In this hierarchical

relationship Sridhar is the employee of the Trivedi brothers, and Lalitha in that sense is socially subservient to the two sisters.

This play tries to make a representation of the subjugated position of women in the patriarchal society. They are left to survive in the confined spaces of domesticity. Their identity is defined only in the context of the identity of their male counterparts. Most feminists believe that the pernicious effect of socialization makes women suppress their human potential. Marren Lockwood Carden, one of the members of the national organization for women, said: "I want to have part in creating a new society.... I want women to have something to say in their own lives.... I have never reached my potential because of social conditions. I'm not going to get the reward. I have been crippled.... I want to see the kind of system that facilitates the use of potential" (Carden 12). It shows that there is no basic difference between man and woman except certain biological distinctions. The awareness of women's position includes the awareness of identity as a woman and interest for their feminine problems. It further suggests that they should not hesitate to break the myth, as Simone de Beauvoir says, "a man is in the right in being a man, it is the woman who is in the wrong" (Beauvoir 15).

In this play, Dattani tries to expose the position of women in a conventional society. In the matter of love and sex, Dattani takes a radical and rational vision against the sentimental and conventional vision which is popular in Indian society. It presents the class between the traditional ideology and contemporary culture that has created a totally new family landscape. The play was performed in Mumbai in 1991, and was subsequently performed in London under the directorship of Michael Walling, who in the preface of the play, commented: "...Postcolonial India and multicultural Britain both have an urgent need for a cultural expression of the contemporary; they require public spaces in which the mingling of eastern and western influences can take place" (Collected Plays 229).

The play is divided into three Acts. In the first Act, 'Woman', the play begins with Lalitha, the outsider who intrudes into the world of Dolly and Alka. Dolly resists the intrusion of Lalitha for some time. The other constricting reminder of the male world is Baa, who insistently rings the bell to summon her daughters-in-law, rupturing the slowly evolving sense of intimacy among the three women. Lalitha's talk about bonsais also has symbolic significance, for just as the bonsais are stunted and their growth limited, the women's condition is no better in the patriarchal set-up. The women take refuge in escapism in various ways: Alka with alcohol, Dolly with her fantasizing about Kanhaiya, and

Lalitha with her bonsais. The 'masked' ball also suggests that they have put on masks of being contented to hide their real frustrated selves. The latent homosexuality of Nitin and Praful is revealed. Dattani points towards the spaces that are shared by the concerns of the female and the gay male.

In the second act, 'Man', the men discuss the psyche of women and the 'ReVa Tee' brand of lingerie that they are to market. Though Sridhar tries to get a female perspective on the product, Jiten insists on the male perspective. It is clear that Sridhar has to defend his campaign even as he realizes that it carries a flaw that will ensure its failure. But he has a job to perform and is bound by it. This explains how the middle class people are totally bound by a system that claims to provide for their needs. It traps them not only for those hours of work but also dehumanizes their entire sensibility.

Sridhar knows that to survive he has to perform his job while keeping in mind the outlook of his employers and not of anyone else. Jiten makes the rules of the game very clear when he associates advertising with "pimping." Sridhar's job also entails getting a girl from Grant Road for Jiten, otherwise he stands to lose his job.

A social system that rests power in the hands of those who have property and capital degrades the ones that are located in a position subservient to the one in power. The bourgeois always aspires to move up the social ladder. In this case, Dattani presents different layers of bourgeois society. On the one hand is Jiten and his brother Nitin who seek a place in the upper segment of this class. On the other hand is Sridhar struggling to come into their position as employer. This points towards the contradictions inherent in the middle class. Sridhar's position is that of a person who seeks social mobility through his profession. He cannot walk out and is left feeling debased as he goes out to "pimp" for his employer. However, Sridhar's revenge is 'having' his employer's girl on the backseat of the car, and leaving his left-over for Jiten. This clarifies the equation of power that exists between the Trivedi brothers and Sridhar. The extent of Sridhar's exploitation at the hands of the Trivedi brothers, especially Jiten, is quite clear.

The play is also a realistic and poignant presentation of the layers of exploitation in the advertising world and the way it seeps into the domestic scenario. At the end of the day it is the profit motive that matters to the manufacturer or the owner and the ad agency that thrives because of it. Selling has been glamorized and in the ad world women are used to sell women to men. Dattani's choice of the advertising agency as a patriarchal construction, the sale of products

for women, and most of all, women as targets for the male gaze is aptly reflected in the play.

In the last Act, 'Free for All', the characters are exposed and the reality behind their pretence is exposed. Dolly's daughter, Daksha, is not the pretty girl who is a graceful dancer, as Dolly earlier describes her, but an unfortunate spastic child, who is a victim of callous parents; though Nitin appears to be a respectable and happily married man, the fact that he is a closet homosexual is eventually revealed. The facade of Dolly and Alka that they are happily married and contented is also ripped apart when it is revealed that their respective husbands are homosexuals and do not love them.

In this play, Dattani takes up various issues: the constricted and hypocritical life of women in a patriarchal society; the callous attitude that parents can have towards the girl-child – how the poor child is condemned to suffer due to their irresponsible actions; and very significantly, the attempts of women to try to cope up and even resist in any way they can the overwhelming and debilitating impact of the patriarchal society.

In the play, *Do the Needful*, as in other plays, Mahesh Dattani takes up the upper middle class family in India as the focus of the play. This play takes up the themes of homosexuality and arranged marriage in India. The major characters are located in heterogeneous settings in Mumbai and Bangalore. Two families, one Gujarati (the Patels) and the other Kannadigas (the Gowdas) are negotiating a match between their children. Alpesh Patel is "thirty-plus and divorced" and Lata Gowda is "twenty four and notorious."

The situation is curious, as anyone familiar with the Indian milieu would immediately understand, for one rarely comes across inter-community arranged marriages. It gets even curiously as it is revealed that both families are themselves wary of the situation and highly skeptical of each other and yet condemned to go ahead with the arrangement because of social pressures. It is then revealed that secretly Lata yearns for Salim who is apparently a terrorist and the groom-to-be, Alpesh is gay because he yearns for Trilok. Now the audience understands the desperation of their respective families to set them 'straight' through marriage, thus bringing to light the shared spaces between women and gay men who seem to be at odds in confronting a patriarchal society that compels them to live lives that are alien to their nature.

When Lata discovers Alpesh with the Mali in the cowshed, initially she is filled with disgust, then she has a gleeful sense of freedom, for she now realizes that she would not have to sleep with this man if she

marries him. Both will be able to give each other ample space and do their own thing, also keeping the families and society happy by 'doing the needful' i.e. getting respectably married. Both agree to keep quiet about what the other does and in this way resolve their dilemmas. Both the families have no problem if their offsprings secretly follow their latent inclinations as long as they keep up the facade of a happily married couple.

The compromise that Lata and Alpesh make in marrying is a clever and conscious choice, almost tailored to suit both the characters as well as the other members of their family. This compromise would be referred to as 'forced harmony' by Dattani. The forced harmony has brought in a sense of liberation, not guilt. This is one way in which the two subversive couples (Lata/Alpesh) and (Salim/Trilok) find liberation against the hegemony of a common oppressor – the family/society.

Dattani manages the scenes in the form of Exteriors and Interiors to decode the conflicts of different characters. Exteriors are the manifestations of social spaces controlled by the idealism of parents. Interiors represent the invisible mental spaces of Lata and Alpesh.

In his next play, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, Dattani again takes up a similar theme i.e. the inner conflict in the lives of gays in the upper middle class society of Mumbai. In the traditional society of India, the identity of gays and lesbians has not yet been recognized and they are left to lead a secluded life in their claustrophobic spaces. Dattani dramatizes the crises of those relationships that are not rigidly demarcated in terms of socially accepted gender constructions. Orthodox society can be quite repressive towards an individual, especially if he tries to overstep the boundaries of behaviour and desire that have been prescribed by society. In an interview with Erin B. Mee, Dattani says: "You can talk about feminism because in a way that is accepted. But you can't talk about gay issues because that is not Indian, it doesn't happen here. You can't talk about a middle-class housewife fantasizing about having sex with the cook or actually having a sex life, that isn't Indian either – that's confrontational even if it is Indian" (Mee 163).

The play begins rather abruptly, where Kamlesh, a fashion designer of Mumbai, is shown having a relationship with a security guard. This scene indicates Kamlesh's sexual preference. Later, Kamlesh is seen in the company of his close friends where he confesses that he is still in love with Prakash who is also gay. By now, Prakash seems to have got rid of his obsession with Kamlesh and is planning his marriage with Kiran, the sister of Kamlesh. The party arranged by Kamlesh exposes the varied experiences of the homosexual community. Sharad,

an extrovert person, does not care how the world reacts to his being gay. His companion, Bunny, is the antithesis of Sharad. Their friend, Deepali, in spite of being a lesbian, is sensitive enough to sustain her female identity. In the very beginning, the desperate attempt of Kamlesh to try out different clothes on Kiran and changing her hair style is suggestive of how unconsciously he tries to search out something that is beyond external bonding. As soon as Prakash, who is also known as 'Ed', gets involved with Kiran during a dance, Kamlesh becomes restless and, to avoid the situation, he goes away. 'Party' represents the manifestation of social life, whereas when Kamlesh is alone, it stands for private spaces. During the party, his irregular erratic behaviour, broken sentences and uncertain comments highlight the emotional crisis of Kamlesh. He is struggling against something beyond his control. Sharad is gay but lacks the insight to empathise with the agony of Kamlesh. Kamlesh makes desperate efforts to suppress his love for Prakash, but in this process of suppression, he suffers terribly and is reduced to the position of a weak, insecure and helpless person.

Dattani traces the concept of homosexuality and also tries to explore how far it modifies the personality of an individual. Sharad wants to help Kamlesh by destroying all photographs and letters linked to the memory of Prakash. However, he cannot bring himself to destroy one of the photographs. It is an intimate nude photograph of Kamlesh and Prakash. Immediately after this scene, Kiran enters the stage and introduces Prakash to Kamlesh as her lover. Kamlesh is frozen and cannot react. Ed realizes his instinctive infatuation for Kamlesh. He is grateful for the support and friendship that Kamlesh gave him when he needed it but he decides to end his relationship with Kamlesh and marry Kiran. Ed lives happily with Kiran till the single photograph preserved by Kamlesh comes in her hands. She is shocked. She asks Ed if he can face the society, his parents and his family after the revelation of his identity as "gay". Though Ed answers in the affirmative, we know that it will not be easy for him to do so.

Dattani suggests that homosexuality is not acquired but is something that is rooted in the human psyche. In the life of Kamlesh it is an irresistible passion that impels him to act impulsively and often make erroneous judgments. Dattani makes effective use of stagecraft, especially in terms of space. The spaces within are 'muggy', too hot to be comfortable, the air-conditioning breaking down, even as the interior spaces of the psyche have to be confronted. Meanwhile, the exteriors keep exerting pressure, intruding into the other spaces

occupied by the characters in the play perpetually reminding them of their isolation.

The play is, in a sense, a plea for empathy and sensitivity towards India's 'queer culture'. The fact that such a play has done so exceedingly well in urban India points towards an audience that is rapidly coming to terms with its own varied multi-faceted self. The audience is more tolerant and mature and is able to look at itself squarely in the face with humour and open-mindedness.

One discerns, through these plays that the playwright makes the audience realize the tremendous amount of resistance that this 'subaltern minority' i.e. the women who are suppressed under a patriarchal society, and the furtive gays have to put up with, when their situation is juxtaposed against the rigid mainstream patriarchal society. It also becomes evident that it is Dattani's desire to sensitize the mainstream social sensibilities to treat 'this marginalized section' in a more humane manner by giving them a legitimate space in a democracy which guarantees liberty to every individual.

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**MONK AND THE MONKEYS:
DECANONISING NATURE IN KIRAN DESAI'S
*HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD***

Richa

Is it the monkey talking back to the human (centre), just in the manner colonised talk back to the coloniser (centre) within the postcolonial framework? It may also be postmodernism talking back to the tradition of the folklore/epics. Is it intentionally an attempt to decanonise Nature of their canonised mythical representation or an attempt to re-establish the colonial canons? Many such questions may arouse in the curious minds of the readers while interpreting Kiran Desai's debut novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*.

My attempt in this paper is to decanonise N(n)ature in *Hullabaloo* taking into account the geographical setting and the thematic and stylistic representation of Nature (internal and external) in the Novel.

In order to understand the process of decanonisation, it is important to understand the construction of canons. Canons are the essentialised categories of an idea in its generic or specified sense with an assured genuineness and importance. The assurance is certainly from a specific perspective (generally mainstreamed) thereby also assuring the subordination of multiple other perspectives. Canon is "a body of writings established as authentic" (Cuddon 108). Canonisation, therefore, also becomes a process of semantic freezing, which is always debatable and equally debatable is the issue of authenticity as it always involves a point of view which is necessarily subjective. And hence there is need for decanonisation, a process of de-essentialisation and defamiliarization, emancipating the canons from their frozen semiotics and drawing them to a fluidity of approach.

The geographical setting is that of an urbanised small town called Shahkot which on the map appears in Jalandhar. Moreover, the hullabaloo is in the guava orchard which again is significant for its locational as well as mythical implications. The novel can apparently be interpreted to be keeping with the pace and paint of the folklore tradition: "For the most part, folk literature (or, perhaps, more properly, folklore) is the creation of primitive and illiterate people and, therefore, much of it belongs to the oral tradition" (Cuddon 322).

Folktales, usually keep with the order and pace of the oral tradition based on the popular myths and legends: "Another type of folk tale, the set "joke" – that is, the comic (often bawdy) *anecdote* – is the most

abundant and persistent of all; new jokes, or new version of old jokes, continue to be a staple of social exchange, whenever people congregate in a relaxed mood” (Abrams 106).

Hullabaloo is a kind of an anecdote reflecting subtly on the various aspects of social realities in a comic manner. It also tries to dismantle the essentialism of a folk narrative by playing them upside down. Such as, the geographical location in the folklore is usually amid Nature with sublimity attached to it. It has been played upside down in the narrative. For instance, Buddha received knowledge/wisdom ‘under’ the tree and Sampath prefers to remain ‘on’ the tree. Moreover, many popular mythological (Hindu myths) characters including Rama, Hanuman, Lakshman, Sita and also the Pandavas reside in the forest which is reduced to/replaced with an orchard in the novel signifying a shift from wilderness to civilization and also from tradition to colonial. It also reflects the process of civilisation of wilderness and colonisation of tradition and also a glimpse of contemporary India where greenery is reduced to a ritual of an orchard. There are many historical instances of the struggle of tribal population to keep the wilderness of the forest. The struggle of the tribals led by Birsa Munda is quite popular in the pages of Indian History: “Again 18th Century witnessed the movement of Birsa Munda to save their land, forest, minerals, tradition, culture and the loss of livelihood” (Wass 93).

These people tried hard to save the wilderness of the forest, where they belonged. But because of the colonial interference civilisation was imposed upon the place. For various other rational anthropocentric reasons civilisation was preferred over wilderness.

The idea of wilderness, signifying nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation, is the most potent construction of nature available to New World environmentalism.... Wilderness has an almost sacramental value: it holds out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth, a post-Christian covenant, found in a space of purity, founded in an attitude of reverence and humility (Gerrard 59).

In the anthropogenic social order, wilderness has been reduced to gardening and forests, into the orchards. *Hullabaloo* acquaints the readers with this reductionism. There is no room for monks, hardly any forest left in that area, what is left is only a mockery of the forest which belonged to a district judge “before the government declared the land to be part of an area reserved for national forest” (Desai 50). Hence,

wilderness has, what Gerrard calls, a 'sacramental value'. Reserved National Forest is a colonial concept of forest conservation. The demands and requirements of people differ according to the geographical/locational context and hence the Indian Forest Act underwent many amendments from 1865 till today, from initial ignorance towards the local population to their consideration. The Act of 1927 is "the basic forest law of the country.... The State government has been empowered to constitute any forest or wasteland which is the property of the government as reserved forest" (Negi 12). This orchard has been given an exotic importance, especially for Sampath: "This orchard matched something he had imagined all his life: myriad green-skinned globes growing sweet-sour and marvellous upon a hillside with enough trees to fill the eye and enough fruit to scent the air" (Desai 50).

Apart from the geographical/locational interpretation, thematic and stylistic experimentations in the narrative are also significant. Theme of seclusion from the worldly activities is usually given a sublime outlook in the literary texts. Armellino's analysis of the text suggests, "To run away and climb up a tree are action which mark for ever (both mentally and physically) the distancing from his parents and from the ideas they maintain...Sampath is an imaginative introverted boy who spends his time contemplating mysterious things in his mind or observing nature in admiration" (Sinha et al 77).

But his admiration for nature and the urge for freedom is dealt with in a low mimetic mode in *Hullabaloo*. Hence a shift can be noticed from the notion of seclusion to the human urge of attracting attention, meaning a movement from isolation and invisibility to mass media attention and visibility. Thus, Sampath does never objectively object to the popular attention he gains except towards the end. It appears as if it is not seclusion from the public rather public attention that he demands which is evident from his act of striptease.

...he began to unbutton his shirt. He tossed the garment into the air like a hero throwing away the rag with which he has cleaned the weapon that will kill his enemy. As the shrieks grew in volume and intensity, he lowered his hands to his pants.... Sampath climbed deftly on the highest tier of the fountain and, in one swift movement, lowered both his trousers and his underpants. His back to the crowd, he stuck his brown behind up into the air and wiggled it wildly in an ecstatic appreciation of the evening's entertainment he himself had just provided (Desai 41).

Later in the novel, he also employs his information gained by the letters in the post office to fetch the public attention and then he starts using the obscure language for the same purpose which establishes him as a monk. Such as, “Everybody can make something from nothing” (Desai 91) or “If a firecracker has been lit...then it is going to explode, like it or not. Unless you throw it into a bucket of water. And then what a waste of firecracker” (Desai 111).

Only towards the end, when it came to losing that attention because of the hullabaloo caused by the monkeys, he expresses his desire to escape; otherwise he was happily enjoying his status of a monk in which he was receiving all the world’s attention denied to him so far. Monks are believed to be indifferent to worldly pleasures and comforts but for Sampath, “the more elaborate his living arrangements, the happier he was. He made a lovely picture, seated there amidst the greenery, reclining upon his cot at a slight angle to the world; propped against numerous cushions; tucked up, during chilly evenings, in a glamorous satin quilt covered with leopard – skin spots...” (Desai 70).

In a section of the narrative, Sampath is revered as the monkey god because of him being positioned on the tree. A shift, hence, is evident from the monk to the monkeys and from Hanuman to Hullabaloo. An overview of the monks, the monkey gods and the monkeys in Hullabaloo suggests that monkeys have got a good room in the varied literary tradition. They have been represented in the mythology, folklores and religions of various regions. Chinese represent them as Sun-Wukong as a trickster monkey God, who is the hero of “Journey to the West” written in the 16th century: “... the monkey king Sun Wukong was said to have accompanied the famous Chinese Buddhist...monk Xuanzang on his trip to India in search of sacred sutras...Monkey was a trickster of the sort who was born from a stone egg...that had been in the world since creation” (Leeming 121).

Monkeys are mostly represented as the messengers of god in the Japanese mythological tradition and probably the oldest of all is Hanuman, the monkey God in the Indian/Hindu tradition. He is a divine figure of unlimited physical, mental and moral strength that is capable of swallowing the sun mistaking it for a fruit, and can bring the whole mountain of Sanjivini herb: “Hanuman, a warrior and learned minister of monkey-worshipping tribals, is himself referred to as monkey god, and is one of the most popular deities of India.... Millions of people worship him as the giver of power through celibacy, health, fitness and the gift of mercy through his unwavering devotion to Ram” (Patil 97).

He is a true follower of Rama and has contributed a lot in the 'moral' war between Rama and Ravana with his *Vanar Sena* (an army of monkeys). Hanuman, hence becomes an emblem of strength and devotion.

Moreover, many narratives in the *Panchtantra* and the *Jatak Tales* are associated with the monkeys. In the popular tale of Monkey and the Crocodile from the *Panchtantra*, monkey has been portrayed as an emotional nevertheless smart/witty and also intelligent enough to solve a problem of his friend, Crocodile. Likewise, in "The Story of Great Monkey" in the *Jatak Tales*, Monkey has received a respectful representation that is an intelligent and a responsible King who can live and die for his people and simultaneously is capable of inspiring a 'man' (supposed to be a superior being). In the same folk tales, these monkeys have also been exploited as the creatures of low wit that only possess the imitative faculty. In many folk narratives, monkeys are believed to be protective against evil forces such as demons and diseases. Thus, in these narratives monkeys either signify something or suggest something else.

Monkeys in Desai's *Hullabaloo* are responsible for the hullabaloo in the guava orchard. For a long time, people of Shahkot forcibly try to attach religious significance to these monkeys but could not retain the idea for a long time as these monkeys do not behave in their 'divine' way. People in Shahkot, out of their own 'obscurities' accept Sampath's obscurity/eccentricity as divinity, only to be interrupted by the monkeys who behave more as biological monkeys rather than mythological or moral monkey gods; hence, restoring their biological entity, decanonised of their mythical imposed metaphorically significant positions. At one point of time in the novel, Sampath is revered as a Monkey God, somewhat sharing the mythical status of Hanuman who had the strength of expanding and reducing himself to any size. He does the same by reducing himself to a guava only to be taken away by a monkey thereby playing down the revered myth.

Not only animal or trees but humans are also presented as natural and biological selves who may not perform the discursive role ushered over them. For instance, Kulfi, during her pregnancy, in the discursively divine state as woman, is always indulged in the thoughts of food. Her basic bodily requirement yells louder than discursive motherhood and hence, "...Kulfi was not thinking of the baby in her belly like a little fish. She was thinking of fish themselves. Of fish big enough and good enough to feed the hunger that had overtaken her in the past months like a wave" (Desai 4).

Discursive morality is replaced by the stark biological realities. Naturalism represented in the representation of hunger and sexual instincts are very significant in the process of decanonisation: "Broadly speaking, naturalism is characterised by a refusal to idealize experience and by the persuasion that human life is strictly subject to natural laws" (Drabble et al 497).

When everyone else is discussing the practical issues, Kulfi's full concentration is always on food. She appears extremely eccentric to the logical world. Her mind is preoccupied with food items: "In her mind, aubergines grew large and purple and crisp, and then, in a pan, turned tender and melting. Ladyfingers were flavoured with tamarind and coriander. Chicken was stewed with cloves and cardamom. She thought of chopping and bubbling, or frying, slicing, stirring, grating" (Desai 5).

Another eccentricity or rather extremity is displayed in the acts of Pinky who is an ever attention seeker. Amid the display of Sampath's wisdom, neighbours' involvement in the whole preaching and the government's plan to tackle monkeys, Pinky would remember the Kwality Hungry Hop boy bursting into 'hysterical tears'. She confesses to Sampath, "I feel like a firework that has been lit by a match" (Desai 111) and finally in her instinct driven act with the ice cream seller, "...she thought she might kiss him, but vein of aggression pounded powerfully within her and she bit him instead. She bit his ear so hard that the Hungry Hop boy shouted out and his voice boomeranged about the town" (Desai 113).

Hence, through so many instances of climbing up the tree to get peace, unsatisfied hunger, an ever tempted soul for food, sexual instinct driving one violent to cut someone's ear, it is evident that in *Hullabaloo* naturalism and instincts replace the imposed values and institutions. A thorough *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* concludes open-ended leaving behind astonishments and many unanswered questions. Beings, things and events have been perceived free from any stereotyping and in the process also decanonised.

To conclude, everything including human and non human nature has been decanonised but is done by employing the low mimetic way. The methods are mock heroic, magic realism and parody. The novel appears to be a farce, a comedy on the part of Indian society which is eccentric, and appreciates obscurity as theology and take unintelligible statements as a source of knowledge. It is a representation of the alternate realities, a movement from invisibility to visibility, profundity

to obscurity and from monk to the monkeys. Such an impression leaves a question behind, whether the novel is really an attempt to decanonise nature of its historical, political and mythological canons or to re-assert the colonial canons. Or is it simply an attempt to deconstruct the canons, leaving the end open for further scrutiny?

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**POPULAR CULTURE AS REFLECTIONS OF LIVED
REALITIES: A CASE STUDY OF *MAHABHARAT*,
JUSTICE LEAGUE AND *THE ORIGINALS***

Pramit Sinha & Aisha Shamsuddin

It is often argued that popular culture and its byproducts are far from lived realities. There is a vast history of changing definitions with regard to the 'popular'. It has been associated with "a cluster of themes attributed to those of low social standing" and with those "excluded from the institutions of knowledge production" (Schiach 26, 27). Over the time, with the definition upgrading to "the style of life of the majority of the members of a community" (Schiach 30), scholarly attention has begun to be drawn towards the study of the 'popular' along with that of culture. Yet a sinister insecurity exists, for now the battle has shifted between the 'traditional' and the 'popular'. While the present day cosmopolitan culture provides a global slot to indigenous culture and tradition on the one hand, on the other hand such slotting is feared to take us further away from our roots. In this paper the central argument is that the popular culture represents human reality, existence and psyche more than one would like to believe. With time the forms of representation and narrations have evolved. It is true that market forces play a huge role in creating and maintaining the 'popular', but one cannot ignore the reflections of human conditions in these representations. The most compelling arguments made to differentiate between classic and popular works is that the classics have stood the test of time and continue to hold relevance even today while popular works seem to rise and fall almost every year.

This paper shall argue that there are many factors that contribute to the valuation of a work of art and it is important to critically examine some of these factors that come into play during the process of canonization of works and exclusions made thereof. For our purpose we have chosen to look at television series' as artifacts of popular culture. They are seldom divorced from the social realities existent in milieus from which they emerge.

Through a critical comparative study of three television series – *Mahabharat* (Oct 1988-June 1990), *Justice League* (Nov 2001-May 2004) and *The Originals* (Oct 2013-present) we shall attempt to debunk some of the fallacies regarding the inadequacies of popular

culture, erroneously espoused by elitist proponents of 'high art'. The idea is to compare and bring forth familiarities between the three in terms of their construction of meanings and ideas, keeping in mind their different contexts and origins. The justification for the selection of these specific series' lies in the popularity that they have attained and maintained in the course of their run. The goals of the characters may seem mighty and beyond the reality of ordinary people but their decisions, choices, mistakes, morals, flaws etc. are close to them. It is essentially this mirroring of the human reality in these mighty characters that have kept these series' close to peoples' hearts.

Visual media or television is an important mode of influence for a large section of the population in any given society. Be it through dramas, comedies, reality shows or cartoons, visual media has the power to mould lifestyles and common thought and vice versa. In his essay, "Folklore and Media", Torunn Selberg says that "Using the products of mass culture is a social act and an event, and it has its meaning within a social context. There is an interaction between the mass mediated culture's commodities and ideas, and the meaning they have in people's everyday communication. The people confirm and interpret their own values in conversations about watching TV.... The products of mass media take on a different meaning in the context of everyday life than they have when studied as texts in the context of mass media" (240).

Mahabharat (inspired by the epic *Mahabharata*) is embedded within religious grounds. *The Originals* has been scripted for TV production and *Justice League* saw its inception in comic books. The ideologies promoted and condemned in these series are nearly similar though they belong to different genres, contexts and timeframes.

Mahabharata is overtly an epic which crystallizes the age old morality of 'good triumphs over evil' from within a religious context. However the telecast of the epic as a series has brought it outside the realm of religion and made it accessible for audiences belonging to different religious inclinations, enabling them to interact with it. Hence religion is no longer the only reason to understand and explore *Mahabharata*, which then has been interpreted as a narrative about human politics, describing the adequate morals and conducts for the humans. Essentially, *Justice League* is a collection of heroes with super powers, like Superman, and vigilantes like Batman, who have taken the responsibility of protecting mankind from all evils. *Justice League* was first published by DC comics in 1960s. Since then it has been adapted

into various television series' and movies. Individual characters of the League have also enjoyed independent series' (television and comics), movies and animated films. Over the time *Justice League* has evolved not only in its plot construction but also in its characters. The central theme here, too, is the struggle between good and evil. However each one of the members of the league is seen fighting their own battles and weaknesses. All the heroes with super powers have weaknesses. Collectively they are an amalgamation of greatness and weakness, of humanity and cruelty; they display shades of grey that fans and followers identify with and perpetually attempt to accommodate into their lives. *The Originals* is an off shoot of *The Vampire Diaries* (TVD) which was first aired in September 2009 and is an ongoing series. As a vampire fantasy, TVD has one of the most intriguing and complicated plots which keeps its audiences loyal to the series. *The Originals* however is more nuanced than TVD in its plot, characters and themes. The manner in which the situations are dealt with brings forth various human tendencies, weaknesses and desires which are usually ascribed to the negative aspect of being human. Yet there is hardly a character that can be marked as pure evil or absolutely 'wrong'. Although the battle of good and evil runs on the surface, the plot runs much deeper, challenging the clear shades of white and black. The capacity of the (meta) human minds to dabble with the grey shades of life is dealt with great depth and insight in this series.

Thus all these series' are close to human reality and explore the human psyche with much vigor and intensity. It is also very interesting to note that the villains are seen in a new light. This is an important change for it shows the shift in our perception of the 'grey' in our lived reality, which is then represented in our modes of entertainment. The impact and consequent relevance of *The Originals* and *Justice League* is not really at par with the *Mahabharat*. The two series have been funded by multibillion dollar studios and they derive their content from popular fiction as opposed to the latter. There are however stark similarities between all three of these series once one observes the plots and deconstructs the logic behind them.

Krishna is seen as the pivotal character in the *Mahabharata* by many. Within the narrative of the *Bhagwat Gita*, Krishna reveals to Arjun that he was the avatar of the Supreme Being. He appropriates the roles of the creator, preserver and destroyer of creation. These are roles classically ascribed to the Hindu Trinity of Lords Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar. While the *Gita* in itself propagates what is termed an adherence to the "Sanatan Dharma," the rest of the *Mahabharata* is

evidently political in nature. A lot has been written about this phenomenal epic, highlighting its relevance in the lives of individuals and societies. In this paper we shall attempt to analyze its televised rendering by B.R. Chopra and gauge the significance of the visual media that took away over large sections of the Indian society, regardless of their personal religious affiliations. It is a fact that the show still boasts of having one of the highest TRP records in the history of television. The then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, had commissioned the making and telecast of *Mahabharata* in 1988. And in doing so he also facilitated the airing of religious program in a state run television channel for the first time in independent India. When the show was re-telecast in the 1990s, it occupied the Sunday prime time slot in the state run television channel – Doordarshan, once again indicating that it had tacit state sanction. Given such statistics one must make room for the possibility that the show was much more than a proselytizing device and the marketing strategy used was nothing like the aggressive marketing that dominates all contemporary visual and print media.

Very broadly put, the *Mahabharat* has characters imbued with super human powers. True to the tradition of epics, gods actively intervene in mortal affairs. A Manichean view of strife between good and evil is the principal plot in which good eventually triumphs over evil. This formula works ditto in the case of *Justice League*. The origin of the superhero in the American context may be traced to the immediate aftermath of the Cold War – a time when mankind had finally attained the power to annihilate all life on earth. If the world wars were brutal examples of the complete collapse of Western civilization, the Cold War was a frightening reminder of the actual fragility of mortal existence. In the face of such fragility rose the meta-humans. With the advent of globalization and the availability of a varied degree of information about world mythologies, the creators of the superheroes found much to coalesce, draw upon and re-invent. By the time *The Originals* come to the fore, one detects massive changes in the ways in which popular cultural texts are made and received. The binary between high and low culture began to blur. The fears of Durkheim and his fellow modernists seem to come true regarding the mechanical reproduction of works of art, as art was seen rolling off of conveyor belts of sounds, lighting and peculiarly representative narrative plot lines catering to niche audiences.

Having acknowledged as much, it is important to look closer at said conveyor belt. For the first time the television evolves from being an

idiot box and the influx of capital in television productions contribute heavily in said evolution. The cultural space hitherto occupied by novels and then movies is appropriated by television through its ability to harness the unique strengths of both. Novels can delve deep into the psyche of characters – a feat not feasible in movies due to constraints of time – and the audio-visual component of movies is missing from novels which fail to match up to actual sound and visual effects achieved through digital sound and CGI graphics in movies. Unlike the time bound screenplay of movies, television series can actually allow ample time for character evolutions over the course of the various seasons of the series. Combined, the resulting story telling provides a more compelling source of entertainment.

Let us now take apart the three series under consideration and make some broad plot analysis.

Mahabharata has been studied as a historical and socio-political text. It has been read as a manual for complexities in life. The opening and closing credits of the series have songs that give valuable pointers to the show's overt purpose. One such song declares: "Katha hai Purusharth ki/ Yeh, Swarth ki/ Parmarth Ki./ Saarthi Jis key Baney/ Shri Krishna Bharat Parth Ki" (*Mahabharat* directed by Ravi Chopra, 1988) [This is a tale of Purusharth (the virtues of being an Aryan Man)/ Of Swarth (selfish aggrandizement)/ Of Parmarth (the ultimate truth)/In it, Shri Krishna acts as the Sarathi (literally charioteer, implicitly the guide)/ Of Parth (another name for Arjun) who hailed from the Bharat Vansh (Clansman of Bharat) – Translation (ours).] This song ends with the lines: "Satya Vighhoshit Hua Jab/ Satya Sarthak Sarvatha" (*Mahabharat* directed by Rajiv Chopra, 1988) [Whenever the inherent truth in this tale is declared/ Truth shall always emerge successful – Translation ours].

One notes that throughout the series the primary characters aligned with the 'good' are tested against great odds and must fight their way out of difficulties, making all possible attempts to stick to the path of 'Dharma'. It is the fluid definition of righteousness that gets exposed at every crucial juncture, revealing Machiavellian machinations in the quest for power, honor and glory. Krishna guides the Pandavs against the Kauravs in their quest for revenge and dominion over Hastinapur. 'Righteous' men slay each other in the name of Dharma. Women are molested and children are slaughtered to avenge lost honor and battles. As the dust settles, one realizes the diminutive stature of man in the face of cosmic and social forces. All that remains is the age old

philosophical question pertaining to the meaning/purpose of life and the various ways to attain it. Even though the narrative resolves itself on the side of the ostensibly fair and the righteous, one is left with a disturbing dismantling of the Manichean structure of viewing things.

As a result, different members of the audience draw different meanings from the show. Those religiously inclined find implicit divine patterns, the politically oriented individuals imbibe the virtues of 'real politik', the absurdist marvel at the futility of all purposes and the sensationalists derive pleasure from dramatic representation created with the help of the innovative use of cinematography, sound and special effects.

In *Justice League* one finds an amalgamation of superheroes namely, Superman, The Martian Manhunter, The Green Lantern, The Thanagarian Hawk Girl, The Amazonian Princess Diana, The Flash and of course, Batman. Each of these characters has intriguing story lines. These heroes join forces to take on super villains. They defend earth from alien invasions and against other human and android threats. In so far as the origin and audience of these heroes are from America, they espouse the all American way of life – candor, bravery, ingenuity, entrepreneurship and honesty. They rarely kill and are for all purposes ideal heroes to look up to. Marvel and DC comics have made billions marketing this new form of idealized western civilization, much in the face of imminent threat of destruction. If there is a philosophical message to be taken, it is the one of adapting a way of life that suits a true hero dedicated to social welfare.

The important thing to be noted in this regard is the evolution of the comics from being cartoons to animated movies. Animation has had a rich history in the Japanese culture as 'Anime'. In the American context it developed alongside Hollywood. Animation is no longer the exclusive domain of comic relief. It morphed to deal with serious issues about crime, social injustice, war and high politics. Good continued to triumph over evil but characters like the Batman continued to blur the boundaries by developing extreme ways of incapacitating the justice league, should it ever become tyrannical.

The next step in this evolution happened when Hollywood adopted animation and CGI in mainstream movies. Characters like the Joker became iconic anti-heroes. The nihilism of Raskolnikov was mirrored in the villain and hero alike. Given the restriction of time, however, psychological character development could not be demonstrated in movies. In the television series, screen time was used to show the alienation, disillusionment amongst the league members and also the

evolution of villains. To preserve the primary agon, the villains never permanently became heroes but they did join forces to repel larger threats, giving room to the possibility of the 'grey' amidst the black and white.

Finally, when we look at *The Originals*, we find the crystallization of the grey on television. One perhaps need not go so far as to say that culture has been democratized but it is not difficult to spot the blur between high and low art. From entirely animated series, television series evolved to incorporate the realist CGI effects from movies. The fact that the companies making television productions are franchises of big Hollywood production houses enabled the sharing of resources between the two media even though Hollywood retains the lion's share of the profits. In the case of *The Originals* a few significant things work simultaneously. Firstly it has a niche audience; it began its ride on the success of its predecessor – *The Vampire Diaries* (TVD). It brings vampires, werewolves and witches on the same table with human beings, with the city of New Orleans in the backdrop. New Orleans is a lot like the Mystic Falls that features in TVD but with historical significance. It is the epitome of a new city with a transient and eclectic population. Jazz music floats about in the air and a family of Original vampires return to take over the city they had helped build in the first place.

As the series progresses, intrigue and counter intrigue sends the city to the brink of war between the different factions and it becomes increasingly clear that the Manichean walls have collapsed. The plot of the series is weak in several areas and the reasoning used by characters to act the way they do often comes across as something that only the shows' niche teenage audience would find appealing. The stroke of genius surfaces when the development of the Original family is shown over the past millennia.

By far, the most interesting character in the series is Nicklaus Michelson who is a hybrid between a werewolf and a vampire – an offspring of his mother's extramarital relationship. Michael, the father to the Originals, is shown as a wicked vindictive man, bent on humiliating and ultimately destroying Klaus who is a living reminder of his wife's betrayal. Klaus' brother Elijah and his sister Rebecca aid him against Michael but over the years their relationship suffers. Elijah is the only person left who abides by the family motto: "together and forever." The story is focused on his attempts to bring peace to the city

and help it flourish so that the original family may finally be able to call it home.

This series, like TVD, is replete with sexual escapades and material excesses. The original family is overtly depicted as creatures capable of extreme violence. Immune to death, they also represent extreme alienation. Societies rise and fall around them as they desperately try to form familial bonds of love and affection. This series and many like it are a direct offshoot of mainstream Hollywood movies and are equally popular. One might say they represent a cultural milieu as any work of art does. True, this form of art is mass produced and might very well not stand the acid test of time. But as one makes these points, one must admit that such traits are very much present in the fabric of contemporary America. It is a multicultural plot where instant fame and glorification have come to redefine the 'American way of life'. Klaus is as much an iconoclast as Rhett Butler and Howard Roark. His obsessions and anxieties are endemic to the obsessions and anxieties that plague life in the first world.

The characters of *The Originals* are reviled and adored equally, much like the Joker. The anti-hero is clearly here to stay. Christopher Nolan and his ilk now make movies with complex characters that far surpass the series in scope and ingenuity but they are loved because of their morally indeterminate characters. There has been an evolution in the objects of our love and appreciation. In other words, the postmodern society idolizes postmodern heroes. These are heroes who can be almost interchangeable with villains because the villains no longer wear masks and look hideous. They look suave and downright desirable. They flirt with the definitions of morality at the altar of a hedonistic way of life. There is the idealism of living the great American dream, there is the need and aspiration to be a self-sacrificing hero, interlinked with the desire to be self-aggrandizing and vain. The bridge between high and low art, for better or worse, stands lowered.

In a postmodern world with no fixed moral centre 'real politik' reigns supreme. It is no coincidence that the message of *Mahabharata* was meant for the denizens of the Kalyug. The search for the ultimate truth – Parmarth – and the ability to pursue it in keeping with one's selfish desires – Swarth – always make the attainment of Purusharth a challenge. Purusharth then has evolved from an idealized version of righteousness to a practical and pragmatic one. It is therefore not a surprise that ours is a time of coalition politics and custom made couture art, reflected adequately in our modes of entertainment.

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**POSTCOLONIAL INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION:
VISIBLE TRENDS AND SHIFTING SENSIBILITIES IN
THE NINETEEN FIFTIES AND SIXTIES**

Seema Sinha

We can perhaps begin with the presupposition that the major achievements of Indian English Literature are in the realm of fiction. This is a reflection of an international phenomenon as far as creative writing is concerned, a process which pushed Drama and Poetry in the background and propelled the English Novel to the centre stage in the nineteenth century. But we need not dwell on this aspect. This paper traces the growth of the Indian English Novel in postcolonial India. The emphasis is on the trends which have emerged in the Indian English Novel since it developed the 'historical sense' in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. The pattern of growth in Indian English fiction is fairly visible; it changes from translation to transformation and finally a transmutation over a period of the nineteenth, twentieth and the twenty-first century. There is also a clear pattern of tradition and experimentation in the theme, technique, aesthetics and language of the Indian English Novel.

Emerging from the shadow of English romanticism, it now exhibits a true voice of feeling and is an authentic expression delineating a living and felt experience. The Indian English Novel gradually evolved from being a document of social ferment, depicting the complex strands of the Indian society in the pre-independence era, to more personal concerns in the aftermath of the Independence and Partition. In the second half of the twentieth century the Indian English Novel has undergone a transition in form and substance. The novelists of the postcolonial era are more preoccupied with the problems and dilemmas of the individual rather than social complexities like the poverty or the inequality of the caste system.

Truth or reality as perceived by the modern writer is not simple but multidimensional. It has the vision which the writer wishes to convey through his creative imagination. The process of growth and change gives dynamism to literature and the enduring quality of true art. The fact that Indian English writing has forged ahead in new directions and new interests emphasizes the fact that it has an insight and understanding of reality. The writers have the moral courage and the

strength of conviction to confront the truth of their times and to express their inner vision by giving it a lasting significance of a true work of art.

The changing ambience, attitudes, interests, artistic and temperamental differences of the different generations of Indian writers in English, has left a lasting impression on the literary landscape of Indian English fiction. These writers have made significant contributions so that Indian English Writing has emerged down the decades as world class literature. The element of permanent truth of a genuine and authentic experience gives a timeless quality to a living and growing literature which came of age in the first half of the twentieth century. From the sociological and Gandhian ideologies depicting the lives of an entire generation inspired by the dreams of freedom to the brutal castration and shattered truth of Partition and Independence, the canvas of the Indian English Novel is huge and it has expressed the changing reality of the Indian scenario faithfully and sincerely.

The collective consciousness which emerged in the Indian subcontinent in the aftermath of Independence and Partition was that of a generation trying to grapple with a changed reality and the traumatic experience of a different world. The trends visible in Indian fiction in the decades after Independence and Partition correspond with the trends in Postwar European fiction – only the Western world had experienced the shattering of the myths a few decades earlier after the First World War. The Second World War made it a concrete truth. In the Indian scenario, the trauma, physical and mental, became prominent in the fiction of the forties, fifties and sixties of the twentieth century due to the Partition and the Exodus on both sides of the border.

The physical and emotional pain of the brutal partition and uprooting took many decades to manifest itself. For writers it was one of those historical moments which gave them a dramatic raw material and they gave a panoramic view of the events in their work. These novels are significant because they recreate the agony of a lost generation but the canvas is so huge that the individual characters cannot be treated in depth. This particular phase in the evolution of the Indian English Novel can be categorized as that of a social and political realism, and the characters are 'types'. The fiction belonging to this particular period deal with the Holocaust of Partition and are significant documents chronicling changes and historical events but are lacking in emotional appeal. The spurt which began in the 1920s due to a sudden

acceleration in the political and social awakening continued uninterrupted till Independence and beyond.

Novels like Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) are called iconic because in them we find a perceptive exposition of the theme of partition. Khushwant Singh often gives the impression of detailing events dispassionately like a journalist, lacking a human touch. R.K. Narayan has pointed out the lack of emotional depth which existed in the Indian English fiction till the forties, fifties and the sixties. In his words, "The mood of comedy, the sensitivity to atmosphere, the probing of the psychological factors, the crisis in the individual soul and its resolution, and above all the detailed observation which constitute the subject of fiction ... forced into the background" (Rao 3).

Literature in Hindi and regional languages like Bangla and Malyalam had a depth from the beginning of the twentieth century. Rabindranath Tagore's *Chokher Bali* (1905) explores the existentialist loneliness of a widow's world. In Hindi, Yashpal's novel *Jhootha Sach* has subtlety, complexity and a deep exploration of human values, character and emotions. It also has the sweep and melodrama of Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*. These novels depict the impact of Partition on a dispossessed people.

The Indian English Novels of the nineteen forties and post-independence India reveal an inherent anomaly and the inner contradictions of the sociopolitical situation in India. This pattern of the concealed complexity in the modern Indian scenario manifests itself in the Indian English writing and characterizes it. The historical background of any country and society moulds its literature and translates itself in creative expression. The prevailing mood of despair and disillusionment preoccupied the Indian mind after 1947. This feeling only intensified in the ensuing decades as an entire generation "looked back in anger" and faced the predicament of the Modern Man, a feeling of loss and hopeless futility. The mood of despair and existentialist dilemma – the philosophical, literary and intellectual ferment which began in the West – became a part of the Indian experience. This bitterness is a common and dominant note of the modern Indian consciousness as expressed in literature. "Despite geographical distance and cultural differences there remains a basic similarity in human experience of the world at a particular phase of history. Feelings of angst, anguish, alienation, futility have made terrifyingly deep roots into the Western life. Consequently, much of

Western fiction has emerged either as an existentialist fable on man's life or as a deep cry like Ellison's anonymous narrator in *Invisible Man*. The protagonist of Dostoyevsky is 'possessed', Camus's is an 'outsider', Kafka's is under 'trial', Becket's is 'absurd' and Bellow's is 'displaced'. These tortured individuals are synoptic of the disinheritance in the Western life. We do not have such equals but we have equivalents. The reasons are obvious" (Rao 5).

Going further back in history, we understand in retrospect that the wounds of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 had been partially eclipsed by the Gandhian ideology of nonviolence. The Mutiny was a defining moment in the history of the two cultures confronting each other. The Gandhian doctrine was an idealistic uplifting of the mind where there was no room for militancy. The elevated idealism and the Gandhian myth were brutally shattered by the Partition and the horrors of violence. The wars with Pakistan and China were a reminder of the grim and ugly reality. Jawaharlal Nehru, the inheritor of the spiritual lineage of Mahatma Gandhi, accepted the truth of the situation: "The peasantry were servile and fear ridden; the industrial workers were no better. The middle classes, the intelligentsia ... were themselves submerged in this all pervading gloom.... There was no adjustment to social purpose, no satisfaction of doing something worthwhile, even though suffering came in its wake..." (Rao 150).

The European postwar notes of disillusionment are echoed here – the same sense of loss of purpose, a feeling of hopeless futility and an existentialist angst are experienced by the Indian collective consciousness in the late forties and fifties of the twentieth century. This is perceived as new points of intellectual and emotional growth in Indian literature beyond that point of time. It created stimuli which motivated Indian English, Hindi and regional literature as well and they acquired greater subtlety and complexity.

The 'Big Three' have continued to write after independence till the seventies and later. Raja Rao's *Comrade Kirillov* came out in 1976, Mulk Raj Anand published *Confessions of a Lover* in 1976, R.K. Narayan's *Painter of Signs* was published in 1977 and his *Salt and Sawdust* and *Table Talk* were written in the nineties. Despite literary careers spanning more than four decades and witnessing the changes of a colonial and postcolonial India, the intrinsic quality of these writers did not change. Raja Rao's work continued to exhibit the same fusion of political, mythical and philosophical overtones as his earlier work. Mulk Raj Anand's work is a voluminous seven volume series, with

autobiographical elements tracing his journey from boyhood to manhood. R.K. Narayan revisits Malgudi in his novel and recreates the unchanging cultural climate and human values of a small South Indian town. The best qualities of R.K. Narayan's fiction are intact: the smoothness, humour and a detached and non-committal observation of the pageant of human life.

There is no doubt that the emotional and physical trauma of the common human experience and the drastic changes in the spiritual atmosphere have affected the form and the content of the Indian English Novel. In Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* (1965), Lila Chatterjee, the old, lonely and disappointed freedom fighter cannot understand the reasons for the discontent of the present generation: "I don't know what has diseased your generation ... the very freedom we fought for, and gave you perhaps?" (7). The older generation is disillusioned while the younger generation is repulsed by the sordid reality of post-independence India: "... The pitiless, bitter world ... this new epoch ... its irritations and failures, its red tape and corruption, its small pale hopes and frustrations" (8). The issues are cultural and social like the East-West encounter, the clash between tradition and modernism, provincialism and urbanization etc. In the sixties and seventies new writers like Anita Desai and Arun Joshi create a new motif in Indian English Novel by displaying a preoccupation with the individual mind, exploring in minute detail the intense loneliness, neuroses and the complexities of the private world. Their characters face a crisis of identity and existence. In exploring this new literary landscape these writers have also created a maturity in handling the form of the novel and experimenting with the language. The element of the modern "introverted novel" is explored for the first time in Indian English fiction. Anita Desai uses what she calls "the language of the interior" (10) in unraveling the complexities of the mind of her paranoid and neurotic characters. This displayed new trends and possibilities in Indian English Writing.

In retrospect it is easy to understand and trace the beginnings of the Indian English Novel as it emerged from historical romances to a social documentation and finally to an exploration of psychological reality. With Anita Desai's first published work – *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) – wherein we see a subtle and complex unraveling of the heroine Maya's subconscious memories and responses, Indian English fiction has arrived at a completely different aspect, a cult of the subconscious and gained a new perspective which had been absent till now. This novel signified the arrival of a gifted new novelist who, with her artistic

sensibility and lyrical and sensitive handling of the English language, added a new dimension and creative impulse to Indian English fiction. She probes this literary motif further in her next novel, *Voices in the City* (1965), and other succeeding novels. In fact she never divorces herself from this theme, probing it in different milieu and settings. This is the central idea in her novels published in the seventies and eighties: *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1978), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984) and *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988). As she herself has said, "One's preoccupation can only be a perpetual search – for meaning, for value, for dare I say it truth" (BBC, "Hard Talk").

The most obvious conception of modern literature is that it presents a trivial view of life. From following the traditions of romance, humanism and realism, the Novel now reflects unpalatable reality, a vision of life and human predicament lacking in aesthetic appeal. As the writer cannot divorce himself from reality, he presents the decadent values of the society he lives in. The truth of the human situation as it emerges from modern literature is uninspiring. The modern writer often faces the charge of being part of a group of writers who "are not simply writers describing decadence, they are decadent writers" (Kettle 150).

The similarity of the basic human experience cuts across linguistic, regional and cultural barriers. The feeling of disinheritance present in the Western world is experienced by the Indian mind after Independence and Partition. The changes in the social system, urbanization, the breaking down of traditions and values, the inner conflicts, the crisis of identity, created a Wounded Civilization. The central experience of all the characters is of loss. The experience of disinheritance is the reality of the modern man's condition: "Hence all the novelists today give full exposure to this face of reality. In their dilemma and crisis they are contemporary everyman. Their being contemporary everyman indicates the fidelity of the novelists to reality. But all these characters have more than average sensitivity and more than usual strength to suffer" (Prasad 56). The problems these characters face are cultural, social, physical, moral or those of alienation and despair. In the final analysis they are universal problems.

The modern writers face the daunting task of creating a world of meaning out of this splendid chaos and remain true to the reality of the situation and their own creative imagination. The Indian English writer has successfully fused his vision and technique to recreate a human truth which is universal. The invasion of ideas from the West had

crystallized among other phenomenon into a literary Renaissance in India which redefined the mores of Indian literature. English is now a part of our heritage, an inescapable reality of our collective consciousness and an aspect of our multicultural reality. The Indian English writer need not be either apologetic or defensive. The mainstream popular Indian English literature is formidable and global; emerging down the decades, it has kept pace with the changing times to express a universal perception of life. Realism has been the hallmark of Indian English fiction.

On account of the influences which came in from the West in the nineteenth and twentieth century, English remained a part of our colonial legacy and literature created in it by the Indian mind was perceived as a part of a colonial hangover. In the recent years the prejudice has given way to a grudging acceptance and now unconcealed admiration as Indian writers dominate the international literary scene and India is considered a literary continent.

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BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *JASMINE*: A STUDY IN ASSIMILATION

Anuradha Gaur

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most significant contemporary novelists. She is one of the few authors of south-Asian descent to gain popularity in the United States. She is a pioneer in writing diasporic literature. She deals with the lives of Indian and other third world immigrants to America. In other words, Bharati Mukherjee fictionalises the experience of immigration. She herself writes: "We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate...when we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society. I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country" (*The Times of India*, Oct. 1, 1989:1). At another occasion she admitted that an issue very important to her is: "...the finding of a new identity...the painful or exhilarating process of pulling yourself out of the culture that you were born into, and then replanting yourself in another culture" (Kumar 16).

Bharati Mukherjee lived in Canada from 1966 to 1979 and migrated to the U.S.A. in 1980. In Canada she felt like an expatriate. The unfriendly environment of the foreign country made her homeless and unhappy. *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* – the first two novels of Bharati Mukherjee capture the pain of rejection, rootlessness and alienation. When Bharati Mukherjee shifted to the U.S.A., her experience was altogether different. She found the new country quite favourable and full of opportunities for immigrants. Mukherjee herself traced the change in her attitude and pointed out: "The transformation as a writer and as resident of the new world, occurred with the act of immigration to the U.S.A...for me it is a movement away from the aloofness of expatriation, to the exuberance of immigration" (Mukherjee *Darkness* 2).

Jasmine, the most celebrated novel of Bharati Mukherjee, reflects this exuberance of immigration. It was written in 1989 when Bharati Mukherjee was well adjusted in America. She felt quite at home and easily merged with the American life and people around. The present novel reveals a highly positive approach to the problems of immigrants. The theme of the novel is an Indian immigrant's encounter with the new world and her gradual transformation as she thoroughly imbibes the new culture. The focus is on the thought that through

acculturation and assimilation one can make home away from home and experience all the joys of immigration.

Jasmine, the dashing and dynamic heroine of this ambitious novel, stands as an example of the "fusion" which is an important feature of the age of globalization. Instead of clinging to the past, the protagonist plunges into the present and gets enthusiastically involved in the new environment of her adopted land. She is realistic, practical, energetic, resilient and ready to accept changes. She knows that change is the law of nature and whole life is a process of changing and evolving. She celebrates the fact of being alive in a new world, of being reborn. The process of assimilation does not mean a denial of the past. It only means giving up a rigid holding on to the past. In assimilation there is no room for sentimentality, no pain of nostalgia for the past, no sense of loss of the glorious heritage. There is no effort to preserve a fragile identity as an Indian; on the other hand there is an acceptance of fluid identity and a will to forge new alliances and new communities in the friendly atmosphere of the adopted land.

Jasmine's original name was Jyoti. She was born in Hasnapur, a small village of Punjab. She is the fifth daughter, seventh of nine children. Jyoti's frustrated mother wanted to kill her in order to save her from the pain of a dowryless bride for her. In India, especially in rural areas, daughters are mostly considered a curse brought on by parents' evil deeds in previous life. Surviving infanticide, she is given the name Jyoti, meaning light, brilliance and radiance. Jyoti fights against fate from a very early age. She does not feel cowed down by the prophecy of her widowhood and exile. Revolting against fate and the norms of conservative society which tried to condition her existence, she gathers all her strength and courage to prove that she can not be treated as 'nobody'. She is powerful enough to change her destiny. She refuses to marry anyone who does not speak English as to want English is to want the world. Jyoti marries Prakash, a young engineer, who has also firmly decided like her "to make something more of his life than fate intended" (*Jasmine* 85). Jyoti is very happy to accept the new name Jasmine given to her by her husband. Thinking that his progress lies only in America, a land of opportunities, Prakash obtains admission in an American University in Florida. Jasmine is eagerly looking forward to going to America but unfortunately her dream is shattered as Prakash is killed by a terrorist just on the eve of his departure. Even after this tragic incident Jasmine decides to go to America and fulfill her husband's dream and then burn herself on the grounds of the university where Prakash gained admission to study.

With forged papers she sets off for America. She has no knowledge of life in the U.S., she has no acquaintances there. She just has the address of Prof. Vadhera, whom she had never met. Once she lands in America she shatters her 'old self' and grabs every opportunity to become American. She wants to prove to the world what "a girl from a swampy backwater could accomplish" (160).

The desire to change the blind forces of destiny is so powerful in Jasmine that nothing can stop her. Nothing can dishearten her, not even her brutal rape by the deformed captain Half-face, in whose ship she is smuggled into America. She turns into 'Kali', the goddess of Destruction. She kills not herself but Half-face because she has a clear vision of her mission which is not yet over: "I could not let my personal dishonor disrupt my mission. There would be plenty of time to die.... I extended my tongue and sliced it" (118).

She is given a new insight into life by Lillian Gordon's precious advice, "let the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you" (131). Within no time, Jasmine recovers from the traumatic experience and sets out to meet Prof. Vadhera. She is scared to discover that professor is making out his living not by teaching but by trading in human hair. She is also expected to observe the austerities of widowhood in this Punjabi family, the thing which Jasmine wanted to escape. So, being disillusioned she leaves Vadheras'. In fact, Jasmine wishes to forget all the cruelties and sorrows of her past life. She has a desire to explore the new land wholeheartedly. She has come to the U.S.A. to realize the dream she visualized with her husband. This is a country where she can challenge her fate: "If we could first get away from India, then all fates would be cancelled, we'd start with new fates, new stars. We could say or be anything we wanted. We'd be on the other side of earth, out of God's sight" (89).

After a short period of hand to mouth existence Jasmine gets an opportunity to work as a caretaker and later Day Mummy to Duff, the little daughter of Wylie and Taylor in Manhattan. She eagerly responds to the affection and friendliness shown by her employers who treat her as caretaker rather than a 'maid servant'. She also takes up other part-time jobs like answering phones and tutoring graduate students in Punjabi at the university. Financial independence makes her more confident. In her own country she was just an unlucky girl with a disastrous fate hovering over her but in the U.S.A. she is regarded as an intelligent, sincere and refined girl.

Sometimes her traditional roots break out and confuse Jasmine. For example when she meets Duff, an adopted child, non-genetic, her reaction is: "I could not imagine a non-genetic child. A child that was not my own or my husband's struck me as a monstrous idea. Adoption was as foreign to me as the idea of widow remarriage" (170). But Jasmine does not allow this cultural change to upset her mind. She has a rare quality to adapt herself to any new situation. It is her willingness to accept the new culture that makes the process of acculturation easy. She avoids talking about Hasanpur as even "Memories are a sign of disloyalty" (121). She masters the English language because it provides her with a more familiar relationship with the American culture as a whole.

Wylie's falling out of love with Taylor and her decision to live with another man shocks her at first but soon she becomes normal. She is fascinated towards Taylor and falls in love with him. "I began to fall in love with what he represented to me, a Professor who served biscuits to a servant, smiled at her and admitted her to the broad democracy of his joking, even when she didn't understand it. It seemed entirely American" (167).

A bond of intimacy develops between her and Taylor. Taylor is a large hearted fellow. He is above all racial and cultural barriers. He does not treat Jasmine as a foreigner; it is the Hayeses' big, clean, brightly lit apartment where Jasmine bloomed from a different alien with forged documents into an adventurous Jase. Here she stays for two years. She learns the American ways of life, husband helping in the kitchen, wife working for longer hours outside, and young couple adopting a child without any hesitation. She appreciates the American world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self absorption" (171).

She is absolutely a changed person. This change is not imposed upon her. She says, "I changed because I wanted to" (185). Jasmine has a rare quality to adjust with any new circumstances. She has a strong will to attach herself to the adopted land. The past does not haunt her. She feels: "To bunker oneself inside nostalgia to sheath the heart in a bullet proof vest was to be a coward" (185). Jasmine does not suffer the dilemmas that torment Tara and Dimple because she is realistic enough to understand that life in the U.S.A. is radically different from that in India. However, Jasmine's happy life with Taylor comes to a sudden halt because she spots Sukhi, the terrorist killer of her husband. She flees from that place because she does not want to endanger the lives of Taylor and Duff.

After she leaves Taylor, Jasmine goes to Iowa where she meets another saving angel Ripplemayar, gets a job in Iowa's bank and a place in the Banker Bud Ripplemayar's heart as well as home. The fifty year old Bud is drawn towards her and feels rejuvenated by her youthful vigour, eastern colourfulness and wisdom. In a few months' time Bud is divorced and Jasmine becomes Jane to him and lives as his wife (though she has not actually married him). She has no feeling of guilt as she looks upon herself a catalyst and not the cause to bring about the divorce of Bud and Karin in midlife. For all America gave her, Jasmine pays with gratitude and love. She serves Bud patiently and fondly after he is crippled. Trying to make him comfortable she becomes pregnant. Still she does not wish to marry him. She enjoys her new status as a stepmother to Du, a sixteen year old Vietnam war victim adopted by Bud after his own grown up sons left him and he is separated from his wife Karin. Jasmine has fully assimilated herself in the American style of living with adopted children and pregnancy without marriage. Not only she has learnt to adjust in a new set of values but also caught the essence of American culture: "In America nothing lasts. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible, or so wonderful that it won't disintegrate" (181).

A sudden letter from Taylor informs her about his visit to her. Du decides to go to California and stay with his sister because he wants to 'belong'. While Jasmine is fully transformed and assimilated in the new land, Du, her adopted son, remains an alienated expatriate who can not adjust. Jasmine has a tremendous capacity for adaptation and assimilation. When Jasmine comments that for some immigrants there is no way except that (they can not merge into another country), Bud says "But not for you, Jane, that's what I love about you" (232).

When Bud plans to legalise their relationship through marriage, Jasmine undergoes an emotional crisis. Taylor's arrival at this moment is a great welcome relief to her. She has true love for Taylor. When he convinces her that there is nothing wrong in her leaving Bud, she feels relaxed and walks away with Bud and Duff. Jasmine' walking out of Bud's life does not indicate her frivolity or disloyalty. It is in order to fulfill her long cherished dream of unlimited possibilities that she joins the company of Taylor. She remarks, "I am not choosing between two men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness" (240). She is a modern girl who has the courage to discard the old world in preference to the American dream. She is "greedy with wants and reckless from hope" (241). Her leaving Bud is a reaffirmation of her strong desire to live life fully. She believes, "Treat

every second of your existence as a possible assignment from God" (61). She no longer thinks of herself as Jane. She has survived the worst and now she is absolutely free to choose the path of life which she thinks is the best for her.

It is neither the fittest nor the most intelligent but the most adaptable who will survive. And Jasmine truly is a survivor. Her capacity to change and adapt is tremendous. She travels from one place to another, undergoing different traumatic experiences like hunger, ill treatment, violence, rape and murder but she is not defeated. She does not revert to the homeland because her dream can turn into reality only in the adopted country. Her rare quality of adjusting and compromising with any new situation is simply astonishing. From Jyoti to Jasmine, to Jase and Jane there are so many varied transformations of her personality. She evolves a new identity after the loss of previous identity. She dies many deaths in her lifetime but is reborn every time. She is forever changing, forever new. Her desire to belong, to become a part of the American society is so intense that she repositions her stars. It is a peculiar American trait that prompts Jasmine to leave Bud (whose child she is carrying) and settle with Taylor.

Unlike other writers engaged in narratives of conflict between estrangement and belonging, Bharati Mukherjee in *Jasmine* exemplifies the need for easy adjustment. She is very much interested in the acculturation and assimilation which is the need of the hour. Jasmine exemplifies all the joys of immigration. Bharati Mukherjee has redefined the idea of diaspora as a process of gain; she has given an entirely new perspective to the immigrant experience which was so far regarded to be a condition of terminal loss and dispossession. She suggests that assimilation and acculturation are the only strategies of survival in a new land. Jasmine is fully Americanized just like her own creator who very enthusiastically claims herself to be the mainstream American writer.

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**WOMEN AS METAPHOR: A STUDY OF ANITA RAU
BADAMI'S *CAN YOU HEAR THE NIGHT BIRD
CALL?* AND SHAUNA SINGH BALDWIN'S
*WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS***

Urvashi Kaushal

This paper was written keeping in mind two small but highly significant scenes from two novels by Indo-Canadian novelists. These vividly described scenes form an integral part of the novels and help in developing the central idea of the novels. However, Anita Rau Badami and Shauna Singh Baldwin's vivid and detailed description of these scenes have left a lasting impact on the readers. Though these works are not termed as partition literature, especially Anita Rau Badami's, yet their treatment of partition in these novels makes it worth revisiting.

Anita Rau Badami is a writer settled in Canada. Her writings have created a niche by her consistent effort to tell the story of immigrants settled in Canada. The settings of her works are essentially India or Canada. Shauna Singh Baldwin also belongs to the same category of expatriate Indian writers. Baldwin too narrates stories of her homeland. Her first novel *What the Body Remembers* received critical reviews for its depiction of the trauma endured by a woman's body. Essentially it is a pre-independence story of Satya, the bold and beautiful wife of Sardarji, the Canal Engineer of the Lahore Region. Satya's innumerable qualities and expertise in home management does not make her a complete wife as she was unable to bear a child for Sardarji. Sardarji's sudden marriage to the young, beautiful and innocent Roop commences a life of compromise for the two women, where he pits one against the other. *What the Body Remembers* represents the humiliation a woman endures on account of her body. On account of her inability to procreate, she leads a life of humiliation, often at the mercy of the other members of her family; her inclusion in the family is solely for the purpose of reproduction. In both the instances her significance is limited to the functions of her body.

Through the novel *Can You Hear the Night Bird Call* Badami narrates the story of three women and their trial and tribulations in life. With the ambition of the central character Sharanjit or Bibiji, Badami takes us from a small village in Punjab to Canada's multicultural society. The other two characters become an integral part of Bibiji's life and become a part of the story that is told. Sharanjit's childhood fascination with

Canada makes her cleverly entice her sister's suitor and make it into her ticket to Canada. She fulfils all her dreams in Canada but is overcome with guilt when her simple and straightforward sister, Kanwar, stops writing back after the partition of India and Pakistan. After years of guilt and anxiety, Bibiji is able to trace her niece with the help of her friend Leela. But the heart wrenching saga told by Nimmo, Bibiji's niece, about partition forms the turning point of the novel.

This paper aims to study how during the partition women became metaphors to represent a number of things and emotions. As Badami and Baldwin both describe the trauma and violence that accompanied the partition, they bring out the different experiences of women during the traumatic events. Through the horrifying journey that Roop and Sardarji travel to cross the border, Baldwin highlights the plight of thousands of people who were displaced. The novel shows how a woman was considered a metaphor for the patriarchal family honour or the "*izzat* of the *quom*." Something that had to be protected from the 'other' at all costs. Her body was seen as the property of her husband which was ultimately his responsibility. Therefore, during partition when communal riots broke out, the property and the woman had to be protected. They were mostly sent to a safe place with all the movable property, like Roop is sent with her children and all their valuables in a car. This metaphorical semblance of women and honour takes an ugly shape during any war-like situation. Protecting their honour and property becomes the first duty of the men as Baldwin quotes some men in her novel saying, "I made martyrs of seventeen women and children in my family before their *izzat* could be taken. I made martyrs of fifty."(497)

Interestingly, the honour of women was so important that men preferred to kill them instead of putting them at risk or accepting the dishonoured women. To face dishonour was unacceptable but killing wife, sister, daughter in the name of honour was acceptable. Even Roop was surprised by her father who killed his daughter-in-law. She remarks, "Papaji thinks that for good, good women, death should be preferable" (521).

Kusum, Roop's sister-in-law, embraces death at the hands of her father-in-law and does not say 'no' as she represented the honour of the family. But one wonders if Roop's father could escape with his grandsons and maid, why couldn't he take his young daughter-in-law. Is it because a young woman was seen as an appendage, a liability, difficult to protect during escape that she is sacrificed.

A disgraced woman became a metaphor of shame, someone who was often ignored or discarded and left to her fate but never consoled for her trauma or accepted by the family. This left little choice for the woman; especially during partition, most of them accepted death at the hands of their family members. In 1949, Indian Parliament passed a law called the abducted persons (recovery and restoration) bill which gave the government unlimited power to remove abducted women in India from their new homes and transport them to Pakistan. Ironically, what was realised that quite a number of them were not at all eager to return. The biggest reason is of course the sense of anxiety and shame about being marked as "fallen women"-- they weren't at all convinced that they would be accepted by their families."

Metaphorical representation of women as the *izzat* of men, family or *quom* goes back to the time when patriarchal structure came into existence. Since then women were seen as the bearer of blood or the carrier of the future generations. She was considered equivalent to an object, a valued possession who was chased or robbed during partition. Like objects robbed or looted by thieves and dacoits, partition literature describes women abducted by men of both the communities. In this regard Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin in their book state that "So powerful and general was the belief that safeguarding a woman's honour is essential to upholding male and community honour that a whole new order of violence came into play, by men against their own kinswomen; and by women against their own daughters or sisters and their own selves" (1998, 44).

In 1947 when hatred on the basis of religion was the pre-dominant attitude, women became the medium of revenge. In order to avenge the injustice or forced migration that people of both the communities had to face, the men embittered by the loss targeted the women of the other side. As Baldwin describes, sometimes in order to humiliate the other community, Muslim men abducted Hindu women and made them dance naked in mosques or as a man remarked, "they raped my daughter before my eyes" (497). Even Deepti Misri, in her paper entitled, "The Violence Of Memory: Renarrating Partition Violence in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What The Body Remembers* states, "It is now a commonplace that in 1947, as Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh mobs fought one another in the violence of India's Partition, women became, in the way that is typical of war, the primary symbolic and literal targets of communal violence" (2).

Besides, during this tragic situation, women became the metaphor for mutilated and plundered motherland. These two novels describe

instances of women whose wombs or breasts were mutilated, representing the plundering of the motherland, the destruction of the mother and her reproductive capability. In a way it hints at the destruction of the future generations of the country. Besides the violated, tortured and mutilated body of women also became a metaphor for the lesson taught by the men of the other community. Purposefully cutting the womb or breast conveyed the message of hatred and warning for the entire *quom*. As Roop perceives, "Men itch their anger upon woman-skin, swallow their pride dissolved in woman's blood" (492).

Anita Rau Badami's description of violence during the partition revolves around the story of Nimmo and her mother. Nimmo's recollection of her childhood was disjointed images of the tragic memories of her mother's death. Living in a village which became the battle ground during the partition, Nimmo faintly remembers her father and brothers going out of the house and never returning. But it is her mother's hanging body that creates in her a fear so great that anxiety becomes her second nature.

As described by Badami, Kanwarjit, Nimmo's mother, becomes the metaphor of loss and hopelessness that overcame many women during partition. Having lost her husband and son in the communal riots, Kanwarjit is overcome with hopelessness and shame when her house is plundered and she is raped by an angry mob. In her effort to save her child when the mob comes marching she hides Nimmo in a grain box. The mob of angry men ransack the house to kill the men but when no one is found they leave after raping Nimmo's mother. Her humiliation in her own house engulfs her with shame and hopelessness and she hangs herself leaving the little Nimmo alone and clueless. Hence her mother symbolised the hopelessness that overpowered reason and hope in the victims of violence and hatred.

Yet, analysing these incidents from a second perspective reveals that these women did not just symbolise loss and trauma but they also present women as saviours or protectors. Kanwar faces the angry mob but saves her daughter by hiding her in the grain box. Kusum agrees to get her neck slashed by her father-in-law's sword so that he can easily escape with her sons. When Roop and her children are confronted by a group of roguish Muslim soldiers, she orders her servant to take her children and hide in the sugarcane fields. Further she also comes to rescue her maidservant, Jorimon, who was being physically abused and molested by the lecherous men. With unmitigated courage unknown to her own self, she shouts and asks them for their names

and threatens them of dire consequence till she successfully scares them away. Even Revati bua, who was old and dependant, stands as a protector, a saviour of her family when their house in Lahore is attacked by Muslims. She stands guard to protect her family by stopping the mob and agrees to convert to Islam in order to buy time for her family's escape.

The silence of thousands of women who lost their homes, valuables, family, honour and identity metaphorically speaks of the trauma embedded in the subconscious mind of all those who experienced the partition. The genocide left many scars as in Nimmo the image of her mother's feet hanging in the middle of the room becomes a haunting image throughout her life. Even the love and care of her husband and children could not erase "the chalky taste of fear that had clogged her throat." Eventually this childhood trauma becomes the cause of her biggest sorrow. After years of being haunted by her fear of impending disaster, Nimmo tries to protect her daughter and acts like her mother when she saved her from the mob. Overcome by fear that had haunted her all her life she goes a step further and ushers the death of her daughter by locking her in a cupboard. Nimmo's action can be understood in the light of Furruk Khan's statement on the trauma of partition:

Individual trauma, on the other hand, is most often suffered in silence, and whenever language is used to convey it to others' or even to self time after time, the pain somehow remains submerged, somehow imbedded within the injured self, and language fails to extricate the experience from the depths of the unconscious where it continues to reverberate, poisoning the daily existence of the survivor and thus paving the onset of victimization to the knowledge and burden of indescribable trauma (2).

Thus these two writers in their respective works have described the trauma of partition from the women's perspective. In keeping partition as an incident in their story, they have shown how women during the partition represented many things but seldom a living being with feelings and emotions. It is often seen that women become the biggest sufferer in any war or conflict. Similarly during the partition of the Indian subcontinent also, loss that women endured was emotional, physical, psychological, social and financial. She became the metaphor of loss and mutilated motherland, of uprooted community with its identity lost.

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JOHN DONNE AS A RELIGIOUS POET

Sushil Kumar Mishra

John Donne (1572-1631) was the main practitioner of Metaphysical poetry. He made his name as a love poet, his imagery often being passionate and sensuous, but later turned his talents to religious poems, hymns and sermons. In his religious verse he used the same techniques he had developed in his love poetry. His two religious poems, "Holy Sonnet (Batter my Heart)" and "A Hymn to God the Father" express his religious feelings and inner conflict. The essential similarity between these poems is that they are both religious; in both poems the poet directly addresses God and in both the address is colloquial in style. The main difference is in the type of feeling expressed by the poet. "Batter my Heart" is an impassioned, desperate plea for God to make his presence felt. "A Hymn to God the Father" is a calm, serene, hymn requesting and expecting forgiveness. Both poems imply that Man is a humble inadequate sinner whose duty is to serve an omnipotent God.

"A Hymn to God the Father" is a much more peaceful poem. It has a free-flowing regular rhythm which reflects the easy acceptance of God's will implied by the poem, and which, as a hymn, would make it easy for the congregation to sing. The rhythm is rigidly repeated throughout the three verses. Words and phrases are also repeated, emphasising the singleness of purpose behind the words. For example the phrase "wilt thou forgive" occurs four times in the first two verses. The argument contains a characteristic of Donne's conceit in: "When thou hast done, thou hast not done." This line also contains a pun on "done"/ "Donne," both the conceit and the pun conveying humility. Another pun occurs in verse three with "sun"/"son." These devices add a characteristic touch of wit to the work.

Despite the personal reference in the pun on "Donne," and despite also being written as a first-person address, this poem is not as personal as "Batter my Heart." Where "Batter my Heart" expresses a complex agonising personal struggle, "A Hymn to God the Father" expresses a simpler universal notion which all Christians can share. This is a quality essential for a hymn. The congregation can easily share the sentiments of "A Hymn to God the Father," but "Batter my Heart" is appropriate to Donne alone. "Batter my Heart" follows the typical Metaphysical form of a logical argument. In this case, however, the argument does not really progress but serves to reinforce and explain

the demand made in the opening line. There is Metaphysical logic in “A Hymn to God the Father” in the repeated line.

The intensity of Donne’s feeling and the inner conflict is reflected in his religious poetry. His religious sonnets and songs are intensely personal and sincere. Donne was a Catholic by birth. He felt humbled and persecuted like other Catholics of his age. Religion, for most of the people, was a matter of accident. Those who liked antiquity and tradition turned to Rome, those who disliked formality and ritual turned to Geneva. But religion should be, according to Donne, a matter of deliberate choice, made after careful study and consideration. It is difficult to fix the precise date of his conversion. It is, however, convenient to assume that by 1598, when Donne entered Sir Thomas Egerton’s service, he must have embraced the Church of England. Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, could never have employed a distinguished Catholic for important public duty.

Donne’s conversion to Anglicanism greatly influenced his poetry. Probably, the Renaissance spirit, leaning towards nationalism, was partly responsible for Donne’s change of faith. But the conversion caused Donne some pangs and heart-searching. Donne felt the laceration of the mind and the conflict between the old and the new faith: “Show me dear Christ thy spouse so bright and clear.” There was also the other conflict in Donne – the conflict between ambition and asceticism, between the prospects of civil service and the claims of a religious life. But after a number of years, Donne continued to retain a soft corner for Catholics.

Donne was essentially a religious man, though he moved from one denomination to another. His spirit of rational faith continued throughout his life. The following are the main aspects of Donne’s religious poetry:

As a man of the Renaissance he could not but question the assumptions and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. Being born in a particular religion is one proposition and being convinced of the tightness of one’s faith, is quite another. As he was sceptical of the religious dogmas of the Catholic Church, he adopted the Anglican faith, but even so his mind was not at peace. He could not reconcile the inner conflicts and as such he prayed for God’s mercy and grace so that he might be able to build his faith on a sound foundation. In “A Hymn to God the Father” he ultimately arrives at a firm faith. It is perhaps the culmination of his spiritual quest.

The metaphysical element, which is so evident in his love poems, finds expression of an inner heart searching. He digs deep within himself in order to measure his sincerity and devotion to God and above all his consciousness of sin and the need of penitence. His fear of death – Donne must have seen many of his friends on their death-beds and their last struggles – makes him repent for his past follies and hence his prayer to God for His mercy and compassion. *The Holy Sonnets* particularly maybe regarded as poems of repentance and supplications for divine grace. Donne's intention is not to preach morality or to turn men to virtue.

Donne found the contemporary world dry and corrupt. He felt that its degeneration would lead to untold human misery. The main theme of his religious poems is the transitoriness of this world, the fleeting nature of physical joys and earthly happiness, the sufferings of the soul imprisoned in the body and the pettiness and insignificance of man. Above all, the shadow of death is all pervasive and this makes him turn to Christ as the Saviour. Even so, his metaphysical craftsmanship treats God as 'ravisher' who saves him from the clutches of the Devil. Though Donne regarded the world as a vanity of vanities, he could not completely detach himself from the joys of the world and there is a turn from other-worldliness to worldliness. However, we cannot doubt the sincerity of his religious feelings and his earnest prayer to God for deliverance. His moral earnestness is reflected in his consciousness of sin and unworthiness for deserving the grace of Christ. He uses the images of Christ as a lover who will woo his soul.

There is a great similarity of thought and treatment between the love poems and the *Holy Sonnets*, though the theme is different. The spirit behind the two categories of poems is the same. There is the same subtle spirit which analyses the inner experiences like the experiences of love. The same kind of learned and shocking imagery is found in the love poems: "Is the Pacific sea my home?/ or are The Eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?/ Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar./ All straits (and none but straits) are ways to them./ Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Ham, or Shem."

Similarly in his treatment of divine love, the poet uses sexual images in holy situations. As for example: "Betray kind husband thy spouse to cur sights,/ And let mine amorous soul court thy mild Dove/ Who is most true, and pleasing to thee then/ When she's embraced and open to most men."

There are two notes in Donne's religious poems – the Catholic and the Anglican. "The Progress of the Soul" leans towards Catholicism and it records the doubts and longings of a troubled subtle soul. The following lines show the working of the mind and are full of bold and echoing vowel sounds: "O might those sights and tears return again/ Into my breast and eyes, which I have spent./ That I might in this holy discontent/ Mourn with some fruit, as I have mourned in vain;/ In mine Idolatry what showers of rain/ Mine eyes did waste? What griefs my heart did vent?/ That sufferance was my sin; now I repent./ Cause I did suffer I must suffer pain."

"The Progress of the Soul," though written in 1601, was published after his death in 1633. Ben Jonson called it "the conceit of Donne's transformation." Donne describes his theme in the very first stanza: "I sing the progress of a deathless soul/ Whom Fate, which God made, but doth not control/ Pla'd in most shapes; all lines before the low/ Yok'd us, and when; and since, in this I sing." He describes the soul of heresy which began in paradise (in the apple) and roamed through souls of Luther, Mahomed and Calvin and is now at rest in England: "The great soul which here among us now/ Doth dwell, and moves that hand, and tongue and brow,/ Which as the moon the sea moves us."

Donne moves from the aesthetic to the ethical plane of existence. His curiosity about the microcosm and his scepticism find expression here: "There's nothing simply good, nor all alone,/ Of every quality comparison,/ The only measure is, and judge, opinion." The poem was written soon after the inner crisis and his conversion: "For though through many straits and lands I roam,/ I launch at Paradise and I sail towards home." The psychological problem finds its solution in a spiritual reintegration.

The *Divine Poems* include "La Corona" and six holy sonnets on Annunciation, Nativity, Temple Crucifying, Resurrection and Ascension. Donne seeks divine grace to crown his efforts: "But do not with a vile crown of frail bays,/ Reward my muses white sincerity,/ But what thy thorny crown gain'd, that gives me/ A crown of glory, which doth flower always."

The other, group of sonnets also entitled *Holy Sonnets* contains 19 sacred poems. They belong to the period of doubt and intense inner struggle which preceded Donne's entry into the Church of England. Here is a mood of melancholy and despair: "This is my play's last scene here heavens appoint./ My pilgrimage's last mile. (Sonnet VI)/

Despair behind and death before doth caste/ Such terror and my feeble flesh doth waste.”

In sonnet II, Christ appears as a lover and Donne as a temple usurped by the Devil: “Myself a temple of thy spirit divine/ Why doth the devil then usurp on me...” In Sonnet III, Donne is sincerely repentant for his past sins: “That I might in this holy discontent/ Mourn with some fruit, as I have mournd in vain.../ No ease, for long, yet vehement grief hath been/ The effect and cause, the punishment and sin.”

In Sonnet IV, Donne compares himself to a felon charged with treason, and yet he cannot resist conceits. Christ’s blood, though red, will whiten the souls stained and polluted with sin: “Oh make thyself with holy mourning black/ And red with blushing, as them and with sin;/ Or wash thee in Christ’s blood, which hath this might/ That being red, it dyes red souls to white.”

Sonnet V shows Donne’s Renaissance spirit, his wanderlust: “You which beyond that heaven which was most high/ Have found new spheres, and of new lands, can write,/ Power new seas in ruined eyes, that so I might/ Drown my world with my weeping earnestly.” Donne prays sincerely for pardon for his misdeeds: “Teach me how to repent; for that’s as good/ As if thou hadst seal’d my pardon, with thy blood.” The pilgrim-soul is not afraid of death: “Death be not proud, though some have called thee/ Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.”

In Sonnet XIII, Donne brings forward the argument because beautiful women liked him in his youth, so Christ, the Incarnation of Beauty, should be kind to him: “No, no; but as in my idolatry,/ I said to all my profane mistresses,/ Beauty, of pity, foulness only is/ A sign of rigour: so I say to thee.” In Sonnet XVII, Donne refers to the death of his wife which has now made him turn his attention to spiritual attainment: “Since she whom I lov’d hath paid her last debt/ To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead.”/ In Sonnet XVIII, Donne expresses his desire to see the true church (England, Rome, Geneva) undivided, because it is indivisible. The bride of Christ is the mistress of the whole world: “Who is most true, and pleasing to thee then/ When she is embrac’d and open to most men.”

The “Hymn to God,” written during his serious illness in 1623, is a sincere prayer to God to receive him in His grace: “So, in his purple wrapp’d receive me Lord,/ By these his thorns give me his other Crown,/ And as to others’ souls I preach’d thy word/ Be this my Text my sermon to mine own,/ Therefore that he may arise the lord throws down.”

The *Divine Poems* contain a vivid and moving record of a brilliant mind struggling towards God. Truth is the goal but there are hurdles and temptations in the way. Donne is not afraid of analysing the appalling difficulties of faith. The vacillations, the doubts, of this imperfect but sincere man are reflected in all their passion. Donne's aim is not didactic or moral; he wishes to lay bare his own moods, his aspirations, his sins, his humiliation in the quest of God. He is the most sincere and introspective Anglican poet of the seventeenth century. He had experienced the intensification of religious feeling mentioned in the holy sonnets.

Some critics question the use of the metaphysical method in holy sonnets and religious poems. Herbert Grierson, however, justifies use of the metaphysical method in these serious poems. He writes: "Here, he recaptures the peculiar charm of his early love verse best, the unique blend of passionate feelings and rapid subtle thinking, the strange sense that his verse gives of a certain conflict between the passionate thought and the varied and often elaborate pattern into which he moulds its expression, resulting in a strange blend of harshness and constraint with reverberating and penetrating harmony. No poems give more...the sense of conflict of soul, of faith and hope snatched and held desperately...."

Donne's holy sonnets are deservedly famous and remarkable. They embody his deeply felt emotions in a language reflecting conscious craftsmanship.

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POETRY

A SONNET OF LOUD DESPAIR

E. Ethelbert Miller

Like cellphone users
we now believe everyone can be a poet.
We overlook how the tongue can be raped by words.

At night one can stay awake listening to electronic
devices humming what is mistaken for Whitman
and Hughes. Maybe these are the days of the last
poets; the time of madness forced into the straight
jackets of couplets.

What do our ears know
of blindness or our eyes of speech?
There is a crying in the world from language
being lynched. The smell of death swaying
over us singing a quiet blues of deep misery –
a sonnet of loud despair.

- *E. Ethelbert Miller is Board chair of the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and the Director of the African American Resource Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. He is the author of several collections of poetry. He has taught at UNLV, American University, George Mason University, and Emory and Henry College, U.S.A.*



ADIOS, EL COMMANDANTE FIDEL

Morakabe Raks Seakhoa

Like a gargantuan baobab tree,
Your liberating words are brave deeds
That, when and where they fall:
Irreversible change the whole world befalls.

As history was bound to absolve you, Commandante Fidel,
Posterity's tasks couldn't be more clear,
To bring forth tomorrow's beauty today,
Banishing capital gluttony and people's hunger forever away.

As we doff our hats to you and your gallantry,
 We raise our scarlet standard even more lofty,
 To make our foes flinch and class traitors sneer:
 For we'll keep the Red Flag flying everywhere and here.

- **Comrade Raks Morakabe Seakhoa** heads the *wRite Associates* (in South Africa). He helped raise the visibility of South African literature and its writers through numerous events and activities.



**I WISH I COULD WALK A MILE IN YOUR SHOES:
 A TRIBUTE TO MAYA ANGELOU**

La Shawna Griffith

I wish I could walk a mile in your shoes
 See all the sights you have seen
 Watch life from the confines of your eyes
 Taste the fuel that fuelled your pen

I wish I could walk a mile in your shoes
 To understand your mind
 How you thought
 Why you believed so strongly in revolution
 Why you were such an inspiration to all that heard your voice
 You see these shoes
 Tell the story of your life
 And they are big shoes to fill
 As they possess so much knowledge
 The remains of a creative soul
 That have edged a permanent mark in history's page as a literary
 legend
 And a poetic superwoman
 My brain cannot possess the amount of knowledge these shoes entail
 I can only imagine how it was for you back then;
 Being a black poet in a time where civil unrest was a "hot" topic
 Where the caged bird was singing freedom so beautifully
 That person's ears became tuned with the cry of unrest
 The words in that poem gave persons a sense of hope and something
 to believe in

I wish I could walk a mile in your shoes
 The shoes that have told
 The wonderful tale of your life
 By tying the laces
 I have accepted the poetic challenge
 To walk the path you have so gracefully created.

- **La Shawna Griffith** is a poet born in and resident of Barbados. Following on the footsteps of her idol and role model, Miss Maya Angelou, her goal is to become a voice for the voiceless, a hope and an inspiration. Her maiden publication titled *Unlock the Door*, a collection of thirty seven poems, has received acclaim from various international quarters.



TWO POEMS

R.K. Bhushan

EYERIES

Main highway
 In the city of the dead
 Has a crowded and chaotic
 Market on either side –
 Populated by government buildings,
 Financial institutions,
 Shops, big and small,
 Running private business
 And professions;
 And push-carts,
 Parked in order
 In this disorder,
 Selling all to feed
 Without a trade-cry –
 All traffic snarls and speeds
 With the grace of a haphazard
 Fatigued , neither girl nor woman!

It is an all-season
 Dumb-show of multitudes,
 Unstoppable –

Restive, restless, disquiet
And even touchy –
Strangers and known-strangers,
Failure, failure-in-success,
Success to come,
Dreams of success
Dazzled and befuddled –
Writ large and deep on their faces.

Formal hellos and handshakes
Or even mechanical enquiries
Or curiosities –
An attempt
At breaking ennui
And far-off confusions,
Do not warm up or cool down
The smouldering sensations
Of these urban, semi-urban
Or rural heroes and heroines,
Lighted up like eyrie-dwellers.

They seem to have
Gone off the deep end!
Perhaps to the better end!

RELIGIOUS THEME

Everywhere –
In all working
And governance,
In professions and academics –
Political schemes,
Economic reforms,
Social regeneration,
Educational rejuvenation,
Religious resurrection,
Global awakening,
Philanthropic projects,
Universal welfare –
All declarations and assertions
Are sacral for development;
Monsters guised as deities
Are religious

In teams and themes
 Rooted in labyrinths
 Of innovative tactics
 For strategic management
 Of sales and marketing
 In deafening jingoism
 And jargonism.

Success of this holistic
 Attitude and approach
 Is dazzling, baffling and distracting –
 Sacred to activism!
 All good; without humanity!

- **Raghukul Bhushan** retired as Head, Department of English, Lajpat Rai D.A.V. College, Jagraon (Ludhiana). He is the author of several poetry collections.



THREE POEMS

Soun Kanwar Shekhawat

THE BLANK SPACE

A light of brightness came into my life,
 Enriching my life in a state of ecstasy.
 First, I wondered it to be a dream,
 But, to my revelation, was all heartfelt.
 The light embraced me and clutched with itself.
 Being my reason to smile,
 Being my reason to live.
 However, to my astonishment, one day it disappeared,
 Leaving me all alone.

I searched thee on Mountains,
 I searched thee in sterile spaces.
 Thou was not there, thou was nowhere.
 Thou left me mousy and moronic.
 I was a lifeless tool now.

Oh, Earth! Just lacerate and take me in,
 Oh, Sky! Just disperse and bombard your thunder on me.

Thou left an unreadable vacuity in my life.
Someone might bring smile on my Face,
However, no one can bring the brightening smile of my Eyes.
Someone might make me speak,
However, no one can feel the silence in my words.
My words are too silent to express,
My silence speaks and cries aloud.

DEAR PEN

O Dear Pen! Catch your speed again.
Let me numberize my thoughts
And color the sheet.
Else you ping my mind, leave useless worries.
O Abundant Brain! Let's pen down you.
But where to bring verse from?
From Literature or from Science?
From novels or from journals?
Just Pen down my friend, all my thoughts.
Catch your speed or run faster.
Pen down my friend,
Just pen down.

WHAT'S TOUGHEST IN LIFE

I transpired out of the Womb,
My sweet cry led my Mum smile.
My smile vanished all her pains.
My first question to self:
What's toughest in Life?
While walking, holding my Dad's finger,
I fall down with blood on my knees.
Deliberating the whole day:
What's toughest in Life?
I grew up with many exams of life,
Some with ecstatic achievements,
In addition, some with painful foggy eyes.
I re-enquired the question:
What's toughest in Life?

While my brain was inquesting,
A sudden cyclone of evil appeared,

And I was a distant far from my loved ones.
 The painful loneliness was murderous.
 I went out to experience the world.
 Where staring eyes, harsh attitudes,
 Multi-faceted personalities and miserable faces were all around.
 Life, O Life! You're the toughest.

- *Soun Kanwar Shekhawat, an M.A. in English Literature, is employed at Yes Bank, Jaipur.*



TWO POEMS

Anupama Kaushal

OPEN SPACES

Zenith is all tranquil
 Merging the ultimate quail
 Manna a forever shawl
 Nadir a chaotic pail
 Grabbing and snatching trail
 Making essence pale
 Proximity brews distances
 Builds myriad narrow cells
 Wrapping behind a mask
 Pretending a social bask
 Human touch inhuman
 In the crowd of Adams
 A fall of the leaf
 Reminds a stay brief
 Society makes a leech
 Nature a true preach.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Talk of the Touts
 A chance for the Pouts
 Flashes all agreeen
 To catch the brightest dream.

Touch of every nerve
 With glib tongue serve

Building yet another mound
A stage for the clout.

Deeming the severed scarf
Of Draupadi's or Sita's past
Empty desolate sights
Clapping to the heights

Waiting for the *dias* to bright
Spent in silken tights.
All is preached and done
Hands yet penniless.

Power on the desk
Woman in the dregs.

- **Dr. Anupama Kaushal** is Lecturer in English at Government College, Tonk (Rajasthan).



A SMILING SPHERE

Runjhun Kapoor

Peeping through the clouds
A big star pouts
Smiling from the sky
The mirror of my eye
The first ray falls
As silver ball crawls.

The dark night slowly envelops half the earth
With haunting killer owls in search of their prey,
A black hand moving towards the earth...
The moonlight pausing the black and spreading bright rays.
The shining sparkling silver light covering the dark
Makes night a better place to live.
However bad intensions rise.
God is there to set things right.

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REVIEW ESSAYS

‘I COME FROM A LAND STUNG BY A LINE’: POEMS BY GURCHARAN RAMPURI

Shyamala A. Narayan

While diasporic Indian English writers, especially novelists, have received a lot of critical attention, there are hardly any studies of Indians settled abroad who write in the *Bhashas*. This is probably because there are very few English translations of their work. *The Diaspora Writes Home: Subcontinental Narratives* (2015) by Jasbir Jain is perhaps the only book which presents an analysis of work in Punjabi by diasporic writers like Harpreet Singh Sekha and Harbhajan Hans. *The Circle of Illusion* is a selection of poems by Gurcharan Rampuri who lives in Vancouver and has been writing in Punjabi for over six decades. Many of his poems have been set to music and sung by well-known singers. Amritjit Singh has selected 48 poems from the ten volumes of poetry that Rampuri has published. Most of the poems have been translated by Amritjit Singh and Judy Ray. However, there is one poem written originally in English. Six of the poems: “Phoenix”, “Song of the Stream”, “Spring”, “Massacre”, “The Moment of Creation” and “Faith” have been translated with help from Wendy Barker, and two poems by Amritjit Singh and Georgia Scott.

Gurcharan Rampuri was born at Rampur (Punjab) in 1929. He obtained his B.A. degree from Panjab University, Chandigarh. He founded a Writers Association at Rampur in 1953. He immigrated to Canada in 1964 and continued to be active in several writers’ organizations in Canada, such as the Panjabi Writers Forum, Vancouver and The Writers’ Union of Canada (Toronto). The poet’s own note “A word from the poet” reveals how deeply he was affected by the Partition of 1947 which devastated the Punjab: “I saw human beings’ brutality to those of other faiths, but many fought against the insanity and sheltered their neighbours from mindless violence.”

The diversity and complexity of Rampuri’s themes is impressive. There are love poems, poems on politics and art, the immigrant experience and nature poems. The first poem in the volume, “Rampur” is a paean to his native village, the genesis and muse of his poetry. While celebrating it through images of “fragrant aromas,” “fields of wheat” and “silvered waters curving the banks of the canals,” he imbues it with universality: “My village is unique,/ yet just like any other village in

the world.” He does not turn a blind eye to “its many illogical beliefs.” “Entreaty for Canada,” one of the most powerful poems in the collection, is the only one written originally in English by Rampuri. It expresses the pain of Partition and pleads with Canada, “Don’t draw a line on the sand.” There is an autobiographical touch, for the Punjab was the part of India most affected by the Partition:

*I come from a land stung by a line
drawn by others a long time ago.*

*.
A line is venom incarnate
and seals the fate of folks
who realize too late
A line in the sand becomes a sky-high wall of hate.*

*.
It doesn’t allow a quick death,
It kills you every moment till eternity (32).*

The poem “Strangers” reflects on the fate of the indigenous people of Canada, who once lived “a life of song and dance,” now dispossessed by the white settlers: “Even the name of their land/ was taken away from these heirs of the earth.// Today they are strangers in their own homes./ But this drunk/ gives an occasional knowing glance/ and once in a while/ he still leaps to the dance” (31). Another poem, “The Whip” touches on the fate of the coloured immigrant: “I lived for years/ under foreign skies/ as if I was in my homeland/. . . ./ Suddenly, there came a moment/ when a simple-minded man/ lashed me with the whip of a racial slur./ I had been oblivious to reality./ Now I am part of the world that struggles against hate” (42). There is a note of acceptance – he realizes that he is not the only person facing racist discrimination. The dominant note is one of thoughtful reflection, expressing deep philosophy in simple words. In “Blind Alley,” the poet adopts the persona of a man enjoying a night out with his friends. The initial stanzas are in the first person: “After a few drinks/ I consider my score card –/ What have I accomplished in my life? (38). The fourth stanza presents the plight of the N.R.I.: “Money seduced me/ I crossed the seas in search of riches./ But is gold everything? (38). However, the poem is not simply about the poet’s personal experience, it is a universal experience: “The fire of love for family, beauty and light burns on in me/ while Mammon’s jealous eye tolerates no other smouldering./ Can the flames be kept hidden?/ I am trapped in a blind alley” (38).

And he concludes: “After a few drinks/ we try to tally our scores –/ what have we accomplished in our lives?// But then,/ after a few drinks/ how can we possibly answer this challenge? (39). The unusual imagery in “Song of the Stream” makes this nature poem memorable:

*Sun-sparked falls crash onto rocks
noisy as a feisty wife complaining ...
Come sit with me by the rainbow's
spray of life.
Why run back to the smog and crowds of the city? (23)*

The volume contains many love poems, including two ghazals which did not appear in the first edition (published by Weaver's Press, San Francisco in 2011). The poem “The Primal Act Leads to Beauty” celebrates sexual union, rejecting any implications of sin: “I need no intercession to justify/ my union with the beloved one./ I have stolen no one's fortune” (25). “Your Letter” is a love poem which is more effective than the three ghazals in the collection. It captures the yearning of the lover through fresh imagery related to Indian life:

*Still no letter from you.
The sun is sad,
and the dim dawn
has not adorned
her forehead with vermilion.*

The range and depth of Rampuri's poetry is apparent even in this slim volume. Some poems like the title poem and “My Wool” require allegorical interpretations. “Moments” is in the form of 19 couplets, many of them exposing the hypocrisy of the ruling class:

*Those who licked the shoes of colonizers
are now ministers wearing home-spun khadi
Complaining of her poor dowry, he killed his daughter-in-law,
But he prays to God for his daughter's welfare.
He killed the daughter after intercepting her lover's letter
But he seeks a new bed every day (70-71).*

The “Preface” by Amritjit Singh provides a perceptive introduction to Gurcharan Rampuri's poetic practice. He also discusses his own methodology as a translator, “we have worked assiduously to stay close to the original text even as we have aimed at making a poem in modern English.” He deserves the gratitude of all lovers of poetry for making these poems accessible in English. Diasporic Indians who write in English are in the limelight while we hardly know about those

who write in the regional languages. This volume is a fine effort to address this problem.

REFERENCE

The Circle of Illusion: Poems by Gurcharan Rampuri. Translated from the Punjabi by Amritjit Singh and Judy Ray. Second Edition. Delhi: National Book Shop, 2015. 87 pages. Rs. 295.

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ESSAYS OF SAADAT HASAN MANTO: AGONY OF ‘AN INDIAN TRAPPED IN PAKISTAN’

R.P. Singh

On the second day of the sixth Karachi Literature Festival in February 2015 the first English translation of Saadat Hasan Manto’s essays was released. Through this the English-reading public came to know that Manto, whose popularity and greatness was hitherto based on his short stories, has left behind a stimulating and illuminating bunch of starkly honest ponderings over various aspects of his time and life in the form of essays which were originally written in Urdu and published in different newspapers of the time. The translator-editor, Aakar Patel, informs us in his introduction to the volume that “except for two... none (of the twenty five) have been translated before.” It is common knowledge that his fictional oeuvre has been translated in all the major languages of the world including English and the Anglophone reading community of the Indian subcontinent love to call him the Maupassant of the sub-continental literature considering the magic of his “naturalistic” stark portrayal of situations and characters.

Naturally, this book is sure to initiate the process of a wider discourse about the work of Manto as his thoughts recorded in essays uncannily apply to the situation prevailing in the present troubled time in our subcontinent. In the immediate wake of its launch during the Karachi Literature Festival a panel comprising Nauman Naqvi, professor of literary studies at Habib University, Pakistan, Kamran Asdar Ali of the University of Texas, U.S.A. and the translator-editor himself, discussed the merits of these essays “as lens to understand Pakistan’s national identity” (*The Express Tribune*, Karachi, 08-02-2015). Putting his views on the issue, Aakar Patel emphasized the point that Manto’s

essays, in their simplicity and readability of a very high order, “predicted the trajectory of Pakistan and India’s future” (ibid.) They are the testimony to his clear-cut rejection of the “irrationality” of religion being the basis of nationhood. And herein lie the timeless relevance of these essays as they enrich us with an objective and dispassionate understanding of the interplay between religion and violence and the need to build secular bonds among the communities making and inhabiting the nations. After reading both his short stories and essays, one can now confidently venture the opinion that unlike the former the latter offer well-argued ratiocinative solutions to the communal problems plaguing the subcontinent.

Aakar Patel prefaces his collection of twenty five translated essays with an introduction titled “Why Read Saadat Hasan Manto?” Instantly in the mind of Manto’s fiction readers this question eagerly rings with the fact that Manto, being the timeless product of his time, compels repeated returns and revisits to his work. So, at the level of the titular question, the translator-editor’s introduction is redundant. But he has some important remarks to the relevance of Manto as a people’s writer for whom the vocation of writing was, as for Dostoevsky, the sole vocation of life. He rightly disagrees with the recent critical opinion in Pakistani literary circles that Manto was a Pakistani writer because he wrote in the Nastaliq script of Urdu which is now considered a foreign script in India. We get to learn that this was the standard script then used by Punjabis and even in the Hindi cinema of the 1940s. Those who have read his work in original are enamoured of the simplicity and plainness of his *Hindustani*. Patel emphatically repeats the widely held critical consensus about him being “a great Indian writer who wrote in an Indian language to an Indian audience about his Indian experiences” (x). Thus, naturally, he should be read in any language the readers can access him to know, analyse and be enlightened by those experiences.

The present collection aptly gets its title from its first essay, “Why I Write” which was originally published as “Main Afsana Kyonkar Likhata Hoon.” Here we get an idea about how “natural” a writer Manto was! Writing came naturally to him. He quite unselfconsciously divides his answer into *how* and *why*, and taking up the *how* aspect first he says that he takes a sheaf of paper, sits on a sofa in his living room, unscrews the cap of his pen, and begins to write. His little daughters play and quarrel in the same room. He settles their quarrels, and if someone comes to meet or talk to him, he plays a good host to them; but the writing goes on amidst all this. He writes, “But through all of this, I continue to write” (2). Coming to the more important *why* aspect

of the question he says that writing for him is a matter of addiction. One can't help quoting him here at some length: "The most important reason is that I'm addicted to writing, just as I am to drinking. When I don't write, it feels like I'm unclothed, like I haven't had a bath. Like I haven't had my first drink" (2). This "confession" reminds the readers of the sad and unfortunate addiction Manto had to alcohol. One very poignantly discussed legend about him (referred to by Aakar Patel in his introduction) is that often he wrote short stories standing in newspaper or magazine offices, took his money in cash from the editors/managers and went in a tonga "to get his fix of alcohol." His untimely death at the age of forty two is believed to be the tragic consequence of that addiction. Patel writes that he's thought to have drunk himself to death" (ix). The translator links Manto's fatal addiction to his reluctant migration from Bombay (now Mumbai) to Lahore to save his family from the viciousness and "barbarism of those days." His life and work in Bombay was the happiest experience he got in his short life. For a man like him, who was gifted with sharp clear-eyed acumen and sensitivity, this *change of place* meant, at the psychic level, a kind of transformation as a writer. The cheer and playfulness, coming from the liberal mixing of many cultures of the Bombay of that time, was no more. The darkest pieces of short fiction which he wrote in the new country bear witness to his transformation. For Aakar Patel, and all the admirers of Manto, it remains a mystery why he didn't return to *his* Bombay. Perhaps out of this very mystery has come out the first sentence of this collection of timeless essays – "Saadat Hasan Manto was an Indian trapped in Pakistan" (vii).

What is important now and for the time to come is that his addiction to writing gave us two indispensable gifts – the best critique of the Partition and the sectarian lunacy which worked behind and around it, and a honestly caring analysis of the life of the marginalized sections of humanity. His craftsmanship as a writer of short stories bonding excellently with his power of penetrating analysis of the characters' minds have rightly led many (including Patel) to call him "one of the greatest raconteurs of the 20th century." Salman Rushdie, in his *Vintage Book of Indian Writing: 1947-1997* (co-edited by Elizabeth West and published in the Golden Jubilee year of Indian independence), (in)famously dismissed the Indian vernacular prose writing of the period, both fiction and non-fiction, but with the exception of Manto.

At the level of wit and insightfulness regarding the respective subject-matter the essays are of different calibre. Some are very penetrating

(like “Why I Write” and “Hindi or Urdu”), but some are indifferent (like “The Guilty Men of Bombay”), but what strikes us while reading almost all of them (excepting those like “The Story of My Wedding” or “A Review of Saigal’s Zindagi”) today is their prophetic quality. “A Stroll through the New Pakistan,” “Iqbal Day” and “God is Gracious in Pakistan” alert us to the catastrophies which befall the future of a nation created in the name of religion. “Save India from its Leaders” tells the tale of the unconcern of the people’s representatives toward the plight of the common people. “Hindi or Urdu?” wittily attacks the meaninglessness of the communalism-driven linguistic debate around an indivisible lingua franca. “The Guilty Men of Bombay,” “Bombay in the Riots” and “Bombay during Partition” are clinically unsentimental comments on the communal frenzy he witnessed there. The two essays on his court trial for obscenity (he had to face five trials – four for his as many short stories and one for his essay, “Oopar, Neechay aur Darmian” (Above, Below and In-between) testify cogently against the insensitivity of an intolerant state toward art and literature. Manto’s innocent “inability’ to understand, “I’m a writer. Why on earth would the police need to search my property? What did they expect to find” (117) reflects the state of mind of the writers and artists of all time who come up against intolerance in the course of their exercise of freedom of creative and intellectual expression in the interest of truth and the common masses.

The translator has taken care to match the simplicity of his English with that of the original’s Urdu. This, while enhancing the readability of the essays, gives the readers a pleasing feel of the legendary directness of Manto’s style of writing.

REFERENCE

Why I Write: Essays by Saadat Hasan Manto. Translated and edited by Aakar Patel. New Delhi: Tranquebar Press (an imprint of Westland Ltd.), 2014. 184 pages. Rs. 350.

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