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RE-MARKINGS

A Biannual Refereed International
Journal of English Letters

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20th
ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATORY
NUMBER

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cultural inclusion.
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- *Charles Johnson*

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Re-Markings, a biannual refereed international journal of English Letters, aims at providing a healthy forum for scholarly and authoritative views on broad sociopolitical and cultural issues of human import as evidenced in literature, art, television, cinema and journalism with special emphasis on New Literatures in English including translations and creative excursions.

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Chief Editor
Nibir K. Ghosh
Flat 101 Tower 5, Shanker Greens,
Taj Nagri - Phase 2,
AGRA-282001, U.P. (INDIA)
Cell: +91 9897062958 (10:00 A.M. to 06:00 P.M.)
e-mail : ghoshnk@hotmail.com

Editors
A. Karunaker
Cell: +91-9849302145
email: akredrem@gmail.com

Sunita Rani Ghosh
Cell: +91-9837793355
email: drsunitarani@gmail.com

Cover Design : sundeep.arora@gmail.com

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EDITORIAL

On this historic occasion of *Re-Markings'* 20th birth anniversary, I deem it an honour and privilege to greet and address the vibrant community of writers, scholars, academics and readers who remained steadfastly associated with the journal since we began our journey in March 2002. As my mind travels back in time, I remember how my friends and well-wishers had cautioned me then against venturing into the less known terrain of journal publication. Inspired by my resolve to create an enduring platform for dissemination and exchange of ideas on issues and concerns of human import worldwide, I refused to be perturbed by the anxiety and fear of the unknown. Consequently, *Re-Markings* was launched. However, not unmindful of the hurdles and challenges I was likely to encounter on my journey, I had consciously declared at the end of my editorial in the inaugural issue: "The *Gita* says. 'Every surface derives its soil from the depths even as every shadow reflects the nature of the substance.' I am optimistic that *Re-Markings* will find effective sustenance in what it has to offer."

Today, 20 years and 44 issues later, it is an immensely satisfying feeling to comprehend how, through 1500+ interviews, essays, articles, research papers, reviews, stories, plays and poems, *Re-Markings* has succeeded in creating an enviable climate of opinion in contemporary critical and creative discourse. The encomiums received from celebrity writers from India and other parts of the globe bear ample testimony to the love and endearment that have been so generously showered by those who have enjoyed a deep sense of belonging in their relationship to *Re-Markings*. At the same time, their profuse love and appreciation is also a call for an enhanced degree of responsibility in continuing to sustain and take forward the hallmark of excellence that the journal has acquired in two decades of its publication. With the precision and regularity reminiscent of the two equinoxes, every effort has always been made to ensure that the readers receive their copy of *Re-Markings* on or before the first of March and September each year.

In these times of crisis, upheavals and cataclysmic changes we must accept the fact that the personal and the political are inextricably intertwined and that no policy of isolation is possible. As responsible citizens of the world, it is incumbent upon us to rise above our own limited interests and objectives and become empathic to the oppression, poverty, discrimination, trauma, violence, bigotry, pain and suffering that we witness all around us. If we have had to contend with the un-precedented havoc wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic that has left in

its wake millions dead and a staggering number of people struggling for survival, we have also been constrained to witness with disbelief and dismay how some diabolically inspired Trump-like figures have become desperate to prove to the world that 'absolute power corrupts absolutely.'

At such critical junctures in mankind's onward march, the glimmer of hope seems to lie in the power and transformative potential of words that we use in articulating our feelings and concerns through the medium of speech and writing. In this context a remark by T. S. Eliot seems quite pertinent: "To do the useful thing, to say the courageous thing, to contemplate the beautiful thing: that is enough for one man's life."

Even a cursory glance at the table of contents of this celebratory edition of *Re-Markings* will reveal the journal's continued commitment to offer our worthy readers stimulating and provocative intellectual delicacies catering to multiple approaches to life and literature. The urge to embrace the spirit of universal brotherhood has been a motivating factor in helping us transcend and overcome boundaries and barriers of nation, culture, caste, class, colour, race, gender, ideology etc. While conversations with personalities from the U.S. and Israel bring to us the happenings in powerful nations, the talk with a Dalit rickshaw-puller-turned-author showcases the fact that even the marginalized can be the torch-bearers of change through their active engagement with the written word. Inspirational historical figures like Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and 'Shaheed' Bhagat Singh teach us, through their visions and deeds, how individuals, fired with a visionary zeal, can activate social as well as political revolution. It is equally significant that insightful erudite critiques and creative renderings from variant cultures and climes have always been and will continue to be the mainstay of our journal.

Before closing this editorial note, I am happy to put on record my grateful thanks to one and all who have contributed in whatever way possible to spread the blooming fragrance of our mission to make the world better. I would also like to announce that our website, so aesthetically handled by our Executive Editor, Sandeep K. Arora, has on display the Editorials, the list of contents for all issues beginning March 2002. The process is already on for providing online access to back numbers of *Re-Markings*.

With warmest good wishes for a safer, healthier and brighter 2021,

Nibir K. Ghosh
Chief Editor

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ENCOMIUMS
RE-MARKINGS@20

The 20-year anniversary of *Re-Markings* is a cause for celebration. For two decades I've read this excellent and ground-breaking publication, which with every issue brings its readers the work of award-winning writers, talented scholars, and critical thinkers from around the world. It is a cornucopia of cultural inclusion, and I feel privileged that my work has appeared on its pages. One might say *Re-Markings* is India's finest literary ambassador to the world.

— Charles Johnson
US National Book Award Winning Writer, UOW, Seattle, USA

I am delighted to learn that *Re-Markings* has reached a new milestone in its distinguished journey as a literary and historical review. I recall with pleasure the excellent interview that Dr. Nibir Ghosh conducted with me on the challenges facing contemporary India. I enjoyed my visit to Agra where I spoke on the political and cultural legacy of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at a wonderful gathering convened by *Re-Markings*. I wish the journal all the very best in its future career and hope it will continue to enrich politically engaged and ethically informed intellectual discourse in our country and beyond.

— Sugata Bose
Eminent Harvard University Historian; Chairperson, Netaji Research Bureau, Kolkata and former Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha)

❖

2020 was a sad year—so much lives perished, got harvested by the grim reaper. Mainstream and social media bristled with news about the Corona Virus. COVID, COVID everywhere—grim headlines assaulted us—breakfast, lunch, dinner. Uncertainty and fear went viral. It is truly a malignant year, perhaps best described as Annus Horribilis.

But all is not gloom and doom. As we get diminished by the somber news and the countless funerals globally, there are anniversaries to celebrate: the discovery of efficacious and hopefully safe vaccines—Pfizer's and Moderna's and Astra Zeneca's, as well as promising new therapies. Beyond that are also the continued bright signs of the joys of life: the musical, the visual and the literary arts. The world has witnessed major trials this year, but it is not about to end. The sun is still rising. Just look out in the morning.

In this spirit of optimism, I am excited about the twentieth anniversary of *Re-Markings*, a literary and cultural publication that brings the world together through creative and critical oeuvres that celebrate the cultivation of humane impulses and the triumph of the human spirit. The world has in the past few years been usurped by authoritarian and nativist leaders across the globe preaching a vile nationalism. They want to erect walls rather than build bridges. They want to imprison rather than unleash the human spirit. They simplify complex problems and pit the innocent against each other. They deny science, including climate science—and withdraw to crude atavism. I am reassured by platforms like *Re-Markings* where dialogue triumphs over tone-deafness, where our common humanity is celebrated over the hereditary differences of tribe, belief or geography. Twenty years might be youth for a human life but a significant, non-trivial milestone for a literary publication.

— Tijan M. Sallah
The Gambia's Renowned Poet and Writer, Maryland, USA

❖

Twenty years is a very long time, especially these days, for a print magazine. *Re-Markings* has enjoyed a rich and rewarding global life of creativity and compassion. I look forward to reading the anniversary issue at my home in California, which is far from India, and really not far at all, when *Re-Markings* arrives.

— Jonah Raskin
Writer, Poet and Journalist, California, USA

❖

We are blessed when good things keep going and growing. Editing a literary publication can be rewarding but also a difficult task. Writing can be fun. Editing is always work. Nibir K. Ghosh should be admired for giving breath and life to *Re-Markings* for twenty years. His journal should be viewed as a resource for future thinkers. Happy Anniversary! Thank you for creating a "palace" for international ideas and scholarship.

— E. Ethelbert Miller
Writer and Literary Activist, Washington, D.C., USA

❖

When, oh when shall I receive my copy of the celebratory issue of *Re-Markings*? It may not be so long a wait. But in these destitute times, nothing seems to engage our nerves like poetry. It was after all a poet

who raised the most pertinent question long ago which sounds so immediate and urgent today. "...and what are poets for in a destitute time?" asks Friedrich Holderin. In the third stanza of the same elegy, Holderin pronounces the law that rules over the poets:

> One thing stands firm: whether it be near noon
>
> Or close to midnight, a measure ever endures,
>
> Common to us all; yet to each his own is allotted too,
>
> Each of us goes toward and reaches the place that he can.

The only journal that caters to the dire need of poetry lovers like me is *Re-Markings*. We are living in the most dangerous times, but as Holderin puts it: "But where there is danger, there grows also what saves." Everything in our life to-day has been Absurd – even tragedy. Poetry is all we have – our only defence against the reign of the Absurd that grips us right now. Still, as Rilke says the unsayable, "man's being is more adventurous than Life itself, … more daring." My heartfelt felicitations and all good wishes to *Re-Markings* on this memorable milestone.

— Ramesh Chandra Shah
Padmashree & Sahitya Akademi awardee Writer and Poet

❖

For twenty years, it has been a miracle and an accomplishment every time *Re-Markings* produced a new issue, and particularly now during a pandemic or our culturally-challenging times. The journal has consistently provided a finely curated platform for eclectic perspectives on intellectual to artistic and political issues. I was privileged to be part of their special edition of *A World Assembly of Poets*, a testament to the journal in always striving for greater inclusivity and a wider representation of contemporary voices. The world is necessarily better for it.

—Cyril Wong
Acclaimed Singaporean Writer and Poet

❖

On the occasion of its 20th birthday, my congratulations go to the editorial team and advisory board of *Re-Markings* for their successful attempt to inform and also bring together international scholars of English Letters and Cultural Studies. The journal's special emphasis on New Literatures in English gives voice to a growing body of diverse

literatures and is of particular interest for European readers like myself. I thank you for your good work and wish you many happy returns! Best wishes, and stay safe!

— Walter W. Hoelbling
Writer, Poet, Critic, University of Graz, Austria

❖

In the inaugural issue of *Re-Markings*, Chief Editor Dr. Nibir K. Ghosh shared his aspirations for the journal: "I humbly hope that the academic fraternity in India and elsewhere will warmly welcome this enterprise and contribute towards its growth with the sunshine of thought and breath of life." Warm welcome ensued and has blossomed into steady commitment twenty years on. As we fans of *Re-Markings* celebrate, we take heart in the diversity of *Re-Markings'* contents, including literary analysis, short stories, poems, essays, interviews, book and film reviews, and editorials. *Re-Markings* brings scholars together across cultures and borders and promotes mutual understanding. Mutual understanding is an aim of the Fulbright Program, the international academic and cultural exchange program sponsored by the United States Department of State and partner governments. J. William Fulbright, who sponsored the legislation creating the program in 1946, wrote in *The Price of Empire*, "[t]he essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy – the ability to see the world as others see it, and to allow for the possibility that others may see something we have failed to see, or may see it more accurately."

A refereed international journal, *Re-Markings* sets a high standard for its authors and provides consistently high quality to its readers. The robust development of the website www.re-markings.com has expanded the journal's reach and value as a source of ideas and platform for its contributors. I commend the editors, advisory board and authors. I look forward with great interest to the journal's continuing evolution in the coming decade.

— Jane Schukoske
Former Executive Director of U.S. Educational Foundation in India, New Delhi & Professor, University of Baltimore School of Law, USA

❖

It is a pleasure to congratulate Founder and Chief Editor Nibir Ghosh and his team at *Re-Markings* as they celebrate their 20th year. Beginning in 2002, their issues reflect an awareness of the best of contemporary

Indian and world literature and the importance of bridging our scattered literary worlds. Through in-depth essays, reviews, interviews, poetry by world-famous authors, *Re-Markings* has become a valuable cartographer of our turbulent century. Its mast-head statement of intent is not an idle boast but has been fulfilled with every issue. It has become "a biannual journal of English Letters aiming to provide a healthy forum for scholarly and authoritative views on broad socio-political and cultural issues of human import as evidenced in literature, art, television, cinema and journalism with special emphasis on New Literatures in English including translations and creative excursions." And most importantly and necessarily, "*Re-Markings* makes an earnest endeavour to encourage newcomers and young scholars by introducing their work to the academic fraternity in the country and all over the globe."

The Special Number Volume 16 No. 4 of November 2017, titled *A World Assembly of Poets: Contemporary Poems*, an anthology guest-edited by Tijan M. Sallah, was a landmark publication that brought together poets of varying reputations from all continents and many islands, with perceptive editorial introductions that gave the variety of today's poetry a context that goes beyond what has become familiar and somewhat worn in academia and literary circles. All the best to *Re-Markings* as it voyages bravely into the oceans of another twenty years of endeavor and measurable achievement.

— John Robert Lee
Saint Lucian Writer and Poet

❖

[Dear Nibir] I am very glad to have an association with *Re-Markings* not only because of your intelligent and warm appreciation of my uncle W. H. Auden, but because of your openness to ideas and interest in different cultures and wish for harmony in the world. Your balanced and critical view of Empire is especially relevant now when immature and, in many cases, ignorant reactions to what indeed have been serious injustices but pulled out of context as if there was no such thing as history and as if prejudice which we all have in one form or another can be reduced to racial discrimination rather than the complex psychological phenomenon that it is and which we all have individually to monitor in ourselves. Felicitations on the 20th Anniversary!

— Anita Auden Money
Academic Counsellor and Writer, London, U.K.

❖

I am delighted to learn that *Re-Markings* is celebrating the 20th anniversary of its publication with the current issue. I have been privileged to appear on its pages through my conversation with Prof. Nibir K. Ghosh and Dr. Sunita Rani Ghosh, a conversation that went a long way to make my life and writings familiar to readers, writers, academics and scholars in different parts of the world. Again, it was a pleasure to be included as a poet in *A World Assembly of Poets*, the signature special volume published by *Re-Markings* in 2017. *Re-Markings* is doing commendable work, under the exemplary leadership of its Chief Editor, Nibir K. Ghosh, in addressing issues and concerns seminal to mainstream as well as marginal literatures. My frequent conversations and occasional meetings with Prof. Ghosh provide much food for thought and reflection. In extending my heartfelt felicitations to *Re-Markings* on this memorable milestone, I am optimistic that it will continue to shed the light of wisdom in creating a world without borders and barriers.

— Sharankumar Limbale
Dalit Literary Icon and Activist

❖

[Dear Professor Ghosh,] I am glad to learn that *Re-Markings*, a literary journal of repute under your eminent editorship, is celebrating twenty years of its continuous publication with a special number to be brought out in March 2021. As an eager reader, and an occasional contributor, of *Re-Markings* it is really consoling to find that a non-commercial literary journal has survived twenty years of rampant marketisation, setting up a secure enclave for creative writing and critical discourses. Besides, *Re-Markings* has served as a bridge between languages across seven seas as its numbers focussed on world poetry and literary theory evidence this. I offer my greetings to you on this occasion and wish a long and fruitful journey ahead for *Re-Markings*.

— Arun Kamal
Sahitya Akademi Award recipient Writer and Poet

❖

Congratulations Dr. Ghosh on two decades of *Re-Markings*, your distinctive journal that celebrates the life of the mind as it provides a platform for scholars, artists, and poets from around the globe to share commentary, insights, and revelations, and connect with a devoted international audience. I'm very impressed by the wealth of knowledge and inspiration you present year after year with articles that reveal,

assess, illuminate, and provide hope. Your own powerful words link your contributors and an involved audience with writing that transcends geographical borders. I admire your tireless efforts as well as your generosity, compassion and inspiration, and your gift for offering solace and wisdom even in the dark times. On a personal note, I am grateful for your very welcome encouragement and friendship, and am extremely honored by your careful attention to my work. And I especially appreciate that, with each issue*, Re-Markings* confirms that we are all interconnected, all more alike than different, all stronger together. Many thanks and best wishes for continued success Dr. Ghosh.

— Robin Lindley
Features Editor, *History News Network,* Seattle, USA

❖

20 years of *Re-Markings*! Twenty. That sounds like a lot. But it's over quickly. What did we do 20 years ago? Were we in love? Have we started a new job? As if it were yesterday! In the special number, Vol.16 No.4, November 2017, I am represented with some poems. As if it were yesterday! To get to know Tijan M. Sallah and Nibir Ghosh! What honour! What a fundamental exchange across continents! Europe-Asia-America-Africa. And you started this dialogue, Nibir Ghosh. I wish the anniversary edition the warm words it needs and the strength for another 20 years! Then we'll talk again. I really hope so!

— Tuncay Gary
Poet and Director, Literatur & Theater Werkstatt, Berlin, Germany

❖

Re-Markings is a true world ambassador representing and giving voice to the craft of writing and her crafters: the writers. Its international reach serves a very familial role: introducing writers to one another and keeping the connection strong and sustained. Happy 20, dear *Re-Markings*! May you grow from strength to strength for many years to come!

— Raks Morakabe Seakhoa
South African Writer and Activist

❖

'ART CAN COMFORT AND DISTURB': A CONVERSATION WITH ROBIN LINDLEY

Nibir K. Ghosh

Robin Lindley is a Seattle-based writer, artist, attorney, and the features editor of the History News Network (hnn.us). His articles have appeared in *HNN, Re-Markings, Salon, 3rd Act, Crosscut, Real Change, Documentary, Writer's Chronicle, BillMoyers.com, ABAJournal (web)*, and others. He has worked as a law teacher and attorney for government agencies. He received his law degree, J.D., from the University of Washington School of Law. A focus of his writing is the history of conflict, human rights, medicine, and the arts. He lives in Seattle with his wife Betsy. This conversation is in continuation of the interview featured in the September 2020 edition of *Re-Markings*. Beginning with his views on the most controversial election in US history, Robin Lindley shares here many facets of his amazingly diverse experience as a historian, a journalist, a cartoonist, a human rights lawyer, an artist and a human being deeply rooted to the ideals handed to him as a legacy by his loving parents.

Ghosh: Like a self-proclaimed dictator, Donald Trump refused to accept the election verdict as the 'consent of the governed'. Consequently, how do you look at the January 6 outrageous incident at the US Capitol?

Lindley: January 6, 2021 will be remembered as a day of infamy in the history of the United States of America. For the first time in our history, a president incited a horrific, deadly attack on the Capitol, the temple of our democracy. The president riled supporters for weeks, proclaiming that the election was "stolen," that he had won by "a landslide." The reality was, however, that President-Elect Biden won an overwhelming victory by seven million popular votes and an Electoral College vote of 306 to 232. A Trump official acknowledged that the election was the most secure in our history and careful reviews of votes in all 50 states confirmed the result after finding no evidence of fraud.

In the face of the reality of Trump's loss, right wing media spread his lies. The attack he launched on the Capitol occurred at the very moment Congress was certifying the election of Joe Biden, usually a mere formality required by law. The January 6 riot left at least five people dead, many more injured, and the august halls of Congress vandalized and defaced. Several rioters were bent on killing Vice President Mike Pence, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and other leaders. And now there are reports that some members of Congress abetted and aided the

attackers. As a former employee of Congress for a couple of years, the siege of the Capitol was heartbreaking.

Ghosh: What are your views on Trump's impeachment?

Lindley: The House of Representatives has impeached the president for inciting an insurrection. He will now face a Senate trial on the charges against him. Trump will be remembered as the only president who attempted to end 240 years of democratic government. He will be remembered for four years of lies, hate, corruption, and cruelty, enabled by Republicans who embraced his white nationalist authoritarian agenda. And he will be remembered as the only president ever impeached twice.

Ghosh: Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* had used the metaphor of the torch of the Statue of Liberty "lost in the fog." With the proverbial change of guard at the White House, can we presume the fog to have lifted from US democracy?

Lindley: Our American democracy is uniquely resilient and fragile. Though Trump has tested its limits, it seems democracy has ultimately prevailed. I am very hopeful about the new administration. In his campaign, Joe Biden promised to unify and heal the nation, to serve all Americans regardless of political preference.

May the healing of our nation begin with the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, and may America stand for tolerance, fairness, democracy, and justice for all. May we maintain hope at this perilous time for democracy. As Dr. Martin Luther King assured us, "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice."

Ghosh: In terms of the new administration, what changes do you foresee in government policy toward 1. COVID-19. 2. Terrorism. 3. Black/All Lives Matter. 4. Economy. 5. Immigration?

At this time, Biden's appointees for the new administration reflect competency, deep government experience and political understanding. The appointees are from diverse backgrounds that reflect America with a significant addition of women, African American, and Hispanic citizens. And, for the first time, a Native American, Rep. Deborah Haaland, will head the Department of Interior with jurisdiction over federal lands and Indian Affairs. Finally, Biden and his team recognize the urgent need to address issues of economic inequality; systemic racism; xenophobia; punitive immigration policies; and advancing civil and human rights. I

appreciate the renewed attention to the common good and improving the lives of all citizens.

It's encouraging also that Biden has selected an experienced diplomatic and national security team as the US faces threats such as the massive Russian cyber attack and acts of terrorism. There's sure to be a focus on domestic terrorists, particularly violent white supremacist militants. Another priority is restoring relations with the rest of the world and re-kindling our status as a beacon for human rights for the world.

This promising new administration represents a sharp contrast to Trump's politics of division and self-interest. And the transition will not likely be smooth as the new administration faces health, economic and national security crises as well as the specter of Trump and his millions of fierce followers.

Ghosh: Your interest in history seems very deep-rooted. Did the motivation to be a historian by choice come from your parents? Kindly share details of your parents and the way they impacted your outlook to life?

Lindley: I don't consider myself a historian, but I am strongly interested in history and human stories from the past. I have a BA in history and JD (law degree), but lack the credentials of the academic historians that I often interview. I admire the work of scholars and others who delve into the past, and speaking with them has been rewarding for me and I hope for readers.

And thanks for asking about my parents, Dr. Ghosh. They both had a couple of years of college and loved history. They also shared their own stories, their brushes with history.

My fascination with history was significantly influenced by the harrowing Second World War experiences of my father, Marion William Lindley (1920-1973). He didn't talk much about the war but, over the years, I pieced together some of his story. Both of his parents (both teachers with MAs from Cornell) and his only sibling died by the time he was 20. At the behest of relatives, he joined the Oregon National Guard in early 1941 and worked as a clerk typist with the Army Air Corps.

Because my father was already in the Army when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941, he was sent with one of the earliest units to fight in the South Pacific. He should have never served in combat because of his profound near-sightedness, but he fought in an infantry unit through prolonged, horrific campaigns in the jungles of New Guinea.

Because the US didn't have much experience with combat in the early days of the war, my dad witnessed grave mistakes, such as American

planes bombing and strafing US troops. He was constantly afraid of losing his glasses in the stifling heat and humidity of New Guinea. He saw friends maimed and killed. He survived brutal hand-to-hand combat. He lost his teeth to a Japanese rifle butt and his hair to malaria before a severe head wound ended his combat service.

My dad was haunted by the war for the rest of his life. He was left with chronic headaches, hearing loss, chronic pain, recurrences of malaria, and post-traumatic stress disorder with exaggerated startle reaction, hypervigilance, emotional lability, and other symptoms.

To support our family, my dad worked the graveyard shift for the extra pay at a physically exhausting, monotonous and unsatisfying job. We were usually in debt. Nonetheless, he was often funny, encouraging, and compassionate. Once, when driving through a snowstorm, I recall him stopping the car and giving his coat to a newspaper vender who shivered in shirtsleeves. My dad had a sardonic sense of humor and could be silly, as when he skipped at our local grocery store in his heavy work boots and sang, "Here we go gathering nuts in May. . ." He made local newspapers in 1957 when the Army belatedly awarded him a Bronze Star for gallantry.

My father died at age 53. The arc of his life may serve as an example of how the forces of major historical events can affect an ordinary person.

Ghosh: In what way did the motivation come from your mother?

Robin: My funny and curious mother, Dolle H. Lindley (1915-2009), also piqued my interest in history as well as in art and reading. She was a talented artist, a pianist, an advertising manager, and autodidact with a creative spirit. Like my dad, she had a dark and earthy sense of humor. For a radio comedy show in Spokane in the 1930s, she impersonated her Scandinavian relatives with a broad accent.

My mother also talked about the difficulties of her impoverished immigrant parents on arriving in America. My mother was also acutely aware of injustice and economic inequality. Her family and friends knew deprivation and loss during the Great Depression. She admired FDR and Ike's opponent Adlai "The Egghead" Stevenson. She was always a Democrat and she often repeated her Swedish American father's view that "da goddam Republicans have never done any goddam ting for da workers." My mom always wondered why the richest among us couldn't share their wealth with those who had little or nothing.

My mom helped our family survive dire financial straits. Her humor and hope sustained us through furniture repossession; dunning calls from

bill collectors; an eviction from our home. And she never gave up. To improve our lot, she entered contests until the last years of her life. The big prizes eluded her but hope sprang eternal.

She also encouraged my long-term interest in the history of medicine that was perhaps sparked by my dad's medical issues and the experiences of my younger sister Diann (1953-1998) who was developmentally disabled.

By age nine, I decided to be a doctor. I read a lot of medical history and books about physicians from Galen and Vesalius to Harvey Cushing. I was especially interested in the brain. I was a fan of a popular television show, *Ben Casey*, the tales of a brain surgeon, and that became my career goal. For an oral report in sixth grade on what I wanted to be, I read about brain surgery and interviewed Spokane's two neurosurgeons. In my class presentation, I shared my big chart of a step-by-step craniotomy that I had copied from a book called *Understanding Surgery*. With the aid of this chart, I described the operation to my class: shaving the patient's head, the initial incision, sawing through the skull, revealing the soft, mushy brain, etc. My teacher was surprised by my ambition and concerned about my morbid sensibility. But future patients were fortunate: my shortcomings in mathematics and chemistry classes in high school put to rest my dreams of medical school.

Ghosh: From the four pictures you recently crafted and shared with *Re-Markings,* it is evident that you are endowed with enormous artistic talent. What invoked your interest in this area? What do you focus on while creating your drawings?

Lindley: The four images I shared emerged from nervous, rapid drawing using digital tools on an iPad. I'm certain events of the day affected these drawings. The image of tired health care workers certainly was a response to stories of overworked doctors and nurses who were risking their health to treat COVID-19 patients.

Ghosh: Did you go for any formal training in this field? Any art role models?

Lindley: I've enjoyed drawing and painting since preschool days. My parents were encouraging, and my mom, a gifted artist, helped me with drawing. But I was incapable of pretty pictures. My grade school teachers were concerned about my images of war, damaged people, natural disasters, fires, accidents. When we made November calendars in second grade, the other kids drew pilgrims and turkeys for Thanksgiving Day, but I was the only one who chose to illustrate Veterans Day

and I created a bloody battle scene. My teacher said, “That tells a story, Robin.” I could hear her eyes roll.

I stopped most drawing and painting by high school. However, law school was so boring and frustrating that I returned to the easel and audited life drawing classes. I’ve taken a variety of painting and drawing courses on and off since then. Many kind teachers have encouraged and helped me. I also enjoy reading about art and art history, and I’ve interviewed several artists and art historians. I’ve also made illustrations for publications.

I feel a special kinship with the expressionists of the early 20th century, such as Kathe Kollwitz, Edvard Munch, Otto Dix, Max Beckmann, Paula Modersohn-Becker, and George Grosz. I also admire the work of other artists who address injustice such as Goya, Daumier, Ben Shahn, Jacob Lawrence, Picasso, Ralph Steadman, William Kentridge.

A book I refer to often is *The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic* by Ralph E. Shikes (1969). This study of prints and drawings from the fifteenth century to Picasso chronicles how artists graphically responded to inhumanity and social injustice.

Ghosh: As an avid reader of literature, who are the writers/poets who have impressed you most?

Lindley: I recently re-read the great epics, Homer’s *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These tales of anger, love, hate, violence, and seeking home are timeless. I especially enjoy those who celebrate our human comedy, often with humor and irony. Some favorites: Voltaire, Swift, Defoe, Shakespeare, Twain, Kafka, Ralph Ellison, Garcia Marquez, Miguel Asturias, Luisa Valenzuela, Oe Kenzaburo, R. K. Narayan, Raymond Carver, Rushdie, Chekhov, Bulgakov, Gogol, Ambrose Bierce, Richard Wright, Kurt Vonnegut,Jr., Joseph Heller, Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson, Sinan Antoon, Albert Camus, Agota Kristof, Michael Ondaatje, George Orwell, Flann O’Brien, Emmanuel Dongala, Ivan Klima, Nathanael West, Gunter Grass, Ismael Reed, Isabel Allende, Luis Alberto Urrea, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Carlos Fuentes, E. B. White, W. G. Sebald, and Olga Tokarczuk.

Rather than add a list of poets, I commend to your attention the powerful anthology *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness,* edited by distinguished poet and human rights advocate Carolyn Forche. This collection features poets from 140 countries who respond to conditions of extremity and calamity. I also recommend her moving memoir on her experience in El Salvador as civil war loomed, *What You Have*

Heard is True. In an interview with Professor Forche we discussed her life in a war-torn land where fear was palpable as right-wing death squads patrolled the streets and the countryside.

Ghosh: Any interest in creative writing – story, poem, novel etc.?

Lindley: I have written some stories and poems, and enjoy these forms very much, but no widespread publication. After my feeble efforts at creative writing, I appreciate the effort, talent and brilliance of accomplished writers of all stripes.

Ghosh: Do you believe that art can transform lives?

Lindley: Picasso said that "Art is the lie that reveals the truth." Art can introduce us to the lives of strangers and create empathy and understanding of our interconnected world. Art can comfort and disturb. Art can touch people emotionally and prompt social and political change. Think of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a story of slavery and oppression. The book shocked readers, and created sympathy for abolitionism. Some readers saw the book as a cause of the Civil War. And Upton Sinclair's vivid novel on the horrific conditions in the meatpacking industry*, The Jungle*, led to consumer protection laws.

In terms of visual art, Picasso's monumental painting *Guernica,* his graphic view of the 1937 Nazi Luftwaffe aerial bombing of civilians in this Basque village, powerfully imagined the horror of war and the threat of fascism with a visceral immediacy that thousands of words could not express. He didn't depict Stuka dive bombers or the enemy. Instead, he shared the perspective of innocent civilians who suffered the strafing and bombing, the mechanized massacre. The painting captures the terror of a brutal attack on unwitting humans and animals. A mother holding her dead child beseeches the broken sky. The figures are twisted. Faces emerge with shocked expressions and mouths seem to cry out against the wanton destruction: why?

Ghosh: What occasioned your passion for journalism? When did you join the celebrated *History News Network*?

Lindley: I've always admired reporters and have been a news addict. There's a saying that journalism is the first draft of history. I remember reports from Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite, and Huntley and Brinkley from the early days of television. And then I read the great reporters such as Martha Gellhorn, Ernie Pyle, David Halberstam, and many more. Murrow's harrowing 1960 documentary *Harvest of Shame* on the plight of impoverished, nomadic farm workers in the US still stands out for me.

Bill Moyers has served as an inspiration. I admire his thought-provoking, in-depth interviews of major writers, thinkers and artists. His book on his bus trip across America in the mid-1970s sparked my own Greyhound 'round the US' tour in our bicentennial year.

I especially admire Moyers's interviews that are fueled by his deep knowledge of history, a passion for justice, a profound concern for others, a love of language, and an appreciation for the ethical underpinnings of the issues he tackles. His research and erudition provide context and analysis that is missing in much of what passes for journalism now. And he dares to imagine that members of his audience are willing to think and to learn.

Journalist Molly Ivins, who suggested that Moyers run for president in 2008, said: "He opens minds—he doesn't scare people. He includes people in, not out. And he sees through the dark search for political advantage to the clear ground of the Founders. He listens and he respects others."

His continuing work embodies these values and motivates my own search and desire to share what I learn with others.

Ghosh: The range and variety of the interviews you have done for *History News Network* is nothing short of phenomenal. What led you to this arena of journalism?

Lindley: Thanks for that kind comment, Dr. Ghosh. Curiosity is the greatest driver. Also, I enjoy connecting with people I admire and learning about their work.

The tireless editor and founder of *HNN*, Rick Shenkman, never gave me assignments. He let me choose subjects and run with them. He's a generous editor and kind friend. My focus on interviewing also was influenced by my reading of oral history and great interviews by the likes of Bill Moyers, Studs Terkel, Terry Gross, Walter Isaacson and others.

Ghosh: How do you decide on the personalities and authors you select for your interviews?

Lindley: I select people I'm interested in. I may read a review or see a reference to a book or author or hear an author interviewed on television or radio. With author interviews, I read their books and try to learn what I can about the writer. After an interview, I always send a draft of my article to the subject for any revisions so that my articles reflect all comments accurately.

It's a privilege for me to meet—even if only by phone or email—these bright and devoted people and then share their words and wisdom with others.

Ghosh: What inferences can one draw from your various conversations on 'trauma narratives'?

Lindley: Whether in literature or for therapy, these narratives serve similar purposes by addressing trauma that would be otherwise ignored. From these narratives we can learn about the nature and origins of trauma as well as the varied courses survivors take to heal and thrive. These stories often depict heroic resilience after terrible physical and emotional injury.

University of Washington Professor of Journalism Doug Underwood talked with me about trauma and literature, and his book *Chronicling Trauma*. "Understanding trauma is how we can understand world politics and diplomacy and everything else. Psychiatrists now will tell you that the whole human experience is about how well we adjust to trauma. It's traumatic to be born. It's traumatic to be a mother giving birth…. As we become aware of the nature of trauma, it can make us more empathetic and more aware of the hard experiences of life, and it brings us together in ways that we share because we all experience trauma at one level or another…. Trauma is unavoidable in our lives and, therefore, would we not be better off if we acknowledged that?"

He added, "I believe that studying trauma – as hard as it's been and it's not always easy to read trauma narratives – has made me a better person…. And I think it does make us better people even though it's a hard process."

Professor Susie Linfield wrote about political violence and photography in her book *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Violence*. I asked her about trauma and how photographs have been used to promote social change and human rights. She discussed how photographs of suffering and deprivation, especially of the innocent, can reach viewers at an emotional level and prompt changes in attitudes and, at times, lead to action. She explained:

> One of the earliest uses of photographs to promote human rights . . . was in the movement that developed in England and the US in the 1890s and early twentieth century [to expose] King Leopold's colonization and brutalization of the Congo…. Photographs of Black Africans—often mutilated, with their hands and feet hacked off—circulated in the West in the

> context of this anti-colonial organizing. Of course, that movement wasn't perfect; it had elements of condescension and racism. But nonetheless, those photographs were important in establishing a human connection between whites in the US and Britain and the colonized Congolese, and in asserting that a thread of common humanity unites us…. A universal impulse has to be behind any politics of human rights, and the denial of that kind of universal humanity is at the heart of the worst violence of the twentieth century.

I also talked about trauma and art with Professor Hillary Chute, an expert on comics and graphic nonfiction and author of *Disaster Drawn*. "I'm interested in how trauma inspires hybrid work that is hyper-aware of how it communicates…. The combination of the words and images allows meaning to be created in their interaction, or even in their disjunct. And all the work in *Disaster Drawn* is motivated by collective violence and its aftermath. . . For the painter and printmaker Francisco Goya, it was the Spanish War of Independence that began in 1808 against the French, part of the Napoleonic Wars. His *Disasters of War* series of etchings was conceived of in 1808, the year the Spanish *pueblo* rose up against their occupiers—a violent action met with great violence in return. For cartoonist Keiji Nakazawa, it was the US dropping of the atomic bomb on his home city in 1945 during World War II that inspired his comics. For Art Spiegelman, it was his Polish-Jewish parents' survival—or inability, ultimately, to survive—Nazi death camps also during World War II."

Ghosh: In his poem "Strange Meeting" Wilfred Owen remarks: "I mean the truth untold/ The pity of war, the pity war distilled." In your view what lessons do war narratives impart to those who care to read them?

Robin Lindley: Some lessons from stories of war, perhaps: The randomness of injury and death. The chaos. The absurdity. The guilt. The waste. The fear. The insanity. The mistakes. The carnage. The lasting wounds. The preparation and disposal of the dead.

We should all learn about the reality of war and how people suffer in war and afterward so that we can respond with knowledge and understanding whenever our nation calls upon its armed services to fight and sacrifice. Our recent forever wars in the Middle East have been wasteful in lives and resources at a terrible cost to our military and to the people we have attacked and to all who have suffered and died.

I appreciate award-winning author Chris Hedges' view of modern war. "War is brutal and impersonal. It mocks the fantasy of individual heroism

and the absurdity of utopian goals like democracy. In an instant, industrial warfare can kill dozens, even hundreds of people, who never see their attackers. The power of these industrial weapons is indiscriminate and staggering…. The wounds, for those who survive, result in terrible burns, blindness, amputation, and lifelong pain and trauma. No one returns the same from such warfare. And once these weapons are employed all talk of human rights is a farce."

I spoke with several writers and artists about the lessons from recent wars and what they saw and learned. They found no glory, no triumph. Award-winning photojournalist Peter Van Agtmael if he thought his graphic combat pictures would prompt people to question war. "I think so. People end up at war through ignorance more than anything else…. You don't necessarily change what's going on, but I do want the photographs to resonate and I take the long view with all of this."

Michael Kamber, another award-winning photographer, stressed that civilians bore the brunt of the war in Iraq. "The vast majority of casualties I photographed in the war were civilians. That was the war and that's what Americans don't seem to understand…. There were no frontlines. There were no armies facing us. This was a guerilla war from beginning to end and it was fought among civilians. That's where the insurgents were. They were dug in and hiding amongst civilian populations. That's where the killing happened, and the civilians were wiped out in huge numbers. There was a terrible cost."

Kamber's photography reveals the human cost of war. "At times, I covered five or six car bombings in one day. These happened in civilian places, and the next morning the Iraqis have to go to work. They have to eat and go shopping and get their kids to school. They have no choice except to go down the same road where bombs went off the day before. I probably photographed hundreds of American and Iraqi casualties. You'd come on a car bomb scene where 20 or 30 people were killed. There's grieving families and body parts and the wounded. It's not like in the movies where there's a clean gunshot wound. It's people blown into small pieces. Sometimes large pieces. And it was every single day."

I also interviewed acclaimed psychiatrist, expert on mass trauma, and author Dr. Robert J. Lifton on his memoir *Witness to an Extreme Century*. He sees recent wars as "atrocity-producing situations" that are "so structured that very ordinary people who are in no way particularly bad can engage in atrocities and that can be the case because of the way the environment is structured. In terms of Vietnam, body counts, free fire zones, and search and destroy missions were military policy

that made killing civilians all too easy. The kinds of experiences of soldiers, especially angry grief they suffered [as] buddies were killed when they were unable to engage the enemy, [are] likely to occur in counterinsurgency wars where it's hard to distinguish combatants from civilians." An old saying that probably originated in antiquity is "When war is declared, truth is the first casualty." I appreciate those who have shared the reality of war and hope their experiences will inform those who create and execute our policies.

Ghosh: In the light of your remark, "I could not help but be troubled by unfairness, violence, suffering," how do you manage to come to terms with such situations in your role as a human rights spokesman?

Lindley: What can an individual do in the face of genocide and terrible crimes against humanity? I think we have an obligation to speak out and do something when we see unfairness, brutality, and evil. What's perplexing now is that I never thought we'd see Nazi and KKK rallies in 21st century America. I've always disliked bullies and didn't understand how Americans could support a thuggish racist as president. It's disconcerting.

I hope to add to the conversation by sharing voices of historians and others who speak truth to power and value tolerance, justice, and democracy. And may the new administration under President Joe Biden restore our position in the world as a force for human rights.

In a 2008 interview, human rights advocate and then a future UN Ambassador Samantha Power discussed the US role in dealing with human rights abuses. At that time, in the waning days of the Bush administration, the US was seen as an international pariah in the wake of the bloody and wasteful Iraq war. Power's words are again timely. "The United States has to get its own house in order and recover its regard for the principles that have made it a beacon for the world. To me, the regard for human rights makes America singular. If we're just a country that pursues our national interest as defined in the short term, that won't be good for our national interest in the long term…. We have to begin integrating a concern for human consequences at every stage of policy and be curious about what the effects of our policies are. And we're not that curious sometimes."

Ghosh: Could you please share your experiences as former chair and board member of the World Peace through Law section of the Washington State Bar Association? What were the issues and concerns that you liked to address?

Lindley: As section chair, I coordinated monthly continuing education programs for lawyers and recruited more women and people of color to the section.

The section was established in the 1980s when nuclear arms control was a major issue. We continued to consider international treaties and also focused on human rights and international law at a time (2005-2006) when US troops and officials were accused of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Experts presented engrossing programs on the law of war, forensic pathology and war crimes investigation, torture, human trafficking, truth and reconciliation commissions, presidential power, health and human rights. A couple of local lawyers spoke their work with the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda. I learned a lot in this role and was pleasantly surprised by how many Seattle-area attorneys, professors, and other experts had worked with these complex international issues.

Ghosh: What are your views on American imperialistic ambitions of being at the top of the international power game?

Lindley: We have serious problems at home, and our experiences with imperialism and nation building have been fraught and costly, especially in terms of human lives, both Americans and those who live in the targets of our ambitions.

Renowned author Stephen Kinzer talked with me about his book *The True Flag* on the US imperialism during the Spanish American and Philippine American Wars (1898-1901). He stressed that "Violent intervention in other countries always produces unintended consequences." He explained, "We tend to forget episodes that don't show us in the way that we like to think that we are. The Philippine War falls in that category. We left hundreds of thousands of Filipinos dead in a horrifically brutal campaign. We had our first torture scandal. We had serious war crimes committed as a matter of official military policy. And yet very few Americans are even aware that this war ever happened. Actually, it's been a huge scar on the minds of Filipinos and it's well known in East Asia, but because it doesn't fit into our narrative of what we do in the world, we've allowed it to fall out of our history books and our consciousness."

Kinzer added, "What I find even more puzzling is that we don't seem to learn from these experiences. There doesn't seem to be any limit to the number of times we can crash into another country violently and have it come out terribly…. The more we crash into other countries, the more we weaken ourselves. This is the lesson our interventions teach us."

Ghosh: In this context, could you please mention your conversation with Professor Daniel Immerwahr?

Lindley: I interviewed Professor Daniel Immerwahr on his groundbreaking book *How to Hide an Empire* on the history of US territories and possessions beyond the 48 contiguous states. He stressed how racism affected our colonization of other lands: "Racism didn't only shape people's lives within the country. It also shaped the country itself, determining the placement of the borders and, within those borders, which places would count as 'American' and which as 'foreign.' There's a long history of US leaders seeking to control which people are 'in' and which are 'out' of the country. Unfortunately, they've largely succeeded in writing Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, and Hawaiians out of U.S. history."

And Professor Immerwahr shared the unlikely story of bird poop and US imperial expansion. "It was in search of guano that the United States started annexing islands overseas—ultimately nearly a hundred of them in the Pacific and Caribbean. These were uninhabited, but someone needed to be there to mine the guano. Guano companies came to rely on non-white laborers, essentially marooning them on these rainless, godforsaken islands with instructions to pick, shovel, and blast loose as much guano as possible. Unsurprisingly, guano workers mutinied. One such uprising, on Navassa Island in 1889, led to the killing of five white overseers and, ultimately, a Supreme Court case. It was where the Court first considered whether overseas expansion was consistent with the Constitution. It ruled that it was, thus laying the legal foundation for empire." The US empire building brought prosperity to some at a terrible price for others.

Ghosh: What impact can political cartoons have in molding public opinion through media journalism?

Lindley: Editorial cartoonists and caricaturists have a gift for taking complex issues and creating a visual scene that presents a point of view, usually with humor. Cartoons can bring clarity and understanding in an instant, in ways that scholarly treatises and articles cannot. They may simplify to a fault but the comic snapshot can be powerful and moving.

Consider the special contributions of the prominent cartoonists such as Gary Trudeau ("Doonesbury"), Bill Mauldin, Oliphant, Herblock, David Horsey, David Levine, Ted Rall, and Ann Talnaes, among others. And then you have the recent innovations in graphic novels and histories such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, and a graphic history of the Civil War, *Battle Lines*, by historian Ari Kalman.

I asked Professor Hillary Chute why graphic novels are popular now. "In my view, the trauma of World War Two, in which conventional forms of expression came to seem inadequate to express human atrocity, and the highly televisual and photographed Vietnam War that followed, allowed the hand-drawn form of comics to reinvent cultures of expression. In 1972 both Keiji Nakazawa, a Japanese Hiroshima survivor, and Art Spiegelman, a Polish-Jewish immigrant to the United States whose parents both survived Auschwitz, created some of the very first meaningful nonfiction comics from different parts of the globe: Tokyo and San Francisco…. Something was happening in the 1970s to those who were directly affected by the war: they were finding new—and in this case, older—forms to register the violence that had devastated their families. And their work took off."

It seems I've tapped into a vein of darkness. I must say that each of the people I've interviewed has left me with hope even when discussing the darkest themes in history. For example, medical historian Frank Snowden finds hope in the history of cruel epidemics in this age of COVID-19. "If I thought that the history of infectious diseases was exclusively a study of disaster and despair, I would long ago have abandoned the subject as unbearably depressing. Fortunately, however, along with the dark sides of human nature, epidemics also demonstrate our brighter and more hopeful qualities. One can see that again and again in the heroism of physicians, nurses, and caregivers; in the dedication and ingenuity of medical scientists; and in the slow, but steady advance of the science of public health and hygiene. That history fills me with the hope that we will, in the end, survive COVID-19, and with that experience behind us, we will resolve to organize our society in such a way that we are not again scourged by a deadly pandemic."

I'd like to conclude with the words of Professor Susie Linfield, the journalism professor: "I hope that readers will go to the history books and the testimonies and the newspapers and magazines, and that they will delve more deeply into the complicated realities that photographs can only suggest. Which is to say: I hope that we will all become historians—at least sometimes—and, equally important, citizens."

Ghosh: Thanks Robin for sharing your views so generously.

Lindley: Thanks for the opportunity to share, Nibir.

VIEWS FROM CALIFORNIA

Jonah Raskin

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2020 ELECTION FOR THE U.S. PRESIDENCY

9 November 2020. Jubilation is the word that's been bandied about these days to describe the mood of the nation in the wake of the victory at the polls for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. He's a Catholic and was Obama's Vice President. She's a U.S. senator and the daughter of Shyamala Gopalan—who came to the U.S. from Tamil Nadu in India—and Donald Harris—who arrived in the U.S. from Jamaica in the West Indies. Harris is the first woman and the first person of color to be elected vice president. Biden is the first candidate for the U.S. presidency to defeat an incumbent in more than a quarter-of-a century. In 1992, Democrat Bill Clinton defeated the sitting president, Republican George H. W. Bush. This year, 75, 218, 898 Americans voted for Biden and 70, 814, 342 voted for Donald Trump who is loved by many and hated by many more. No American president has ever been as intensely loathed as Trump. In fact, many of the people who voted for Biden did so to register their disapproval with Trump, not because they're enamored of the former vice president.

All across the nation, citizens have been in the streets celebrating Trump's electoral defeat and Biden's electoral victory. I've been at home following the news on my computer, watching it on TV and emailing friends and family about the election. My brother, Daniel, emailed to say he'd observed a spirited demonstration in the streets of San Francisco and took dozens of photographs of jubilant citizens. My brother, Adam, the youngest in the family, sent me a quote from Karl Marx, which I've read many times before. I would have preferred something from his heart not from his head, and certainly not from Marx, though I admired much of Marx's writing.

I've also been emailing with my nephews, both of them teachers, both of them married to women of Asian descent and both of them parents of young children. I have liked going through the whole campaign, the run-up to the election, which seemed to drag on and on, and the election itself. My nephews have provided food for thought, as have friends in New York City who left their apartments and flooded the streets. Rarely has there been such an outpouring of elation. As of November 8, five days after Election Day, all the votes have not yet been counted. Still,

Biden is way ahead of Trump, and Trump, true to form, has so far refused to concede the election.

What has not happened, and that many people feared was that Trump would declare himself the winner and refuse to leave the White House. That is still a possibility, but leading Republican politicians, including Senator Mitt Romney—who ran for president in the primaries in 2008 and 2012—has urged the nation to "get behind" Biden. He has also said that he has seen no evidence of voter fraud. That's what Trump has been screaming about for days. For weeks and months, he insisted that the Democrats would steal the election from him. There is no evidence that anyone has tampered with the results.

More and more newscasters and political pundits have been saying on radio and TV that Trump's statements about fraud and the theft of the election are untrue, false and blatant lies. The President has been lying about the economy for years. He has been lying about the pandemic for more than half-a-year. Trump tells crowds who cheer him that he has brought the automobile industry and jobs back to the State of Michigan. In fact, there have been no new car factories during his presidency and no revival of the sagging American auto industry. Some Trump supporters seem to know he's not telling the truth. Some of them love him because he makes stuff up, doesn't play by the rules and has cast himself as a bonafide American demagogue.

Trump has been threatening to take legal action and go to court to stop votes from being tallied and to call for a recount. He isn't going to "go gentle into that good night" to borrow the words of the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas. It seems likely that Trump will "rage, rage," to borrow again from Thomas. So will his allies, including racist groups like "the Proud Boys." They haven't gone away.

Trump has many friends the world over, from Israel to India and Russia to Brazil. They may lament the defeat of the Republicans for the White House, but Israel, India, Russia and Brazil will have to make their peace with Biden and work with him. The American president is too powerful a figure to ignore or to rebuff.

One can expect that the Biden/Harris administration will create effective means to deal with the pandemic, that they will revive the environmental cause and aim to bring justice to the tangled field of relationships between whites and people of color, who more and more form the majority. America's Founding Fathers, Washington and Jefferson and Madison, might be surprised that women and people of color have the

vote, but they would be delighted to see that Democracy American style still works.

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A Song for Louise Glück: Nobel Prize Winner in Literature 2020

> Those of us who write books presumably wish to reach many. But some poets do not see reaching many in spatial terms, as in the filled auditorium. They see reaching many temporally, sequentially, many over time, into the future, but in some profound way these readers always come singly, one by one. I believe that in awarding me this prize, the Swedish Academy is choosing to honor the intimate, private voice, which public utterance can sometimes augment or extend, but never replace. – Louise Elisabeth Glück, from her Nobel Lecture, 2020.

Readers turning the pages of *The New Yorker* magazine dated October 19, 2020 probably weren't surprised to see a poem titled "Song" by Louise Glück on page 53. Poetry appears in every issue of the magazine, but it's a step-child and comes after nonfiction and fiction, which take up most of the space and are accorded the most respect. Still, poetry lovers can't be too peeved. Poetry isn't easy to find in magazines these days, and poetry lovers can go to sleep now knowing that poetry will appear in the next issue of *The New Yorker* and the issue after that. Two cheers for the magazine's poetry editor.

I was not surprised to see Glück's poem on page 53. After all, she had just won the Nobel Prize for Literature for 2020. The same issue of the magazine offered a review/essay of the letters of American poet, John Berryman, and I found myself imagining that one day there would be a review/essay in *The New Yorker* about the letters of Louise Glück, who was born in New York in 1943, a year after I was born, and whose first book *Firstborn* appeared in 1968, the year when everything imaginable happened.

I feel an affinity for Gluck because we belong to the same generation and grew up in the same part of the world, on the East Coast of the U.S. After she won the Nobel Prize, she told a reporter, "I come from a country that is not thought fondly of now, and I'm white, and we've had all the prizes. So it seemed to be extremely unlikely that I would ever have this particular event to deal with in my life." That comment further endeared her to me.

We have both spent big chunks of our lives in academia; Gluck still teaches at Yale on the East Coast and Stanford on the West Coast. Those five to six hour journeys by plane surely provide her with time to read and write poetry. Glück has published hundreds of poems, many of them collected in *Poems: 1962–2012* and also included in anthologies. Rather than try to encompass all of her work, which would require more stamina than I am currently capable of, I want to write about "Song," which reminded me of how fine a poet Glück is. "Song" has ten stanzas and 30 lines of unequal length, one as long as eight words, others just three and four.

The poem seems to be on one level about a friendship between the "I" who tells the story and a person named "Leo Cruz," a potter with a kiln and a studio located in a desert and who makes beautiful white bowls. The name Leo is repeated four times, which makes me think he's a real person. The word "beautiful" is repeated in line ten in which the "I" explains that Leo thinks that man-made things "are more beautiful/ than what exists in Nature." Since Leo is a potter that seems like a logical position for him to take. The narrator, whom I think of as Glück herself, doesn't agree with Leo. "I say no," she says emphatically in line twelve, which brings to a close the first part of "Song."

Clearly, Cruz and Glück have a strained friendship. They make plans, but don't carry them out; some things are left unsaid. "Never again: that is what we do not say," which also sounds emphatic. Out of the stress and tension between the two, comes an epiphany: "He's teaching me/ to live in imagination." The definite article, "the," seems to be deliberately omitted. Leo accused Louise of "dreaming again." He sounds like he's scoffing at her. Leo works with his hands; she works in her head, both consciously and unconsciously. "I'm glad I dream/ the fire is still alive," she says in the last two lines, which sound to me like they're sung. Hence the title "Song." I like to imagine the poem as an aria in an opera that takes place in a cold desert. Glück is very specific about the location: Leo lives in a house with a chimney that's probably connected to the kiln where he fires his bowl.

The poem itself catches fire and grows more powerful as it goes along. It seems to celebrate the imagination, dreaming, friendship and the making of "beautiful white bowls." With a minimum of detail, but like a good landscape painter, Glück conjures an image of a world in crisis. The desert grasses are gone and can only be seen in a book. Glück wants to deliver some bowls to an unidentified "you," but given "these times" doesn't know how to do that. Maybe it's the pandemic and maybe it's another catastrophic event.

It occurred to me after reading the poem twice that it's a kind of bowl: an enclosed space that had been carved out by the imagination and human hands. "Song" strikes me as a gift poem—a gift to readers. It does what most good poems do: offers the opportunity to slow down, read, reread, think, interpret lines and make the language part of our own selves. Glück has a new book of poems coming out in 2021. It's titled "Winter Recipes from the Collective." Those five words have me hooked already.

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ALBERT CAMUS'S *THE PLAGUE*: A PRESCIENT WORK OF FICTION FOR THE PRESENT DAY

> Each of us has the plague within him, no one, no one on earth is free from it. We must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in somebody's face and fasten the infection on him.
> – Albert Camus, *The Plague*, 1947

Like millions of other "shut-ins" in California, where I live, I'm under quarantine and doing my best to chill. I've just finished reading for the first time Albert Camus's *The Plague,* which takes place in Oran, on the coast of Algeria, and offers a horrific picture of a whole population living with fear and anxiety and trying to comprehend the incomprehensible. Yes, *The Plague* has flaws. There is nothing about the indigenous Algerian population in the book. Some are ready to toss it out the window because it ignores them. I'm not at that point.

For decades *The Plague* has been less well known than *The Stranger,* which was first published in 1942, but here and now in 2020 Camus 1947 novel ought to sound alarms, touch nerves and reverberate globally. In fact, it reads to a large extent like a contemporary account of the coronavirus.

Oran suffered from plagues in 1556, 1678, 1921, 1931 and 1944 in part because it was a major port on the Mediterranean. Camus looked back at historical events to write his book, which he began to think about in 1941, soon after the Nazi invasion and occupation of France. *The Plague* is also about the virus of fascism.

Published first in French as *La Peste* and a year later in English, the novel*,* is set sometime in the 1940s. Camus doesn't provide an exact year, but he describes in vivid detail the pain and suffering that strikes the lives of rich and poor alike. Oddly enough, as mentioned above. or

perhaps predictably, the narrative features no Arab or Berber characters, though Spaniards appear in minor roles.

Born in 1913 in Algeria to parents who belonged to the demographic group known as "*pied noir*," Camus refused to support the Algerian struggle for independence when it raged in the 1950s and 1960s. He famously observed, "I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother before justice." His mother was of Spanish descent, his father French-Algerian. Briefly, Camus belonged to the French and then the Algerian Communist Party to "fight inequalities between Europeans and 'natives' in Algeria," he had the right idea and then didn't follow through.

Camus moved to Paris before the outbreak of World War II, took part in the Resistance, edited and wrote for *Combat* and befriended Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, though he soon went his own way, politically speaking.

The Plague doesn't have a strong plot and dramatic action, though it has momentum and suspense. It's a philosophical work with reflections on freedom, terror, love, and exile and on the necessity of bearing witness. Despite its refusal to play by the rules of traditional French fiction, it offers six major characters, all of them men and all intended to be representative types.

The six men are: Bernard Rieux, a medical doctor; Jean Tarrou, an outsider who arrives in Oran just before the advent of the plague; Raymond Rambert, a journalist; Joseph Grand, a government clerk; Monsieur Cottard who goes mad and shoots people on the street; and Father Paneloux, a Jesuit priest. There are no political leaders and no military officers. Indeed, there's a vacuum of leadership—as there has been in the U.S. under President Trump.

Camus tracks the comings and goings of his characters, though the real protagonist of the book is the plague itself, which follows phases of life and death. Critics have suggested that *The Plague* was meant to be an allegory about French resistance to the Nazi occupation.

That may well be. In *The Plague*, "the contagion," which is also referred to as "the holocaust," creates a totalitarian society. "It's up to us, as far as possible, not to join forces with the pestilences," a character observes, and sounds like he's preaching a version of existentialism.

If Camus were alive today—he died in 1960 at the age of 46—and wanted his book to speak even more directly to the current Coronavirus pandemic than it already does, he might want to revise and update, though there's a great deal that he wouldn't want or need to touch.

Indeed, *The Plague,* with its trenchant reflections on the human condition itself, is perhaps timelier now than it was in 1947. Much of the language retains its power. Camus writes poetically about "the angel of the plague" and the "odious freedom of the plague."

Tarrou, the outsider in Oran, observes, "each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it." He adds "we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in somebody's face and fasten the inflection on him." How timely that comment! No heroism exists in *The Plague*, though there's human decency and friendship between men.

Before the arrival of the pestilence in Oran the citizens are largely preoccupied with matters of commerce and are bored with themselves and one another. The plague catches the authorities off guard. The essential serum that can fight the plague is in short supply and coffins run out. The dead can't be properly buried. At its height, the plague erodes the capacity to love and to experience pleasure. Citizens fall into a state of denial. Railroad platforms are off-limits, streets are often empty, telephone calls are illegal, and good intentions do as much harm as evil itself. Citizens are quarantined in a vast public stadium. Those without the contagion are obsessed about getting it and do their best to practice cleanliness. They are also obsessed about the need for sterilization. "Revolutionary violence" erupts but achieves nothing.

The Plague offers a happy ending of sorts. The pestilence vanishes almost as mysterious as it arrives. Optimism is reborn, but a sense of uncertainty lingers. Those who are alive in Oran want medals merely for surviving. The reader is left with the assumption that the plague can return at any time. On the last page, Camus writes about "the never ending fight against terror."

His language suggests that he was thinking about religion when he wrote *The Plague,* and, though it's not an explicitly Christian book, it offers words and concepts like "grace," "crucifixion" and "deliverance." Religion provides a kind of subtext. What Camus wants are healer, not priests, political leaders and certainly not demagogues. We could use a few million healers right now, from Los Angeles to Oran and New Delhi.

- **Jonah Raskin**, a regular contributor to *Re-Markings*, is the author of 15 books, including literary criticism, reporting, memoir, and biography. His new book is *Dark Past, Dark Future*.

'LEARN THE NARRATIVE OF THE OTHER': A CONVERSATION WITH JOANNA CHEN

Nibir K. Ghosh

Joanna Chen is a British-born writer, poet and translator, currently living in the Ela Valley of Israel. Her poetry, essays and literary translations have been published in *Guernica*, *Mantis*, *Narratively* and *Waxwing*, and *Re-Markings*, among many others. She teaches literary translation at The Helicon School of Poetry in Tel Aviv. A former journalist, her work has appeared in international publications such as *Newsweek*, *The Daily Beast* and *Marie Claire*. Her full-length literary translations include *Less Like a Dove* (Shearsman Books), *Frayed Light* (Wesleyan University Press) and *My Wild Garden* (Pantheon-Random House). She writes a column for *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. She states: "Poetry and prose are intertwined in my writing, as is literary translation, which enriches every single word I write. Writing has always been my preferred medium of expression, the best way for me to explain myself to the world." Joanna loves the outdoors and is always happy to spread the word about poetry and poetry in translation! Discover more at www.joannachen.com.

Ghosh: Greetings from the city of the Taj! Our acquaintance began with the publication of your poems in the *Re-Markings'* special number, *A World Assembly of Poets*. How did you feel being a part of such creative diversity?

Joanna Chen: I welcome creative diversity and am always interested in what other people are writing and creating around the world.

Ghosh: Did you experience any kind of cultural lag in moving to a new place?

Joanna Chen: I was 16 when I arrived in Israel. For many years, I suffered because I didn't speak either Hebrew or Arabic and the culture felt alien to me. It took me a while to acclimatize – perhaps I'm still acclimatizing now.

Ghosh: When did you start to write poetry and what inspired you to write?

Joanna Chen: I was always scribbling in the margins of school notebooks and writing snippets of poetry on pieces of paper for as long as I can remember. I was inspired by particular moments – oak leaves moving in the breeze outside the classroom window, the sound of foot-

steps coming up the stairs – and I often got into trouble at school for not paying attention in class.

Ghosh: Who would you consider your mentors in poetic composition? Name a few poets who attracted your admiration in your formative years.

Joanna Chen: Adrienne Rich for her honesty and daring; Jane Hirshfield for her delicacy and precision, who is also a wonderful literary translator; Wendell Berry for never failing to remind me of the immediate beauty in nature; the Bronte sisters, whose home I visited many times in the North of England, where I lived; Ethelbert Miller has been an inspiration and a dear friend to me for a number of years. A literary activist, he's constantly encouraging writers to push forward. He taught me the importance of sharing – work, resources, ideas.

Ghosh: Referring to the lines from Adrienne Rich's poem, "Diving into the Wreck" – "the thing I came for:/ the wreck and not the story of the wreck/ the thing itself and not the myth" – you state: "This is why I write poetry." Are you suggesting that your concern is with lived reality rather than imaginary stories or myths about reality? Please elaborate.

Joanna Chen: Exactly. As a former journalist, I'm deeply cemented in the here and now, and the fact that what we write about people is not a story: it's real life.

Ghosh: In popular perception Israel is "a pressure cooker of constant changes, political, ideological, social and familial intensity and density, permeated with an anxiety about claustrophobic suffocation." What is your view?

Joanna Chen: That and so much more.

Ghosh: Who are the emerging Israeli poets to look out for? What are the emerging themes?

Joanna Chen: Tehila Hakimi is a wonderful writer of prose and poetry who writes about the role of women and their place in society. I just finished translating a wonderful novella of hers called *Company*. Yonatan Berg is another fine poet and prose writer. He has written extensively on growing up on a Jewish settlement, on serving in a combat unit in the Israeli army, and how all this affected him.

Ghosh: What is your take on the process of Americanization in Israeli life and literature?

Joanna Chen: I don't see this is any different from any other country really.

Ghosh: What subjects do you consider closer to your heart in your poetic compositions? Why do you consider them important to share them publicly?

Joanna Chen: I want to share my work as much as I want to read and discuss the work of other people. We do not live in a bubble and in order to write I think it essential to read.

Ghosh: What kind of challenges have you encountered as a woman writer in Israel? Was it easy to find writing colleagues and outlets to publish?

Joanna Chen: I write in English. There's a small but thriving community of English writers in this country. As for finding places to publish, I publish my work outside of Israel, mostly in the U.S.

Ghosh: What is your vision about the future of poetry in Israel and elsewhere?

Joanna Chen: I think poetry is on the rise. People are less inclined to say today – oh, I wasn't good at poetry in school – or – I don't really understand poetry. It's become more accessible, and today especially I believe more people are turning to poetry as a way of taking refuge from what is happening in the world.

Ghosh: Do you believe that poetry can transform lives? What is your take on writers using words as weapons?

Joanna Chen: I believe that poetry can move people but we must be our own change, do you know what I mean? A poem itself doesn't change the world, but it can make people think, it can offer a new perspective. As for words as weapons, let us hope we are all a little more resilient than that.

Ghosh: What got you interested in the art of translation?

Joanna Chen: Literary translation is a wonderful bridge to other cultures. You asked about cultural diversity earlier. This is it! For me, literary translation is a way of holding each word up to the light and turning it around, to see new perspectives and meanings. It's a way of delving down deeply to the roots of words – their social, cultural, political and religious implications. Just as reading is an essential part of writing, so

is literary translation. When I'm translating a poem, I am honing my own writing as well.

Ghosh: You teach literary translation at The Helicon School of Poetry in Tel Aviv. Please enumerate the nature of your work as a translation teacher. What are the various translation projects that you have worked at? What methods do you follow to ensure that good poetry is not lost in translation?

Joanna Chen: Let me put it this way. I share my love for words with my students, I encourage them to explore writing in other languages and to translate into their native language. One of my students has published the poetry of Jericho Brown in translation; another has translated Ocean Vuong.

We work first on a literal translation of a given poem, we research the background of that poet to make sure we understand the cultural context. Then we do the real magic – the transforming of the poem into the target language, and then we look to see: What did we gain and what did we lose?

Ghosh: What motivated you to learn both Hebrew and Arabic after you migrated to Israel? When did you begin to think you could use your knowledge of these languages in translating poetry into English?

Joanna Chen: The answer is simple: You can't live in a country without speaking the language of everyone else who lives here, right? One of the problems immigrants face, particularly older ones, is a lack of proficiency in the language of the country they find themselves in. It's debilitating, it sets you apart. You can never fully integrate unless you are able to grasp the language, and that's not always possible.

It was just as important to learn Arabic as well. In my journalism days, it was crucial to be able to walk into a Palestinian home and say hello to everyone in Arabic, it shows respect.

One day, while driving up to Jerusalem, I was listening to a song in Hebrew on the radio and I suddenly realized I knew all the words by heart, and I also understood the deeper meaning of the lyrics. I had taken a course that year in literary translation given by poet Linda Zisquit, and absolutely loved it. I realized I might turn my knowledge into a profession. I began translating poetry, and now translate prose as well, although I believe there is always poetry in prose, there is always the lyricism and rhythm of that source language. It's a bit like music, listening for the voice and the tone.

Ghosh: What motivated you to the choice of translating *Less Like a Dove* by Agi Mishol and *Frayed Light* by Yonatan Berg. Do these two poets have anything in common in terms of their poetic concerns? Also, what attracted you to translating Meir Shalev's *My Wild Garden: Notes from a Writer's Eden*?

Joanna Chen: Agi Mishol's poetry spoke to me immediately with its clear images and accessible language that I was sure would resonate for the English-speaking community as well. Her writing is steeped in the multiple layers of the Hebrew language. Similarly, Yonatan Berg's writing taps into the flexibility of Hebrew, its ability to convey past and present simultaneously. Both poets dig down deep into their own lives and that of the culture they were born into, with all its flaws and all its beauty. As for Meir Shalev's *My Wild Garden: Notes from a Writer's Eden,* I must say that though a prose writer, Meir Shalev's work is often lyric, verging on the poetic, in this particular book I translated.

Ghosh: What skills did you acquire as a student of the creative writing program at Bar Ilan University?

Joanna Chen: The Shaindy Rudoff Creative Writing Program at Bar Ilan University is a marvellous place to hone your craft and exercise your creative muscles. It provides an excellent toolbox for writers of all genres and also a warm and nurturing community that I still enjoy today.

Ghosh: What are your priorities as a journalist? Did you ever have to face a situation where you felt constricted to be silent about something that mattered to you as a person?

Joanna Chen: Don't expect to necessarily agree with people you're interviewing! You can't change the world but you can enter into people's lives for a brief time and try to understand them.

Ghosh: You begin the poem "The Art of Journalism" by saying, "It takes three years and I'll tell you why." Kindly shed light on the layers of experience that a trainee journalist has to contend with in acquiring the art of reporting.

Joanna Chen: A bureau chief at *Newsweek* told me that three years is the maximum to stay in any given location: the first year you're in shock when you see a child wandering the streets, shoeless; the second year you know the ropes, you know how to speak to that child so she won't run away from you; the third year you're so accustomed to it all you don't even see the child anymore.

Ghosh: Your poignant essay, "When Poetry is a Crime," written in protest against the Arab poet Tareen Datour's arrest and captivity, showcases your conviction to speak out against repressive measures employed by the State to curb dissent. Do you ever find yourself at the receiving end on account of your courageous stand at the level of your community or nation?

Joanna Chen: I'm not courageous. I wrote that piece in order to highlight Dareen Tatour's personal plight. I wrote it because I believe that everyone has the right to free speech even if her opinions may not always mirror my own.

Ghosh: According to Margaret Atwood, "Women are still expected to be better than men, morally that is, even by women, even by some branches of the women's movement; and if you are not an angel, if you happen to have human failings, as most of us do, especially if you display any kind of strength or power, creative or otherwise, then you are not merely human, you're worse than human." What are your views in the context of Atwood's contention?

Joanna Chen: Let's just get on with our lives and do the best we can.

Ghosh: "Fire, charred buses, men lined up against a wall, roadblocks, guns at intersections, shards of glass on the street, the fear on people's faces, the funerals revisited on the 8 o'clock news" – these images from one single poem of yours reflect the gloom that we are prone to see all around us. How do you manage to create a balance between what *is* and what really *ought to be*?

Joanna Chen: The world isn't a kind place. But there are kind and courageous and daring people who live and breathe in it and that makes life worth something, right? I write about subjects that are meaningful to me. I hope someone reads my writing and says, yes, I feel that way too.

Ghosh: How would you respond to a statement that Thomas Paine had once made: **"**The whole religious complexion of the modern world is due to the absence from Jerusalem of a lunatic asylum"?

Joanna Chen: The whole world is a bit of a lunatic asylum actually!

Ghosh: In terms of the Arab-Israel conflict, if you were to be appointed an ambassador of peace, what measures would you suggest as a poet of humanity and citizen of Israel?

Joanna Chen: There's no easy solution but I can say this: learn the narrative of the other. You don't have to agree with this narrative, but at

least accept there is another narrative, another way of looking at the world.

Ghosh: You have been writing a regular column for *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. What are some of the major events, themes and issues that you have enjoyed addressing?

Joanna Chen: I write a lot about literary translation as a bridge to other cultures and other people. I interview writers whose words speak to me. I most recently interviewed the Irish writer Colum McCann on his book *Apeirogon*, about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, because no Arab language or Hebrew language publishers will publish the book.

Ghosh: As a writer, poet and journalist how do you view the cataclysmic changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic on a global scale?

Joanna Chen: People are reading more. People are discovering the positive side to keeping close to home. On the other hand, this is an incredibly challenging time in which many have lost jobs and are struggling to make ends meet.

Ghosh: In this age of digitization and social media explosion, do you consider it ironical that, though interest in reading has waned, the publication industry has registered a huge growth?

Joanna Chen: On the contrary, people are reading more and more today. Poetry too!

Ghosh: Names of cities and places, near and distant, frequently make their appearance in your poems and prose narratives. Are you fond of travelling to "faery lands forlorn" like John Keats or do you feel the urge to visit places where all is not well in terms of ideals like liberty, equality, fraternity and the like?

Joanna Chen: The only place I'm traveling to this year is Dublin, where my beautiful eldest daughter and granddaughter live. COVID-19 has shut the door to everywhere else. Because of my love for them, Dublin has become second home to me.

Ghosh: Mutuality of political interest has created close ties between Israel and India. In case you happen to visit India someday, what would figure in your list of preferences?

Joanna Chen: I would love to visit India one day. I'd love to learn about the many layers of language that exist in India and am so curious about the social structure of this huge country.

Ghosh: What message would you like to give to young upcoming poets and journalists worldwide?

Joanna Chen: Look close to home when you write. Right in front of your nose there is so much going on. And on the other side of the world there is someone who would love to read it.

Ghosh: Thanks, Joanna. It was real pleasure talking to you.

- **Dr. Nibir K. Ghosh**, former Head, Department of English Studies & Research, Agra College, Agra, is UGC Emeritus Professor. He has been a Senior Fulbright Fellow at the University of Washington, Seattle, USA during 2003-04. An eminent scholar and critic of American, British and Post-colonial literatures, he is Author/Editor of 15 widely acclaimed books and has published over 175 articles and scholarly essays on various political, socio-cultural and feminist issues in national and international publications. His most recent work is *Mirror from the Indus: Essays, Tributes and Memoirs* (2020).

SHAPING SPACES FOR MULTIPLE EQUALITIES: ISHWARCHANDRA VIDYASAGAR, THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE MAN

Shanker Ashish Dutt & Zaara Urouj

Biographical and historical studies have portrayed Ishwarchandra Bandopadhyay as a pre-eminent figure in the Bengal Renaissance. While the context of his education, professional life and socio-educational activism were located in Bengal, the latent inequalities that he challenged were pan-Indian. His passionate campaign for the Hindu Widow Remarriage despite belligerent opposition led to Lord Dalhousie finalising the bill that led to the legislation of the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act in 1856. Hence, he is being recast as an Indian Renaissance Man as his ideas and campaigns impacted the entire subcontinent, then a part of the Empire.

Vidyasagar's pluralism melded the richness of the Indian knowledge system with the empiricism of the West and therefore he did not uncritically vilify English influences as was a common practice among the orthodox *bhadraloks* in 19th Century Bengal. Enumerating the positive off-shores influences modified with irony that occasionally carried a considerable weight of social satire, he had stated at a social gathering: "On the whole, I feel that we have received three good things from the English. The literature of Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Sir Walter Scott and others that we have got from them – do not underestimate their value. Second gain – ice. In the searing heat of summer, put one piece of ice in a tumbler of water, and your relief is immense. And the third is sliced bread.... You laugh at what I say? But tell me, did we have anything comparable to sliced bread in our country before? Soak a slice of bread in a bowl of milk and have it, and you will be full, and you will also not fall ill. The third advantage cleverly satirises orthodoxy as bread was largely produced in bakeries run by Christians and Muslims and hence was a prohibited item in Hindu orthodox households. (Chaudhuri, *The Telegraph* Online 12th July 2020)

Born in an orthodox Hindu Brahmin family, where hierarchy was the social norm, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar built spaces for multiple equalities. With or without him, the Bengal Renaissance would have certainly taken place but his credibility lies in the fact that he dared to transform Hindu society from within and brought out remarkable changes in the thought process of the people not by denying the al-

ready existing beliefs but by interpreting them in a new manner. Neither poverty nor the erroneous beliefs of Indian *Shastras* could stop him from becoming the man he was destined to be: a social reformer and an educationist of rare distinction. An epitome of egalitarian compassion, modesty and simplicity, he was a man grounded to the earth but blessed with a mind that was open to the pursuit of truth and the stark social realities. At a very early stage in his life, he realised his responsibility towards society and he dedicated his entire life to uplift the disadvantaged communities and helped enable women's agency at a time when patriarchy was deepening its roots.

Vidyasagar carried forward and indigenised the social and educational reforms begun by The Serampore Quartet comprising William Carey, Joshua Marshman, William Ward and Hannah Marshman who believed in ecumenical pragmatism (Daniel 171), an egalitarian vision and education as an instrument of equality and justice. They founded schools for the girls in order to impart western education to them (Chatterjee 121). These schools were the first of its kind in Calcutta and the efforts of the Serampore Quartet was instrumental in their development. William Carey prepared books like *A Grammar of the Bengalee Language*, *Iitihaasmala*, *Kathopokothon*, *A Dictionary of Bengali Language* and the translations of the *Bible* in Bengali and several other Indian vernaculars as a part of the curriculum. They adopted the Serampore system of native education, encouraging knowledge in history, science, geography and mathematics apart from the general 3 R's i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic – a blend of the traditional and modern, giving special importance to orthography and grammar of Bengali and English languages.

Vidyasagar was influenced by the outlook and liberal thoughts of Ramkrishna Paramhansa (Ghosh 44). His personality was forged with utmost dedication to his education and later his profession, vast knowledge in eastern and western disciplines, devotion to his parents, morality, mercifulness, kindness, empathy, cooperation, unconservative attitude, a heart filled with regret to the then situation of women and a vision to give Indian educational system a modern perspective. He is well known for his educational and social reforms throughout the world paving the way for introducing the modern education system in India. His linguistic, educational and social activities, which he was committed to from his early life till his death, are remembered by Indians from that time to the present day.

In 1839, he graduated in law examination conducted by the Hindu Law Committee. His education at Sanskrit College saw him amassing

considerable knowledge and mastery in a number of *shastras* or disciplines – kabya (poetry), alonkar (rhetoric), Vedanta (vedic literature and anthology), smriti (philosophy of law), nyaya (logic, science and jurisprudence), and jyotish (astronomy) (Bani, Alam 15). The title of 'Vidyasagar', meaning the 'ocean of knowledge', was conferred upon him by Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, who later with great affection addressed him as Vid. It is said that he derived strength from the knowledge and used it as a powerful instrument to eradicate the evils prevailing in the society namely child marriage, gender discrimination and other social taboos.

Having worked in the Education Department and having observed the education system very closely, he decided on radical educational reforms. He favoured English and Bengali as mediums of learning alongside Sanskrit and wanted to offer students a wider range of subjects and thus broaden their horizons, to inculcate critical and lateral thinking in examining European and Indian knowledge and practices side by side so they could apply their own judgement in discovering the truth for themselves. He was influenced by Western thoughts and was indeed one of the modern thinkers of his time along with Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen and others. In addition to his responsibilities as the Principal of Sanskrit College, he travelled around Bengal in the capacity of Inspector of Schools witnessing the pervading darkness, stark realities and superstitions in which people of Bengal lived in the absence of education. He realised that it is only Education that can help in liberation and emancipation of people from the prevailing injustices and inequalities in the society. He opened twenty schools in just 60 days followed by thirty schools exclusively for girls' education. He also established a normal institution for making competent teachers for these schools. He opened thirty-five schools for girls between 1857 and 1858. The significance is underpinned by the realisation of the Bengali educated class of "the importance of female education for bringing social reformation and reformers like Roy, Vidyasagar and Radha Kant Deb endorsed education for girls. This was generally linked to caste taboo and superstitions among the Bengalis about sending girls to school. But now the new orientation toward Western ideas and missionaries resulted in the development of native female schools." (Dutta 32) One of his major contributions was the establishment of Calcutta Metropolitan Institution for higher education which is now known as "Vidyasagar College." He also was directly involved in the establishment of "Calcutta Female School" with the help of Drinkwater Bethune in 1849. Now it is called

"Bethune School." He has also made his valuable contribution in education through his writings. He wrote many text books, translated books, biographical books and was a continuous writer contributing to different magazines.

He commenced the process of education with his first book of alphabet (Part I and Part II) called *Barna Porichoy* first published in 1855 which laid the foundation of Bengali prose. Vidyasagar was a source of inspiration for Bengali writers such as Tekchand Thakur, Pyarichand Mitra and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Indeed, Tagore revered him as 'the father of modern Bengali prose'. He also translated a number of Sanskrit works to Bengali and wrote biographical notes on numerous noteworthy personalities in the history of the world so the young generation could be inspired. His notable literary contributions include *Banglaar Itihaas* (1848), *Jivancharita* (1849), *Shakuntala* (1854), *Mahabharata* (1860), *Seetar Vanavas* (1860), *Bhrantivilaas* (1869), *Oti Alpa Hoilo* (1873), *Aabaar Oti Alpa Hoilo* (1873), *Brajavilaas* (1884) and *Ratnopariksha* (1886). (http:// bengalonline. sitemarvel.com/vidyasagar.html)

Though Vidyasagar was not financially very sound, he was philanthropic from his student life. He would feed the poor and needy and buy medicines for the sick from the money received through scholarships and even borrowed money from others for his altruism. He opened the doors of Sanskrit College to lower caste students that was previously exclusive to only the Brahmins; he nursed sick cholera patients, went to the crematorium to bury unclaimed dead bodies, dined with the untouchables and walked miles in darkness to take urgent messages to people who would benefit from them. This was the beginning of his life as a social reformer. He was deeply affected by the inequalities in the society such as polygamy, ban on widows from remarrying, child marriage, gender inequalities, keeping them away from the light of education and depriving them from property rights. When he tried to call for dialogue to discuss social matters, he was rebuked and his efforts were rejected in the name of dictates of Hindu *Shastras*. He received threats of physical violence and death from the orthodox and narrow-minded priests but he stood fearless and continued his work with determination and diligence. Conducting extensive research into Hindu scriptures and *Puranas* he tried to explain that there was nothing evil in a widow's remarriage and polygamy which was in practice unacceptable as it was an evil. He published two separate volumes on remarriage of widows and another two volumes on polygamy citing from the scriptures and explaining the validity of his

arguments (https://biographypoint.com). These include *Bidhobabivah* (whether widows should remarry) the first exposure (1855), *Bidhobabivah* – the Second Book (1855), *Bahubivah* – (whether polygamy should be banned) the first exposure (1871), *Bahubivah* – the Second Book (1873) and *Balyabivah* (flaws of child marriage). To prove that his compassion for widows was not empty rhetoric as some might have assumed, he married his own son off to a widow. He compiled a list of 'distinguished' polygamous Calcuttans and another for surrounding districts. It is an infernal statistic that a considerable number of men on those lists married up to 80 times, often under-age girls, and yet were unable to control their boundless thirst for lust. (http://www.deshforum.com/showthread.php?tid=949)

In earlier times, widow remarriages would occur sporadically only among progressive members of the Brahmo Samāj. The prevalent custom of Kulin Brahmin polygamy allowed elderly men – sometimes on their deathbeds – to marry teenage or even prepubescent girls, supposedly to spare their parents the shame of having an unmarried girl attain puberty in their homes. After such marriages, these girls would usually be left behind in their parental homes, where they might be cruelly subjected to orthodox rituals, especially if they were subsequently widowed. These included a semi starvation diet, rigid and dangerous daily rituals of purity and cleanliness, hard domestic labour, and close restriction on their freedom to leave the house or be seen by strangers. These hapless widows were prohibited (as spiritual sanction) to abstain from consuming meat, fish, onion and garlic. Every day, they had to rise before dawn to conduct their diurnal religious rituals, bathe in icy cold water and wrap a clean white sari around their wet bodies without drying themselves, and pick fresh flowers with dew-drops, to offer prayers to the Gods. By custom, they were the last ones to eat in the household, or went without food observing various religious fasts. They had to dress in plain white cotton saris and remain with their heads tonsured for the rest of their lives to render them unattractive to other men. (http://swpust2015.blogspot.com/2016/06/ishwar-chandra-vidyasagar-as-social.html) Some widows would even be evicted from their homes or sent to religious places like Varanasi or Vrindavan, supposedly to pray and purify themselves, but in reality, they frequently ended up as prostitutes, rape victims and unsupported mothers. Unable to tolerate the ill treatment, many of these girls would run away and turn to prostitution to support themselves. Ironically, the economic prosperity and lavish lifestyles of the city made it possible for many of them to have quite successful careers once they had

stepped out of the sanction of society and into the demimonde. In 1853, it was estimated that Calcutta had a population of 12,718 prostitutes. (http://www.deshforum.com/showthread.php?tid=949)

Vidyasagar took the initiative in proposing and pushing through the Widow Remarriage Act XV of 1856. He fought with the conservative society in the 19th century and influenced the Government to enact the Widow Remarriage Act which was legalized on 26th July, 1856. He also established the Hindu Family Annuity Fund to help widows who could not remarry; he took the initiative to finance many such widow re-marriage weddings, often getting into debts himself. To stop polygamy among the Kulin Brahmins and child marriage, the Civil Marriage Act was passed in 1872. His contribution in the uplift of the women by eradicating blind superstitions and tortures in the name of rituals will be always in the heart of the women. (Ghosh 46)

Vidyasagar was one of the earliest in India to realize that modern science was the key to India's future. He translated into Bengali the English biographies of some outstanding scientists such as Copernicus, Newton, and Herschel and sought to inculcate a spirit of scientific inquiry into young Bengalis. A staunch anti-Berkeleyan, he emphasized the importance of studying European Empiricist philosophy (of Francis Bacon) and the inductive logic of John Stuart Mill. He said, "Education does not only mean learning, reading, writing, and arithmetic, it should provide a comprehensive knowledge." (Alam 14)

Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar managed to continue the social reformation movement that was started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy by picking it up from where he left. A staunch believer of humanity, he brought revolution in India especially in the uplift of the women and education system of Bengal. While Raja Ram Mohan Roy represented the new aspirations and the earnest work of the first generation of his countrymen in the nineteenth century, Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar reflected their arduous endeavours in the second (Mitra I). The influx of western knowledge, art and culture as well as advanced moral values enriched the mental horizon of Bengal liberal intelligentsia. Playing a pioneering role in expanding modern education and social mobilisation during the nineteenth century Bengal that spread to the other parts of India, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar not merely confined himself to the role of a sermonizer towards spreading education within the superstitious notions engrossed in the Hindu community through their native language, but also engaged himself in the practical field of social changes that led to the beginning of the modern India. (Alam 12) He

believed that there is no other religion and goodness than another person's welfare.

In the book *Makers of Indian Literature*, Sarkar says that Ramendrasundar Trivedi looked upon Vidyasagar as a giant of a man and wrote: "There exist instruments of a kind called microscopes that make small things look big. Physics has indicated [conversely] a big thing may be made to look small, but such a device is hardly ever used…. The people around us, who usually pass as big, suddenly get dwarfed if an account of Vidyasagar's life is placed by the side of any of them." (Sarkar 39)

In 1857, the Revolt against the East India Company was to radically alter the administrative and cultural relations between the coloniser and the colonised subject. With organic and structural changes in colonial policies of reform, the *bhadralok* began to protect and promote their traditional customs. The 38-year-old Vidyasagar left government service a year later citing exhaustion and increasing disappointment with British policy. Yet he remained active until his death, aiding malaria patients, caring for widows and orphans, and pursuing his work as an author and reformer. Plagued by poor health and disappointment, he retreated in 1873 to Karmatanr in western Bengal, where he built a home and provided homeopathic care to the tribal population. (Hatcher Instagram@Harvard Magazine May June 2014) An epitaph penned by Tagore, etched in marble below a modest bust of Vidyasagar at Karmatanr, reads: "The chief glories of [his] character were neither his compassion nor his learning, but his invincible manliness and imperishable humanity."

Celebrating historical figures does not mean that we deify them, inviting persons of importance, usually those from the political class, to put marigold garlands on designated dates on their bust to the applause of onlookers and a photo opportunity for a self-seeking media. It means to walk the talk; to emulate the words and deeds of nobility; to cultivate egalitarian compassion toward the anonymous 'other'; to resist the human hubris that sanctions the repetitive wrongs of history and to uphold dignity, justice and equality. In emulating Vidyasagar, we can do our bit to express our humanity.

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- **Dr. Shanker Ashish Dutt**, former Professor & Head, Department of English, Patna University, Patna, has been Chairman, Bihar Sangeet Natak Akademi. Writer and editor, his publications are in areas of Cultural Studies and Liberation literature. He has been a U.G.C. British Council and American Centre resource person for English Studies and has lectured and chaired seminars at various eminent institutions. He has also distinguished himself as a theatre actor and director.
- **Zaara Urouj** is Ph.D. Research Scholar in the Department of English at Patna University, Patna.

❖

CREATIVE VOICES FROM SAINT LUCIA IN *SENT LISI:* A CONTEMPORARY ANTHOLOGY

George Goddard

Sent Lisi: Poems and Art of Saint Lucia is a fine anthology of contemporary Saint Lucian poetry selected by Saint Lucian writers, John Robert Lee, Kendel Hippolyte, Jane King and Vladimir Lucien (2014). The work anthologizes a number of Saint Lucian writers beginning with Sir Derek Walcott (1930-2017, Nobel Laureate 1992) as well as a number of other poets – some of no small note, others showing that their work deserves wider recognition. The uniqueness of this anthology is that it also presents the art of several major Saint Lucian painters including the Walcott brothers and Sir Dunstan St. Omer (1927-2015).

The collection was produced in celebration of the 70th birthday of McDonald Dixon, poet, novelist and playwright, one of the distinguished writers of this small Eastern Caribbean island.

While Saint Lucian literature is regarded as beginning with Derek Walcott, "perhaps the most widely acclaimed of Caribbean poets who have brought the voice of the Caribbean to the world" (Edward Baugh: 2007), this is so in the classical sense essentially. Saint Lucia, like many other cultural spaces can be regarded as having an "oral literature" predating this, exemplified in the songs and music of folk singer Dame Selipha Sessenne Descartes (1914-2010) and others. This article examines the written literature, specifically the poetry.

Walcott notes in his *Arkansas Testament,* "our myths are ignorance, theirs are literature" (*Arkansas Testament,* "White Magic," p. 39). It is precisely to transform our myths into literature that he and others of his generation like Garth St. Omer (1931-2018) and the less well-known Stanley French (poet, playwright and engineer 1937-2010) set out. Walcott wrote that together with his life-long friend, artist Dunstan St. Omer, they resolved to "put down in paint, in words/ as palmists learn the network of a hand/ all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines/ every neglected self-pitying inlet/ muttering in brackish dialect…" (*Sent Lisi: Poems and Art of Saint Lucia*, from *Another Life*, 1973, Ch.8: p.1).

The excerpt in the anthology, from Walcott's *Sainte Lucie*, maps and names … "these sun-bleached villages/ where the church bell caves in the sides/ of one grey-scurfed shack that is shuttered/ with warped boards, with rust, with crabs crawling under the house shadow/ where the children play house" (p. 123) paints the stark beauty and the naked poverty inflicting his island but he is committed to his people because,

speaking in his Saint Lucian French-based Kwéyòl, "moi c'est gens Ste. Lucie/C'est la moi sorti; / is there that I born" (p.131).

This life-long commitment, articulated in *Another Life,* is reflected years later in his work *White Egrets* (2010) and reproduced in the anthology under review in *The Acacia Trees I.* Here he laments the neocolonial oppression of his people in an island-nation where the plantation economy of the colonial era has been supplanted: "…These new plantations/ by the sea; a slavery without chains, with no blood spilt – / just chain-link fences and signs, the new degradation." Walcott reflects the voice of a people grappling with the issues of postcolonial alienation and degradation.

From the very first poem in *Sent Lisi*, he sets the tone for a singularly articulate and insistent voice speaking to the world. While the Walcott generation learnt the network of their island's hand, rooting their work in its landscape, oral and theatrical traditions, they were setting the stage for a bourgeoning of poetry, literature and art that transcended what they envisioned. The works of those like MacDonald Dixon who is considered the bridge between Walcott and the poets of the succeeding generation would follow. Dixon was a close friend of Walcott and became a conduit that helped ignite the literary passions of the next generation.

The selection of poems by the various authors I suggest amply demonstrates that there has been much quality writing contemporary with and post-Walcott. I would like to consider Dixon of whom I suggested elsewhere, that his work stands out beyond the limited critical acclaim that he has garnered.

I am particularly drawn to his poem, "Rose King Burial": "let the sun set on the broken string/ the moon on the shadow of his guitar/ let the rose droop pale in silence/ for the man that is no more light." And again "fire the blood with your *malcochon*/ tonight you play the grief of your simple folk/ your voice is the *laurier* of the box/ manufactured in the heights by an/ unknown *chapantier*" (p.118). Dixon can be perceived as continuing Walcott's mission. The voice of Joe La Bier from the laurier of the box in which the folk musician is laid, speaks to the next generation.

The rhythm of this poem with its rustic cadence is infectious. Its terse, pulsating lines are authentically Saint Lucian. It is celebratory rather than sad. The grief which the poet speaks of is not a debilitating emotion. It is a sensibility that fires the blood of the simple folk. It allows us to believe that our art is above price (p.119) and demands our commitment.

In "To a dying countryside" there are echoes of Walcott's concern with the kind of development that inflicts an "open wound": "They come with giant machines/ Threshing heart from the forest/ Slaying mud with iron claws./ Asphalt pours salt/ Into the open wound." Dixon considers the role of our art in healing that wound.

> But can this poem
> Heal the caterpillar's scars
> Rebuild pitons for tourists'
> Eyes, or mend the broken
> Landscape, shard by shard?"

He speaks to the world in a voice that is insistent yet not abrasive – a tone which he occasionally departs from in some of his other works which more stridently confront the legacy of colonialism.

Another contributor to the anthology is John Robert Lee. Lee has been a close friend and literary associate of Dixon and has achieved a certain international recognition with several collections by prestigious publishers. Along with writers like Kendel Hippolyte and Jane King, he is part of a small cohort of Saint Lucian writers who knew and interacted with Walcott. They are the generation immediately following, on whom the task of defining our Saint Lucian-ness and Caribbean-ness seems to have rubbed off – a magic not necessarily antithetical to but clearly distinct from the "white magic" referenced in *Arkansas Testament*. Lee comes to poetry from the perspective of a city boy. While it is true that both Walcott and Dixon hail from Castries like Lee, their early preoccupation with the images of the countryside does not happen for Robert until later.

Life in the city has its own rhythm and nuances. This is captured in his poem "Gramophone." Here he reminisces on his childhood at 12 Trinity Church Road, Castries, the experiences that urban life in a small island would have exposed him to: "that gracious hour that has grown/ with my life, as his Master's Voice dipped and wobbled/ and then the nasal singer…/ we begged/ and she spun us more of these crooners" (pp. 16-17).

Is His Master's Voice, the label of the vinyl recordings Lee refers to, emblematic of his acculturation into Western culture – an acculturation that was more evident in the towns than in the countryside? A dichotomy reveals itself because he also remembers the music of the Mighty Sparrow and Lord Kitchener (famous Trinidadian calypsonians) from

that afternoon of Victrola enjoyment. This was the voice of the colonizer being countered by that of the colonized.

In the poem "City" (p. 34) Lee on his return home from Boston to his small Saint Lucia city-town, experiences a degree of alienation when he asks "why do we return there?" (p. 36) and suggests "no reason is good enough." It's an alienation which had already appeared in Metropolitan Boston. An alienation which he apparently hoped would have been assuaged by his return home. He reminisces about an earlier time which he has apparently come back to find but he notes that that time was "Before I went discovering/ the Graveyard off Chaussée…" (p. 36). The Graveyard is an inner city community that comes to represent Lee's sojourn through the counterculture that was a reaction to the oppressiveness and alienation of the city.

Through all of this Lee eventually comes to epiphany. In *Kwéyòl Canticles* (p. 120) his subject has come from "the nondescript costume of the far city/ the profligate famine of Barnard's estates – / to the embracing plenitude of Kwadril shak shak and violon/ to that bright brooch in the glistening triangular foulard." This is not only a reference to Lee's personal journey that has led him to a deeper Christian faith, it is also a return to the source, a cultural as well as spiritual rejuvenation. Consistent with the overarching theme in this anthology, it is Lee finding his voice and himself – it is Saint Lucia/ Sent Lisi speaking confidently to the world.

Lee has become a recognized voice in Caribbean and world literature, and when anthologized along with writers like Walcott and Hippolyte, the gravitas of this collection becomes evident. In Hippolyte as in Lee, Saint Lucia affirms its voice. It affirms that Walcott, Garth St. Omer and others are not a transient phenomenon. It is this island-nation asserting itself in the march of History, not through the eyes of Henry Breen or other colonial chroniclers but on the tongue and by the pen of those who have mastered the word as Fanon would have said. And it is not the Master's Word or Voice, but its own distinctive voice.

Kendel Hippolyte has been recognized in international literature through a number of collections like *Word Planting, Fault Lines* and *Night Vision*. In a blurb to his recent collection, *Word Planting*, it is proffered that "…his poems address the dread reality of a Caribbean world of disappointed dreams, of sovereignty swamped by the new economic and cultural imperialism that masquerades under the mask of globalization…" (*Word Planting*: 2019). And again, "[He] draws upon all his verbal mastery and critical insight to draw sharp focus upon a nation in

flux, where urbanization expands and fragments his home of St. Lucia" (*Night Vision*: 2005).

In the poem, "Village": "the village that the mini-van was travelling to was vanishing/ as we drove. Somewhere in ourselves we knew that/…road gangs worked in the punishing/ heat and dust and noise and smell of progress towards what/ ever it was that progress was supposed to be leading" (p. 49); these lines evoke echoes of Dixon's "To A Dying Countryside" but its tone is measured, deliberate, despite the rushing mini-van, unlike the shorter lines and insistent rhythm of Dixon's. It may be because Kendel is writing this later in life, than Mac Donald was – the more deliberate engagement of maturing. His dismay at the trajectory of "development" that Walter Rodney would characterize as "under-development" (Rodney: *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa)* is palpable. The sensitivities of the two writers are not dissimilar.

In *Lines on a sidewalk* (p. 110) Hippolyte turns his attention more deliberately to the issues thrown up by environmental degradation. Consider this: "a true civilization builds its way of living/ at the seeming fault between humanity's fulfillment and nature's/ And perhaps if all our ways were like old flagstone paths, acknowledging the grass growing between our footsteps as well as the going of our feet/ we might eventually reach a different destination" (p. 111). A resolution of the issues of development and environmental degradation embraces an "acknowledgement of the of the old flagstone paths" – a return to what is elemental.

Adrian Augier and Jane King are also included here. Contemporaries of Hippolyte and Lee, and friends of Walcott, they have brought their unique voices to the developing Saint Lucian literary canon. In her poem *"*I cannot find this island*"* (p. 114) Jane King yearns to end the drought of vision that has turned her country into a wasteland where "we live merely by willing it." This pictures a certain lethargy and helplessness, because like her contemporaries she sees a country in which our sins, a warped sense of development, have found us out. The language assumes the gravity of biblical edict. She longs "to see this island once again/ emerald, shooting rainbows/ through the rain, shimmering…" (p. 115).

King is not necessarily speaking here of a return to a naïve pristinity. She is engaging with the issues of environmental and spiritual degradation that have turned her island into a drought-stricken landscape. She imagines she could be "a priestess…/ dancing around a churning fire/ that never would go out" – an awakening from resignation and lethargy, I suggest, to "make a path through doubt/bawling incantations/

screaming for rain" (p. 115). Bawling, screaming – not pleading! In *Geography for Robert,* she speaks again of "…this dark time/ as drought devours our land" (p. 38).

Her lines are crisp and urgent and are "as innocent as clay..." – the ground in which her people's lives are rooted, but she is certainly not naïve. Despite her nostalgia for lost times, is she suggesting that it will take a churning, pyrrhic experience to return this land to an ethos that acknowledges the grass growing between our footsteps and the old flagstones of our paths?

The themes of engagement with the issues of development, environment, social and economic marginalization that run through the anthology reflect a literature, and more specifically, a poetry that is at the cusp of the advocacy to break out of the mould of alienation and deprivation that the Caribbean and other parts of the postcolonial world have been locked into. These themes are clearly of global import, and contrast sharply with the sun, sea and sin imagery that has become a metaphor infusing these "destinations." In the very "naming" of our environment, we are also taking up "thunderstones" (or *Pyè Loway*, a Saint Lucian characterization of ancestral stone axes) against the violation of this aesthetic and the primacy of human dignity.

And then there is Adrian Augier's "…don't panic yet/ it's just a theory/ perhaps the children don't need our poetry" (p. 81). The question of whether our people and indeed "the children" who must carry forward Hippolyte's "true civilization" (p. 111) need the insight of our poetry is a poignant one. The perennial consideration of whether poetry, or for that matter literary engagement, changes anything is a troubling one. Adrian, another of Saint Lucia's (and the Caribbean's) notable voices, addresses this matter in his easy yet incisive style. His short, clean lines are contrasted with the longer, fluid lines of Kendel, or indeed some of the longer-lined poems of John Robert Lee but they are no less lucid and compelling.

Augier, like King, alludes to a drought: "on this soil/ there must not be a drought of poets/ even though some grow old and tired/ criss-crossing the same crumbling bridge/ of words" (p. 85). He suggests that the poet's art is a crumbling bridge of words, that there is a dearth of the spirit and insight that the poet's muse infuses society with. He appears to teeter on the brink of hopelessness. Augier worries that the "wise among us still expect/ society by some miracle to rationalize/ that there can be no funds for luxuries/ like theatres and libraries" (p. 83). But the

consideration that we should not panic, that it is only a theory supposes that this spectre of cultural desertification might be reversed.

His "Kawem's People" continues to address the dearth and drought afflicting the psyche of our people. This poem is more starkly hopeless and dark – despite the liveliness of its images. The issue of cultural drought as our modes of discourse are supplanted seems to be a re-curring theme with Augier as with King.

Speaking of the younger generation and its "need for poetry" this discourse would be wholly inadequate if it did not address the poetry of Vladimir Lucien. He is perhaps the most recognized of a younger cohort of Saint Lucian poets, having been awarded the prestigious Trinidadian NGC-BOCAS prize for literature, for his debut collection *Sounding Ground* (Peepal Tree, 2014). Derek Walcott had won the same prize a few years earlier. In Lucien, Saint Lucian literature continues to assert itself internationally in a way that belies the notion that small island states are inconsequential in the development of world literature. Through Lucien, Saint Lucia and the Caribbean continue to speak with a distinctive voice.

At a time when the Caribbean seems to be re-discovering itself in its bush brews, offered on supermarket shelves, from North America and elsewhere, Lucien is a potentially phenomenal discovery who offers us the "faith" of a refreshing brew of *Bush Tea* from his childhood: "your faith has always been this gathering of leaves/ this beetle of fire lying on its back/ this blossoming flower of boiling water" (p. 27). It is a bush brew that ostensibly continues the magic, the Obeah (as Lucien dares to characterize it), of stirring us up from the sleep of the "white magic" that Walcott speaks of. Vladimir Lucien speaks "of a simple kind/ of obeah that makes us rise from bed."

Lucien's is a fresh voice that suggests that the children do need poetry, after all. They may have already discovered this through the performance poetry that has become en vogue among poets like George 'Fish' Alphonse, Ras Isley, Glen Charlery, all anthologized here.

His use of language embodies a distinctive cadence that marks him as a significant voice. Whereas George "Fish" Alphonse ("Country Boy," p. 42) and Ras Isley Nelson ("Nowhere to Go," p. 46), two of his older compatriots, also speak eloquently in what has come to be characterized as Nation Language (after Kamau Brathwaite). They do this with the fluency and turn of phrase that is unique to performance poetry. Vladimir, on the other hand, brings to his poetry a similar energy – on the page.

He melds the oral and written language in ways that allow us to continue discovering that our poetry imparts to us a singular ability to define ourselves and our place in the world, as small Caribbean societies – despite the omnipresent prevalence of acculturation in ways that tend towards cultural erasure. Though the existential threat remains, Vladimir, like so many other young Caribbean poets, is an affirmation that the line continues and is an ageless one.

On a personal note: although I have been writing from youth, a contemporary of Lee and Hippolyte, I published my first collection, *Interstice,* in 2016. In a review of this book, Nahdjla Bailey (a Saint Lucian writer) says "George Goddard is a skillful and attractive poet whose work appeals on more than one front: certainly its accessibility…the clarity and sharpness of images make for a certain degree of lucidity" (*The Voice*: May 30, 2016). In this anthology, I offer poems both in English and Kwéyòl.

I am represented in *Sent Lisi: Poems and Art of Saint Lucia*, in three poems, two of which are presented in both English and Saint Lucian Kwéyòl. I am one of the few Saint Lucian poets who write in both languages. In the poem, "Morning Coffee," the image of my grandmother brewing home-milled coffee does not only conjure up in "an astoundingly flavourful book, a sensual collection that evokes…the stories and landscapes of yesteryear…the sounds and smells of it as well…the delightful odour of local coffee beans being parched" (Jane King, Foreword, Sent Lisi: p. xv). It is as well a returning to the source.

It is a returning not just in the sense of nostalgic reminiscence, but also in pointing to Caribbean life and its subsistence and traditional economic relations being supplanted increasingly by market economics, more thoroughly so than in the old colonial times. Walcott speaks ominously of "the doomed acres/ where yet another luxury hotel will be built/ with ordinary people fenced out…" (p. 53). I note here: "This morning/ I am drinking/ Nescafe" (p. 40). The international food conglomerate now overwhelms the local traditions with its products.

In the poem, "Islet, Choc Bay" (p. 4), like King, Lee, Lucien and others in this anthology, I recall memorable moments of my childhood. But these are not just holograms of the past that I attempt to touch and hold on to. The very act of its translation into Kwéyòl (p. 5) is a reclaiming of one's identity. Lucien does it by melding Saint Lucian vernacular into Standard English. I try to evoke this with the nuances of Nation Language as it is captured in a translation of the full poem.

Both of the poems referenced here were originally in English. However, many of my poems are Kwéyòl originals which bring a new dimension altogether to the writing. With the increasing acceptability of Kwéyòl and other Nation Languages as part of the Caribbean literary canon whole new vistas are being opened up. It is not just a matter now of our myths being literature. It is the blossoming of the sounds, movement and rhythm of Saint Lucian and indeed Caribbean language and life through the medium of new imaginings.

The Kwéyòl offerings of other writers like Alphonse, Armelle Mathurin, Marcian JnPierre are of note as well. This book also includes the work of Hazel Simmons-McDonald, Irvin Desir, Patricia Turnbull, Travis Weekes, Modeste Downes and Glenn Charlery. Downes and Charlery bring a certain sharp-edged protest poetry, less nuanced than many of their other fellow writers gathered here.

While this work cannot begin to treat more comprehensively the works of these collected writers, this essay, with a deliberately personal input, is offered as an outline of the trends in Saint Lucian writing, specifically in poetry. Poetry seems to be the chosen genre for Saint Lucian writers, and one wonders whether the influence of Derek Walcott is responsible for this. Many of the poets represented in this anthology have been successful in creating a place for themselves in international reckoning. For a 238 square-mile island-nation the voices and styles are many but they surely are not just indistinct din and babble. This anthology suggests:

> the clear voice of a people no longer coiled up
> under rocks and afraid.
> We speak: the earth's wretched are!" *(Interstice*, 2016, p. 56).

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- **George Goddard** is a Saint Lucian writer. He published his first collection of poetry *Interstice* in 2016. His work is included in *Sent Lisi: Poems and Art of Saint Lucia* (2014) and in *Roseau Valley and other poems for George Odlum* (2003). His work has appeared as well in *BIM*, a long-lived and prestigious Caribbean literary magazine (2020 & 2019), *The Caribbean Writer* (2017), *Interviewing the Caribbean* (2017), *The Missing Slate* (2015), *ArtsEtc* (Barbados) among others.

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BETWEEN BORROWED FRAMES AND READING GLASSES: THE TEXT IN THE CLASSROOM

Jasbir Jain

Any attempt at defining 'theory' comes up against several problems. Is it an approach, a method, a tool or a concept? Where does it belong, where grounded and how emerged? Does it emanate from the text, political environment, ideology, means of production or epistemological and philosophical debates or does it exist as complete in itself and can neutrally be applied across all cultures and histories? Perhaps all these and much more but in the main, no matter from where we get into the act of theorizing, it is an attempt to comprehend the nature of 'Knowing' and the meaning of the text and its travels between the real and the unreal.

The literary text has had to contest certain position throughout the 20th century. First it was literary history engaged in building up continuities and national ideas; then came New Criticism interested in pinning down the text to its confines; followed a whole spate of linguist theories, semiotics, rhetoric and language structures and anthropologists and behaviour psychologists all jumped into the fray. But it was the politics of violence which, when it invaded intellectual debates, pulled many an intellectual into its vortex, rending many of them into exiles.

Theory was born of all these shifts and while literary theory concerned itself with processes of creation, critical theory focussed on the cultural and political fields of production. I propose to discuss the impact of theory, the possibility of reading without it and the strategy of reading alongside it. Critical theory traces its birth to the Frankfurt school where philosophy jostled with politics in a multidimensional and multidisciplinary context but it was not born out of nothingness – the literary imagination with its fragmented and rebellious characters who walked out of their roles, the existential crises that overtook creative imagination – all contributed to its birth. Pirandello, Kafka and more than them Dostoyevsky who preceded both and whose work was perhaps even more expansive and elusive in its concerns with the real and the unreal, the divided human being, the nature of crime – the unknown side of the human unconscious – than many another later writer. It is not surprising that many a theorist engaged with Dostoyevsky. The thirties and after witnessed a different kind of helplessness as well as a disintegration – the holocaust, the dismantling of imperial

strongholds and the rise of new dictatorships. The very nature of human existence was under threat.

It is in this period – the 30s to the 70s – that several thinkers wrote their major – Heidegger, Adorno, Horkheimer, Sartre, Foucault, de Man and Bakhtin (whose work surfaced only in the early 60s). These positions looked for meaning in a world in flux while the literary text offered a tentative and a temporary island, yet the progress and reception of theory varied on account of situational locations and historical forces. England was slow to open out to theory and American scholars wondered why continental theory should engage them. We, in India, leaned towards literary theory guided more by the cultural agencies of western powers than our own needs. But the Yale School of critics resisted the onslaught of linguistic concerns. J. Hillis Miller in 1979 in "On Edge: The Crossways of Contemporary Theory" questioned the uncritical acceptance and application of literary theory while Paul de Man in "The Resistance to Theory" (1982) argued for the primacy of the text. Miller privileged the text for its "inexhaustible strangeness" (402) while Paul de Man wrote that the resistance to theory is "a resistance to the use of language about language," it is therefore a resistance "to the possibility that language contains factors or functions that cannot be reduced to imitation" (351). It was the 'human' side of the reader which was being denied. Predetermined frames, several critics were of the view, subtract from the interpretative act. T. S. Eliot and Helen Gardner alike resisted the notion of heavily guided decoding. Eliot felt that it was as if a machine had been pulled apart, leaving the reader to put the pieces together, minimising a creative relationship (qtd. by Gardner) while Helen Gardner in her lecture "Present Discontent" commented that the reader occupied in 'making texts' rather than reading them has mislaid one of the greatest human qualities: "intellectual curiosity, the desire to enlarge his being by learning about something other than himself" (525).

Where are we in India in these debates? Is there a direct encounter between reader and text in the classroom? Is research in the academic field rigorous enough? Are there sufficiently good number of journals available for theoretical debate? Is the young scholar trained adequately to think independently and creatively? Where are we vis-a-vis the rest of the world? Plainly speaking, we are sadly inadequate on several of these fronts and the minor visibility is primarily emerging from diasporic location and other disciplines. Not that theory is not being evolved at home, but it has not received the attention it deserves. Our knowledge systems are held to ransom by the market forces. I

maybe generalising and am open to correction but the barrier where we stood with T. S. Eliot's “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and the D. J. Enright and Ernst De Chickera anthology was broken only when M.Phil. courses were started in the late 1970s. First Handy and Westbrook, then David Lodge's volumes and finally the home grown Sethuraman anthology moved outside their limits. When theory in its different forums came to us, we accepted it. But we did not debate it by positing any indigenous approach. But have these shifts led to any improvement in the quality of research? The quality of publication is only sporadically good, rarely rising above the level of the descriptive. Apparently, one needs to begin with the classroom and its pedagogical approaches.

Pedagogy is a system of facilitating learning. In a literature classroom the equation between the text and the pedagogical approach can very easily be disturbed by the different agencies engaged in the process. The test of good teaching is the disturbance of the equation. Prioritising the 'act of reading' it is important for a questioning to be unmediated. This calls for a partial effacement of the teacher. Teaching must capitalise on what David Dabydeen describes as “the student's initial innocence” rather than a theoretical framework. The energy spent on “mastering the techno chip jargon of theory,” Dabydeen, like Soyinka, feels is likely to lead to “a second epoch of colonisation” (Dabydeen 29).

This is the risk I have hinted at in the title of my paper: the unmediated or piecemeal transference of theoretical jargon to the interpretative act. David Dabydeen in his essay, “Teaching West Indian Literature in Britain” is analysing an encounter between two cultures and is at the same time questioning the basic assumptions of postcolonial theory which stand the risk of being essentialized. The challenge, Dabydeen points out, “to the West Indian teacher is to abandon Western critical theory as being inappropriate to an understanding of West Indian literatures…. The West Indian Teacher will then have to offer for analysis a set of propositions about the history and the culture of the region, a particular region, derived from the body of creative writing itself…. The books should speak to each other, the task of the teacher being to host the dialogue” (29). Dabydeen's essay offers a blueprint for a pedagogical approach: the text, the location, concepts, nature to the text, cultural framework, and theory in that order.

In a lesser known work of Mulk Raj Anand, *Roots and Flowers* (Dharwar Lectures 1972) Anand comments on his own novel

Untouchable and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and opens them out first in locational situation before throwing them open to Joycean influence, demonstrating the coming together of diverse kinds of narrative processes. Both Anand and Dabydeen share the feeling that any theoretical framing should follow the reading of the text – and not precede it.

Theory, in order to be grasped, needs to be applied but pedagogical practices do not, ordinarily, knit them together for two reasons: literary criticism and theory constitute separate courses in most departments while literary texts cover several courses, they are not used as related to each other; second, we are still not open to Interdisciplinary Studies. Literature students are not generally free to audit courses in philosophy, history or psychology and only marginally exposed to them. A third reason – we are not situationally located. Even Indian texts, which are steeped in Indian culture, such as Anantha Murthy's *Samsk*ara and those in particular social conditions like Kancha Ilaiah's *Why I am not a Hindu*, are analysed through borrowed frameworks – both theory and text are lifted out of their locations. Again, not sufficient attention is paid to the fact that a writer often rebels against his predecessors. Eliot has drawn attention to this in his own context, but histories of literature also provide ample evidence – the Bronte novels challenged the Austenian mores; Beckett's silence is a turning away from the onslaught of New Criticism. Art rebels against domination and homogenisations and creates its own counter position. This is how theory is born. When we engage with a text written in earlier times, we work in a double time location and both – the text and the reader – travel the distance in between. The past haunts us. Why did Bond turn to Shakespeare's *King Lear* and why do we have a remake of *Devdas* every twenty years or so: a novel written by a young man in his teens in colonial India? What connection does Kafka's story "Great Wall of China" have with the barriers mankind has erected? As we work with these queries their multiple locations come together opening out theoretical positions.

If academic objective is to equip the young scholar for research, then it is obvious that this too, like the interpretative act, needs to begin with a questioning in a more fundamental way – an accepted statement can be opened out for interrogation. The researcher needs to explore the passive acceptance of ideas thrust on us regarding the existence of native concepts, ideologies, and indigenous narrative structures. Comparisons often obliterate differences, such as the Black situation being compared to the Dalits. Research is a continuing process which begins

with questioning and only later goes on to conceptualise. Heidegger began thinking about the problem of 'being' in 1907. It was only after twenty years, in 1927, that his work came out. Identifying a problem is born out of a questioning, of going against the current. Theoretical approaches own their beginnings to defiance, to a sense of discontentment or resistance to the conventional. Queries addressed only towards the meaning of the text neglect to open out into myriad directions. The narrative form is fluid and despite its dependence on language and structure a great deal slips through these morphological definitions. Once when I was working with child narrators, I realised that there was an element which could not be captured through language. It was not embedded, it hovered around for the reader to develop the meaning. Was this narrativity?

In research reading of texts which we term 'theoretical' is incredibly useful. But in the main they are texts of philosophy, psychology, politics, and a host of other disciplines. They are born out of a questioning and address themselves to them. They also raise other questions for the reader. They evolve out of a desire to enter the unknown and unsaid but in tracing origins and continuities they join the ongoing discourse. For the young scholar both questioning and debate provide an entry point. I would suggest that the scholars be motivated to look up Encyclopaedic entries on the conceptual terms they encounter and discuss them in class. This would subvert the tendency to borrow uncritically. In support of my position, I turn to an essay by Professor Daya Krishna, "Thinking vs Thought; Strategies for Conceptual Creativity" (1987), which traces the process of conceptualisation. The initial step is to question because to ask a question is to disrupt the closed circle of the accepted knowledge and to open out a vista for new thought (29). Questioning does not relate only to the meaning, it also addresses itself to the unsaid, "the hidden questions which lie behind what is said" (29). This is what will make the reader a partner in the thinking process. The text, for Daya Krishna, is an unfinished process, "unfinishable in principle" and needs to be freed from its solitary, individual monadic existence. The hidden text is in fact a suppressed text, suppressed not in the Freudian sense of repression, but suppressed for intellectual or aesthetic reasons. (I offer Beckett and Kafka as two examples, which refute the idea of linguistic transparency). Daya Krishna offers aesthetic and intellectual reasons, but in addition political realities also push writing into layered expressions. When we locate censored or banned texts, their subversive act causes a rupture both in literary traditions and power equations. My

reference here is to Rushdie's *Satanic Verses.* The act of banning (such as Ramanujan's "Many *Ramayana*s") is an acknowledgement of the disruptive power of the text. The act of questioning rescues the text or the idea under discussion from any pre-determined meaning, given to it by tradition or theory. Daya Krishna with reference to religious texts and presumably the presence of religious thought, refers to the need of being liberated from "a theological hangover which has in texted so much of negative enterprise in all parts of the globe" (31). One could relate this act or questioning to the "initial innocence" of the reader. Both recognise the creative potential of a fresh response and restore an openness to the text.

Given our academic time schedules, where does the solution lie? In working out a more relevant and demanding pedagogical environment or a fresh look at the course modules? A lot of good and innovative work is being done but it does not compensate one for the mediocrity of the rest. Of the problems which surface in research are the lack of balance between descriptive and theoretical frames. A look at some of the Indian journals will bear me out. Sans tradition, sans questioning are we writing research papers or book reviews? Decidedly we are guilty both as teachers and learners. And this compels one to come back to the classroom and pedagogy. Pedagogy needs to become multidirectional, more self-critical and participatory. I am arguing in favour of a "critical pedagogy of place" which David Grunewald views as a method which challenges the assumptions taken for granted in the dominant culture. Grunewald's recommendation duplicate what Daya Krishna has already suggested. But in another sense, our pedagogy is not one of place nor situational. Sethuraman's anthology includes only Aurobindo's essay, which is hardly ever discussed. We need to press for the inclusion of works such as Daya Krishna's essay on the processes of conceptualisation, Grunewald's "A Critical Pedagogy of Place," critics such as David Dabydeen, and a couple of challenging Indian thinkers, extracts on narrativity such as the "Preface" in Rahi Masoom Raza's novel *Aadha Gaon* which is located right in the middle of the novel. Essays and writings where some problems are posited raise questions which we need to address and create a multilogue between philosophical and aesthetic systems emerging from different cultures that may lead to fresh thought. It may generate newness and bring about a shift from the domination of west-centric theory.

I have argued here in favour of a critical pedagogy which is also culturally relevant and lays emphasis on questioning and debate rather than explanation, an application over transmission of information and

the spilling of the classroom to the outside. Do we or do we not have the imagination to address these problems and become part of a larger discourse?

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- **Professor Jasbir Jain,** formerly an Emeritus Fellow and Sahitya Akademi Writer-in-Residence at the University of Rajasthan, is now an independent scholar. She has also taught at several universities abroad including Tampere (Finland), Copenhagen (Denmark) and several US universities. Her recent publications include: *The Diaspora Writes Home, Forgiveness: Between Memory and History, Subcontinental Histories: Literary Reflections in the nineteenth and twentieth Centuries* and *Interpreting Cinema: Adaptations, Intertextualities, Art Movements.*

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DEATH IN THE NOVELS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

Smita Jha

A close and careful reading of the novels of Virginia Woolf gives us a ready impression of the fact that the writer of these books is actually aware of the problem of death. No doubt, she is conscious also of the beauty and charms, the splendors and majesty of life, but it is clear that she is far more conscious of the all-powerfulness and all-pervasiveness of death than of anything else. It really looks extra-ordinary that Woolf should be so much obsessed with the problem of death, and yet it is not difficult to understand as to why she had to devote a good deal of her time, energy and talent to tackling this engaging problem in her novels. If life is mystery to her, so is death too; in fact, the mystery of life assumes an added piquancy and meaningfulness if and when it is examined in the light of death mystery. Virginia Woolf seems to be so much obsessed with the idea of death that in novel after novel she goes on discussing the nature and form of life and of death in various ways.

It goes without saying that these deaths in Virginia Woolf's novels that figure as references or reminiscences form important and unavoidable links in the plots of her novels and that they have undeniably a technical value of their own. We may say that she remained preoccupied with the burden of death throughout her life; in fact, life and death keep on acting and reacting upon each other in her novels. It is against this background that the present study proposes to deal with the mystery of life and death in the select novels of Virginia Woolf.

Virginia Woolf, says J. K. Johnstone, "began her literary career with the same care and deliberation that characterizes her novels, and she pursued it with unhurried industry" (320). Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915, and it was followed four years later by *Night and Day*. Her third novel, *Jacob's Room*, was published in 1922, and thereafter we come across such of her novels as *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1925, *To the Lighthouse* in 1927, *The Waves* in 1931, *The Tears* in 1937, and *Between the Acts*, published posthumously, in 1941. These eight novels were, thus, published over a period of twenty-six years from 1915 to 1941. Besides novels, Mrs. Woolf also wrote *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), a collection of short sketches, two Feminist books, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938), and three biographies or near-biographies, *Orlando*(1928), *Flush*(1933) and *Roger Fry*(1940). The two volumes of *The Common Reader,* published

in 1925 and 1932, contain a number of her critical essays, while six other volumes of her writings, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942), *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (1943), *The Moment* (1947), *The Captain's Death Bed* (1950), *A Writer's Diary* (1953), and *Granite and Rainbow* (1958), have been published posthumously. There are reasons to believe that a good deal of Virginia Woolf's writing still remains unearthed, and attempts are being steadily made for discovering and identifying them as also for getting them duly published. Mrs. Woolf was indeed a prolific writer and she kept on writing ceaselessly till her tragic death in March 1941.

Virginia Woolf is one of those modern writers whose creative pursuits have been the favorite haunt of critics and scholars and it is quite natural that a good deal has been written about the various aspects of her achievement as an artist. We find a large number of books and articles which stand addressed to the task of analyzing her stream of consciousness technique, her prose style and the manner in which she is able to project her characters in the novels. Much has also been written on the element of time in her novels, on the nature and function of her symbols, and on the psychological orientation of her fictional art.

Besides these attempts, efforts have also been made to discuss Virginia Woolf's positivism, her advocacy of the cause of feminism, her contribution to the corpus of biographical writing, and the nature of her art and vision in relation to the Bloomsbury ethic. And of late there have been serious attempts to undertake a meaningful study of her short stories, general essays and critical writings. It has been sought to be pointed out to us that Mrs. Woolf did really cover a remarkably large distance in the course of her journey from her position as a mere reviewer of books to her emergence as a writer of profound novels. In this paper I would like to discuss in detail the treatment of the theme of death in her novels which is indeed a very delicate aspect of her artistic vision; it requires patient endeavor to be able to make a fair and comprehensive assessment of it, and, as much, it is proper to give the problem in question the kind and degree of attention it necessarily deserves.

In her famous essay, "The Death of the Moth," Virginia Woolf presents to us a very poignant picture of the moth's struggle against death, of its ultimate death, and thus of the losing battle that life wages against death. She says:

> One could only watch the extraordinary efforts made by those tiny legs against an oncoming doom which could, had it chosen, have submerged an entire city, not merely a city, but masses of human beings; nothing, I knew, had any chance against death. Nevertheless, after a pause of exhaustion the legs fluttered again.
>
> It was superb this last protest, and so frantic that he Succeeded at last in righting himself…. As I looked at the dead moth, this minute wayside triumph of so great a force over so mean an antagonist filled me with wonder. Just as life had been strange a few minutes before, so death was now as strange. The moth, having righted himself, now lay most decently and uncomplainingly composed. O yes, he seemed to say, death is stronger than I am (10-11).

At the end of *The Waves* we find Bernard, one of the six principal figures in the novel, speaking to himself:

> What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O death! (211).

At this point it is pertinent to draw a line of distinction between those deaths in Virginia Woolf's novels which work as references or fragments of recollections or reminiscences and those which actually take place in them. We come across references to a large number of deaths in her novels; the death of Jenkinson, Theresa (Rachel's mother), Venning's mother, Terence Hewet's Father, Paley, Mrs. Paley's brother, Evelyn M.'s father, Mrs. Hunt's son, Mackenzie (the famous explorer) and Susan Jane in *The Voyage Cut:* those of Mary Detchet's mother, Mrs. Hillbery's mother, Queenie Colquhoun and Ralph Denham's father in *Night and Day*; those of Seabrook (Elizabeth Flander's husband), Edward, Florinda's father, Miss Wargrave and Miss Birkbeck in *Jacob's Room*; those of John, Justin Parry, Sylvia (Clarisa's sister) and Kilman (Miss Kilman's brother) in *Mrs. Dalloway*; the death of William Bankes's wife in *To The Lighthouses*; that of Susan's mother in the *Waves*; the deaths of Miss Ann, Miss Matilda, Mrs. Potter's children, Parnell, Miss Pym, General Artbuthnot, Charles and Nelly in *The Years*, and the death of Mrs. Giles Oliver's mother in

Between the Acts. And the deaths which do really take place in Mrs. Woolf's novels as part of our immediate experience are those of Rachel in *The Voyage Out,* Jacob in *Jacob's Room*, Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Mrs. Ramsay, Prue Ramsay and Andrew Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, Percival and Rhode in *The Waves*, and Mrs. Rose Pargiter, Sir Digby Pargiter and Eugenie Pargiter in *The Years.*

It really looks extraordinary that Virginia Woolf should have devoted so much of her time, energy and talent to tackling the theme of death in her novels. Being the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, one of the outstanding intellectuals and writers of the Victorian age, it was only natural that she should have enjoyed a fair degree of honor, peace and affluence in life. Sir Leslie Stephen was a well-connected person both on the side of his father and mother; his house was the frequent haunt, among others, of such eminent personalities as Henry James, Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell, and there was a definite and pronounced kind of literary, philosophical and educational atmosphere about his house. Virginia Woolf grew up, along with her sister, Vanessa, and her brothers, Thoby and Adrian, in this very atmosphere. Moreover, even after her father's death she kept up the tradition of her family, for she did always occupy a place of unusual distinction in the Bloomsbury Group. The meetings of this group, of which such eminent figures as Bertrand Russell, Lord Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry, Oliver Bell and E. M. Forster were the members, used to be held almost regularly at the residence of the Stephens. And yet, in spite of educational enlightenment, cultural heritage and material affluence, we find her nearly obsessed with the problem of death in her novels. However, this particular kind of obsession, at least in the case of Virginia Woolf, does not seem to be anything unusual if we try to examine and analyze the outwardly even and calm, though really irregular and ruffled, course of her life.

"The first great crisis in the lives of the Stephen children's," says John Lehmann, "was the death of their mother Julia, in 1895. Viriginia, at thirteen, was deeply attached to her and was aware of the bond of happy love that had existed between her and her husband. The effect on Sir Leslie was catastrophic" (13). If the effect of Julia's death on Sir Leslie Stephen was 'catastrophic', so was it on Virginia. Very soon after her mother's death Virginia suffered a mental breakdown, a sort of wild depression that left her almost a physical and mental invalid for quite some time. No doubt, she recovered, but her slow and precarious recovery was disturbed violently by the death of her step-sister Stella, in 1897. Virginia got upset once again because it was she who looked

after the Stephen household after Julia's death. Somehow or other, Virginia managed to survive this disaster too in the family, but she was hit once more by the death of her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, in 1904. "The result was that … she had far more alarming breakdown, which one cannot call anything but madness" (14). However, it was very slowly and cautiously that she was brought back to the normal state of her mind and was made, at least temporarily, to shed off the unhappy memory of deaths in the family.

Unfortunately, in 1906, her elder brother, Thoby, died of an undiagnosed fever he had possibly contracted in the course of his journey abroad. "Thoby's death," remarks John Lehmann, "was a shattering blow, from which, it seems, Virginia never entirely recovered, though it did not cause the kind of mental crisis that had followed the deaths of her mother and father" (19).

Virginia's direct and nerve-shattering encounter with these deaths caused serious and substantial psychological changes in her. The atmosphere of violence and destruction that engulfed and darkened England during and following the First World War aggravated her rather incurable morbidity and depression. In the second year of the Second World War Virginia Woolf was so terribly affected by the destruction of her personal library and the general climate of tension pervading in England that, in a fit of madness, she committed suicide in 1941 by drowning herself in a river. It hardly requires emphasizing that, in one way or another, throughout her life Virginia Woolf remained preoccupied with the burden of death; it worked as a single constant factor in her psychological make-up, and, as such, it is certainly no surprise that she tackles the theme of death in her novels. In fact, it is her awareness of death as a haunting presence that makes her alive to the meaning of life, and, thus, life and death coexist and act and react upon each other in her novels.

The deaths that figure in Virginia Woolf's novels by way of reference or reconciliation may not seem to be important or significant in themselves, and yet it is difficult to ignore or dismiss them as mere flat items of information or stray incidents. On closer inspection they are found to be the components of the general structural pattern of these novels or, at times, pointers to the shape of things to come.

The very many deaths that are referred to in *The Voyage Out*, such as those of Jenkinson, Theresa (Rachel's mother), Arthur Venning's mother, Terence Hewet's father, Paley, Mrs. Paley's brother, Evelyn Murgatroyd's father and Susan Jane, caused either by some mishap in

hunting or drowning or war or suicide, not only prompt us to view things in retrospect but also creates an atmosphere of suspense and sadness in the novel. The reference to the death of Meckensie, the famous explorer, who died of fever in the course of his expedition to South America, seems to be rather an unmistakable, even though remote, pointer to Rachel's impending death at Santa Marina in South America itself (339).

The references to or reconciliations of four deaths in *Day and Night*, there being no actual deaths in this novel, serve a tangible and specific purpose. It is through the remembrance of their dead mothers that both Mary Datcbet and Mrs. Hilbery try to review the course of their own lives. It is indeed meaningful that in Virginia Woolf's novels deaths take place or are described as having taken place during or after travels abroad. Perhaps Mrs. Woolf could not forget the death of her elder brother, Thoby Stephen, caused in a similar situation. The reference to Queen Colquhoun's death in Jamaica, during travel, is a case in point. And the mention of the death of Ralph Denham's father gives us, at least, some ideas of the physical as well as psychological state of his being.

It is indeed difficult to piece together the references to deaths that figure in *Jacob's Room,* for the novel in question is Virginia Woolf's first serious exercise in the stream-of-consciousness technique, and yet the references to such deaths in the novel as those of Seabrook Flanders, Edward, Florida's father and Mrs. Duggan's husband and children seek to bring out the tragic aspect of life, or to suggest death's stranglehold on life. The death of old Miss Birkbeck is mentioned by way of parenthesis to give us the relevant information that Jacob Flanders has been able to travel abroad on the strength of the legacy he has inherited from her.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, through a series of remembrance, we are told about a number of deaths in retrospect: Mrs. Foxcroft and Lady Boxborough remembering John who died in the war; Clarissa Dalloway suddenly being reminded of an old man dropping dead in a field; Peter Walsh re-membering the dead Justin Parry (Clarissa's father), Sylvia (Clarissa's sister) and Helen (Clarissa's aunt); and Miss Doris Kilman pointing to the death of her brother in war. All these deaths recollected by different characters at different places in the novel make us painfully aware of the drift and tension, agony and tumult, of life in the present century.

The only example of death, mentioned by way of reference, in *To the Lighthouse* is that of Mr. Bankes's wife. Mr. Bankes is a brother, a

devoted worker, and all that is intended through this death is to impress upon us the unusual state of Mr. Bankee's mind. And in *The Waves* Susan remembers her mother who is reported to have died of the hideous disease of cancer. It is nothing unnatural that in *The Years* which records the changes perceptible in the English society over a period of nearly fifty years, from 1880 to the post-first World War phase, rather in the Arnold Bennett manner, we get references to such deaths as those of Miss Ann, Miss Matilds, Mrs. Potter's children, Pernell, Miss Pym, General Arbuthnot, Charles, Nelly and Colonel Abel Pargiter. Concerned less with individuals and more with "the whole of the present society," Viriginia Woolf stresses in it the changes that society undergoes. The Pargiters, like the Forsytes in Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*, become symbols of changing middle-class society" (125). The reference, in *Between the Acts,* to the death of Mrs. Giles Oliver's mother in India is only a link in the whole chain of such references or reconciliations we get in Virginia Woolf's novels (186).

A brief survey of these deaths—deaths presented to us by way of reference or reconciliation—takes us necessarily and rather inevitably to a dissuasion of the significance or implication of those deaths in Virginia Woolf's novels that form part of our immediate experience. The first example of this kind that deserves mention is the tragic death of Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out.* Miss Rachel Vinrace, aged twenty-four, goes, with a host of people, to Santa Marina in South America on an expedition. It is here that she encounters Terence Hewet, and slowly, though steadily, Rachel and Terence come to love each other. This encounter is Rachel's first pleasant experience in an otherwise cheerless life. In fact, even as Rachel and Terence get "engaged to marry each other" (355), Helen Ambrose, while trying to guard her niece, Rachel, against all possible disasters, keeps on thinking of death: "Her mind left the scene and occupied itself with anxieties for Ridley, for her children, for far-off things, such as old age and poverty and death" (340).

It is almost as a sequel to Helen's apprehensions that soon, thereafter, Rachel falls ill, gets delirious, and dies. And it is indeed ironic as also poignant that only a little before her death we find Rachel and Terence speaking of "an order, a pattern which made life reasonable" (366), of a "calm" (384), a "quiet" (384), a "certainty" (384) leading to "satisfaction" (385) in life. In the entire chapter xxv of *The Voyage Out* Virginia Woolf gives a movingly graphic account of Rachel's illness, her delirious condition when she sees in a vision "an old woman slicing a man's head off with a knife" (413), and her death. J. K.

Johnstone seems to be clinching the issue when he observes that *The Voyage Out* is a "quest for reality" (323).

The stillness and mystery of death and the tumult and excitement of life offer a tempting invitation to Virginia Woolf. Her second novel, *Night and Day*, is different from *The Voyage Out in* the sense that we do not find any character actually dying in this novel and that it deals with "the conventions and commonplaces" (13). *Night and Day* may, then, be called a novel of fact, and yet in this book too Virginia Woolf makes occasional probes into the meaning and mystery of life and death.

In her next novel, *Jacob's Room*, which does not have either plot or characterization in the traditional sense of the term, the central character is one Jacob Flanders, son of Betty Flanders who has been a widow for two years and who has committed herself to the task of looking after her sons very carefully. In this novel we are brought face to face with the suddenness and violence of Jacob's death; in his case, death seems to be a rude interruption in the general flow of life. Virginia Woolf seems to be of the view that life, in spite of all its beauty and pleasures, is only a procession of shadows.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* we meet in Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, a mentally deranged character who is out and out a victim of psychosis, of a feeling of eternal suffering and eternal loneliness. He tortures himself, and commits suicide by flinging himself out of the window. His death indeed is so sudden and so violent. Septimus, in fact, happened to be a promising young man; it is natural that he volunteers himself for the war, for England, with determination and valour of France, but subsequently develops a hunch that he just could not feel. Whatever it may be, Septimus's death is an attempt to save the privacy and dignity of soul in the modern crowded, shell-torn world. Death is indeed a haunting presence in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Virginia Woolf does speak of the ecstasy and vitality and charms of life, but she speaks here also of the terror and worthlessness and wreckage of life. In *To the Lighthouse* Prue Ramsay dies because of some illness connected with childbirth, while Andrew Ramsay dies fighting in France where he is blown up to pieces in shell explosion. These two cases of death are profoundly tragic, for both die in the prime of their youth. Mrs. Ramsay dies suddenly, and it is difficult to guess what actually brings about her death. The deaths of Prue Ramsay and Andrew Ramsay may be accounted for in terms of the functioning of the brute forces of nature, the dispelling of dreams, or the beastliness

of man, but the spiritual presence of Mrs. Ramsay in the novel prompts us to think that there may be, or is, a life beyond the grave.

Although in *The Waves* we encounter six characters, it is the two of them, Bernard and Rhode, that do seem to be immediately relevant. Rhode is a dreamer, an idealist, and has no real contact with life. It is no surprise that she commits suicide. In *The Waves* Virginia Woolf tries to resolve the seeming contradiction between the flux and mutability of life on the one hand and the fixity and constancy of reality on the other. Here the waves stand for individual selves or consciousness, while the sea represents reality. The struggles and changes of life do come to an end with what we call death, but death, maintains Virginia Woolf, is not annihilation, but resurrection, an entry into a greater and more glorious life. *The Years* is a period novel that records the changes taking place in Europe or England from 1880 to 1937, and yet here too Virginia Woolf tackles the problem of life and of death in her own peculiarly serious manner. It is through the image of hard-blowing, ruthless, scraping, scourging wind that Mrs. Woolf gets us ready for Pargiter. These two deaths remind us of the havoc that the First World War had caused to human society and point to the reverberations of the Second World War that were so clearly audible to people then. However, it is the death of Mrs. Rose Pargiter in the novel that takes us directly to the problem of life and of death in it. Eleanor Pargiter looks upon life and death as the bubble and the stream respectively, and through her Virginia Woolf, perhaps expresses her own belief in the life beyond death, in the unbroken continuity of life. The problem of life and the problem of death, thus, turn out essentially to be a problem of perpetual discovery.

Though no deaths take place in two of her novels, *Night and Day* and the posthumously published book, *Between the Acts*, it is not difficult to see that Virginia Woolf gives serious and sustained thought, in her novels, to the problem of death. Death, according to Virginia Woolf, may be looked upon as a cruel sport or a wanton game, but it is much subtler and much profounder than what it seems to be. And it is here that Mrs. Woolf expresses her belief in the continuity of life, in life beyond the grave. If mysticism could be defined as an excursion into the unknown or an expedition into the uncharted regions of consciousness, then her attitude towards death may justifiably be called mystical or metaphysical. She may not have tried to build up “a transcendental theory” (168) of death, and yet her belief in the gap, the dislocation between “the word and the reality” (436) seems to be firm.

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- **Dr. Smita Jha** is Professor of English in the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee. She has published over 55 papers in refereed Journals of literature like Routledge, SAGE, OUP. She has been the recipient of a fellowship from British Colombia in 2009. She has attended more than 50 International Conferences and chaired sessions in USA and Spain. Her research interests include Indian Writing in English, Commonwealth Literature, Diasporic literature, Linguistics, ELT, Postcolonial Writings, Contemporary Literary theories, Gender and Cultural Studies. She is Member, Editorial Board, *English Language Teaching & Linguistics Studies* international open-access journal published by Scholink, LA, USA. Engaged in numerous social and cultural activities, she is Nodal Officer, Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyaan (MHRD).

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IT'S COVID, STUPID…

Omkar Sane

2019 is Covid's birth year. But 2020 is when it came into its own. So, calling it Covid19 is just unfair on good ol' 2019. That was a fun year. Just some good ol' bombings, genocides, hunger, protests, inequality of all kinds, an odd jungle fire, some storms – easy peasey.

Covid20 was supposed to be the break. But that it has done is just revealed what we probably knew but didn't want to accept.

There's a Billion too Many

As a 1980s school kid, a billion were a measure of stars or grains of sand, not a country's population, let alone the world's. Today, we're far too many of us. So, when Covid20 visited, no matter how rich or poor the country, doctors had to make tough choices of playing passing-the-parcel with ventilators. Europeans found out what a Bihari always knew – getting treated on a wooden bench in the corridor of an overcrowded hospital. Nobody was rich enough to have dignity in death. The outrage followed the shock. How are there not enough beds? Didn't we have the best health infrastructure in the world? Were we sleeping all along? Well, we were, and given that we're at around 7 billion today, evidently, with each other. No infrastructure is enough to accommodate us. Except Nature of course. Maybe that's what they mean when they say the universe is expanding.

Nature > Sapiens

Covid20 is just Mother Nature stepping in to reign-in her most petulant, selfish, misbehaved child. It's her telling us to shut up and give her some time to cool down and think about what she wishes to do with us. She's been around for billions of years and will continue to be around for another billion odd. Nature does not need people. People need nature. Since sapiens forgot that, she reminded us in a way we'd understand. An odd tsunami or a flood or a fire just wasn't cutting it anymore. But what did we do? We said game on. Tough luck mom, we have the internet.

A Competition called Covid20

We finally got our wish – sitting at home and doing nothing. We had a chance to break away from the human anthill. To break free of the trapping of expectations. But, we did the opposite. We sat at home and tried doing everything. The internet became the playing field of the

dreadfully mediocre. We made Covid20 a competition of ambition – oh, we have time – grow a hobby, achieve more, do more, be more, listen more, become more. Here's a podcast. Here's a new video. Here's a recipe; where's your cake? Here's a new subscription. How dare you just sit at home? You have to be productive. Look at Bezos. Do you know Shakespeare wrote *Lear* in lockdown? You have to outdo, out-achieve everyone, what will you tell people when this is over? Productivity became your debt, not your choice. We never realised that this was a competition nobody was winning.

Money = Solution

No matter what the problem at hand, we think a simple tax-deductible donation will solve it. Covid20 brought this out in a way like never before. A fruit cart owner's cart was toppled by the police? Donate. A man helped some others by removing some potholes? Donate. Does anyone need masks? Donate. Someone lost their job? Donate. Someone need to apply for a job? Donate. Someone wants to fly back home? Donate. Just donate. Donation became the # 1 instrument for guilt generation. If you didn't donate, you were a heartless person. If you asked why donate, what kind of a person were you? How could you sit in your privileged cocoons and question donating?! If you wondered if donations help or add to the problem, you were over-analysing. If you questioned the point of it, you were a cynic. We proved that we have no first clue about the nuance and complexity of problems. We do not understand them and hence have no hope of solving them. Those who understand them are just over-educated people. Their solutions will take too long and too much work. I've signed up for the game of Instant Karma. Instant Gratification. I want to donate so I can broadcast my donation so I can be congratulated for it so I can guilt-trip someone else into it. Let's just throw money at it and hope it goes away. Just like shaming people online is not punishment, throwing money at a problem is no solution, but heck, these weren't times we were thinking.

WhatsApp - 1; Sapiens - 0.

This became evident when the infodemic spread faster than the actual pandemic. WhatsApp took the virus farther than it wanted to go. It turned the entire world into a conversation from the depths of a dingy bar around closing time. Everyone was brimming with opinions and 'their take' on how to do things and now had a place to express it. In the good ol days, it was restricted to your table between friends. Not anymore. Just being on someone's phonebook means you're their friend.

Extrapolations of the R-naught, predictions of deaths, random statistics, even more random cures and random still, the precautions – we were in for a never-ending stream of garbage. And in usual times most of us are passive receivers, we look the other way; but something about Covid turned everyone into active senders, plunging common sense and decency even further down the sinkhole. Logic and reason soon left the building. Panic was here to stay. And whenever an iota of reason tried to raise its ugly head, along came another forward to kill it. The funny part is after all of that, we still are just as clueless as to what *exactly* needs to be done in case one of our loved ones tests positive. What exactly is quarantine? After all the information, all the forwarding, we know much less than when we started. But we can't be bothered. Here's another forward on the side effects of breathing – stupidity.

We're Racist Conspiracy Theorists

Corona was added to the list of casual common slurs Indians use like *Choti Aankh* and *Kaancha Cheena*. And of course, the Tablighis spread it. But the Chinese sent it on purpose for world domination. What kind of markets do they run? Why couldn't they tell us earlier? Why didn't they contain it in their country itself? Why can't they stop eating bats? Who eats pangolins? We have not stopped to think what if the Chinese ask us who eats Paneer Wonton or Gobi Manchurian. We have some answers of our own to give. Covid proved white supremacy exists. It had no chance if it began with killing people in Africa. Italians and white Europeans were dying. OMG. This is a terrible disaster. The world must act. Covid20 showed other diseases how it's done – attack the white and the rich and watch the world come to grinding halt.

Death and Us.

Covid20 revealed we are just not ready to even think about the only truth we all share – we are all dying. Our relationship with death is broken. Our understanding of it is non-existent. How scared we are of death became glaringly clear. A lot of people started behaving as if, if they could avoid Covid, they have a free pass to immortality. To behave as if death is an optional thing was beyond absurd. The very thought of death is impossible to process. The thought of seeing (or not seeing, in case of Covid) our loved ones die before us was indigestible. 'Dying alone' as a concept has done the rounds, as if there is an option of dying together – that was genocide, holocaust. Let's ask them if that was any less or more painful. Accepting death as an underlying principle of life itself is not even on the table. And we're poorer for it.

I, Me, Myself

Eventually, Covid proved to us what Kurt Cobain crooned many years ago – All Alone is All We Are. Society was divided into concentric circles with self at its centre. The farther circle you were plotted in, the fewer chances you had of getting help or care. We did not want to go near someone who may have Covid. Because that would mean we could bring it home to our parents – the first concentric circle. We avoided friends too. Pushed to an extreme, many chose to avoid their own parents and partners too. Of course, we pretended to do it out of care. Truth was, nobody mattered except self. We forgot that two feet distance was permissible. That we could keep the door open and just smile at each other. That we could talk to each other by sitting at the edge of the room. And it was not just us regular folks, even doctors – from physios to orthos to ophthalmologists to ENTs to GPs to even surgeons just went into their holes and cocoons. The richer we were, the more educated we were, the more selfish we behaved. Maybe not having a way to quarantine makes us kinder. But we'll never know; we'll be in the other room.

Division is our Game

The passport holders brought in the disease and the ration card holders suffered for it. And like that wasn't enough, we stopped them from coming to our homes. Because 'they' could give 'us' the disease. As if we had no chance of giving them the disease, which was what happened in the first place. Not only did we not care about the poor, we tried to blame them for it too. We worried if the slum dwellers became super spreaders. We wondered if the poor walking home might carry it back with them. We did not worry about them walking. No, that they had to. They lost the ovarian lottery. What can we do about it? Oh yes, we shall be donating. We locked our gates. Nobody could go in and out. We wanted the deliveries, but not the delivery boy. We wished the dishes would be done, but not by the maid. We wanted the food parcels, but not the carriers. Though they came with temperature slips and proofs. Nothing was good enough. Once fear sat in the driver's seat, all bets were off. And everyone was graded. How dare he take so long to bring me my chicken, though, the roads are empty!

Desires were only in our Heads

Covid revealed the gap between needs and desires. As things shut down, supplies got cut off, salaries stopped, deliveries went cold, the cruel joke of capitalism dawned upon us. We are the products and always have been. We do not need anything more than our needs and

what we need is milk, medicines, groceries, condoms (if you're lucky) and the occasional takeaway. From The Muji table to the M&S shirt – all of it, every last desire of ours was imagined. The only thing that proved this wrong was liquor. Every other possession, every other thing in our carts could wait – because it was meaningless. It never got us happiness except the momentary fleeting feeling of getting something new and shiny. It dawned on us that maybe, just maybe we are better off with fewer things and lesser possessions. Of course, that dawn had a very quick dusk once non-essentials were allowed to be delivered. But till then, we know Zen and Minimalism were not marketing tools but an actual, useful way to live.

We are the most Forgiving with Govts.

Indian governments are very lucky. We expect nothing out of them. We celebrate them for building things fast, for being efficient at last. As if they do us a favour by actually doing their jobs. We listen to them. We do not question them. We love them wholeheartedly. We celebrate them, just for doing their job. We do not question why we never had hospitals in the first place. We never question why malaria, dengue and TB claim way more lives every year than Covid can ever dream of? The most desirable job in the world is that of an Indian politician. And the least one if that of an Indian wife.

We are least Forgiving with our Spouses

Covid20 showed us why feminism just had to be invented. Doing household chores can really get to anyone. Men had it interesting in a pandemic. They realised that the auto-pilot their life is on has a name – the wife. They probably rolled up their sleeves and did some utensils for a change. Of course, they congratulated themselves for it. The entire family had to be told about it on the group. Gratitude was still in short supply. A realisation that the wife (or the mother) is the reason you are still eluded us. We expect more out of our spouses than we are willing to do ourselves.

Policy Making is Real

How bad Covid is, how disastrous and fatal it became, depended not so much on the virus but on the policy. For decades, none of us knew what policy makers do. Now we know they have a role to play. If they were allowed to play it is a different question altogether. But how countries dealt with Covid as it rampaged through us decided our fate. Of course, Indian policy decisions included activities like banging plates and lighting *diyas* because that much sound and light can kill the virus. Sure we were

all asked to stay at home, but the ones who did not, the ones who called the shots need to be commended (or damned). But that's the thing about policy making that Covid revealed: damned if you do, damned if you don't. Effects of decisions are only understood looking back. But need to be made going forward.

Peace of Mind? LOL

We can't sit still. We can't just breathe. We want to say that we can. We want to appear to have it together but we just don't get peace. We don't know why one needs it. Peace is so daunting; chaos is easier. Stillness is death, isn't movement life? Peace is for losers unless it is a hashtag for two countries. We use it as a way to say we've settled a fight but we are not ready to know and have its original meaning. We have made a symbol of it with two raised fingers. We sell products under its name. We call that the ultimate prize. Yet, when one chance came to experience it, we were found wanting. We wanted to do things. We were not and are not ready for peace. Peace is a bad word if it is to be implemented.

We could be introspective. We could have slowed down. We could have done without that 100th webinar. We could have accepted that we needed to stop. We could have given ourselves a break. We lost our chance to be better, to know more, to lead more compassionate lives. Mother Nature will give us another one. She always does.

- **Omkar Sane** is a Mumbai-based author, screenwriter and teacher. A product of the Sir J. J. institute of Applied Art, he is the founder of Storysurf – the only place on the internet to read based on your moods. https://storywave.app

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REBIRTH OF A PEEPAL TREE

Debasish Chakraborti

Way back in 1985 I got the opportunity to quit my lucrative job with an MNC in Calcutta and join the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) as a Scientist at the Naval Science and Technological Laboratory (NSTL), Visakhapatnam.

I slowly started liking the town known for its natural beauty. Those days it was called Waltair—a virgin place with combination of sea, nature and hillocks all around. Our Laboratory had a sprawling lush green campus with an Officers Mess and Institute (OMI) where we used to take our food (Breakfast, lunch and dinner) as bachelors. OMI gave us the feeling of a hostel life, the kind we had cherished in our college days of Engineering. Our OMI was indeed a cosy place with a lawn and the lush green hills as a backdrop. A huge Peepal tree, with its branches spread all over in the lawn, enhanced the ambience of the place.

In those days, we, the bachelor scientists, used to frequent the mess every Friday evening on weekend and enjoy the friendly chats with drinks and food served by the Mess boys, in that serene environment. The topics of discussion spanned out on various aspects of life, including the science related issues faced by the scientists. Those were our growing age in the professional field of learning Science & Technologies. The journey continued and I grew up in the laboratory dealing with underwater weapons' research and development. I became the Principal Associate Director of the Laboratory and was very much satisfied with the work of our team NSTL Scientists who developed and inducted two variants of Torpedoes into Indian Navy services with exhaustive user trials.

One Friday evening, on 28th November 2014, we were in OMI discussing about the Rehabilitation work that was being undertaken by NSTL, consequent to a destruction caused by the severe cyclonic storm Hud Hud one and a half month ago. Hud Hud hit the land mass of Visakhapatnam at 1105 hrs on 12th October 2014 at a peak speed of over 200 kms per hour—a horrifying one—and devastated our campus by uprooting almost all the trees (big and small), shattering the roof tops of our Engineering workshop, and causing plenty of damage in residential quarters and offices. All the roads were blocked by fallen trees. It was a mammoth exercise to clean up the roads and slowly taking up the repair jobs all around. The uprooted trees were stacked up in one

common place. A month and a half went by after Hud Hud with lot of activities related to cleaning up our premises.

The same evening, we changed our topic of discussion and started discussing some question raised by a scientist, "Why the ceiling fan rotates anticlockwise and table fan clockwise?"—this had always been a typical thing in our OMI, where some questions were raised but answers were not readily available. Such observations used to trigger the minds of the people interested to find answers. It happened many a time when I had to refresh my fundamentals while trying to find a right answers to the questions. It was not always restricted to Science. People also asked, "why the gents' shirt buttons are on right side, whereas for ladies it is on the left side?"

In the midst of such conversation, all on a sudden, all our eyes were fixed at the poor Peepal Tree, lying uprooted in the lawns. She must have struggled a lot for survival but gave up to the gusty winds of the cyclone Hud Hud. The diameter of the tree estimated was almost 20 ft. Simultaneously, a temporary structure that we had constructed beside the tree in the same area attracted my attention. This structure was intact. Hence I raised this question: "Why so? Why is it intact?" This question was rooted in our minds…

The mess boys came up with the last drink and food and informed us that the contractors had a plan to cut the Peepal Tree into pieces in a day or two and clean up our OMI premises. Even though we had decided on the same action before, yet I don't know why, on that day, I suddenly felt a need to change our plan at least for this iconic tree. "We will try to keep the tree in the same place dead or alive," I quipped. Someone retorted, "after so many days, the tree cannot survive even if we put it back." I was firm and said, "we will put it back and try; if it does not survive, we will put up a small plaque with the inscription 'Hud Hud Victim'. The Tree had suddenly become very close to our heart. I could see the gleam in the eyes of our mess boys too who were pained to see this tree uprooted, since the tree was giving shade to them in hot summer afternoons after a days' hard work. We called it a day, late night on the weekend and came back home with a heavy heart and with the question, why the structure remained intact?

On the next working day, I contacted the then Director of the Lab, Mr. C. D. Malleswar and discussed my plan. It was indeed a moment of joy when I found that he too was contemplating to do the same. Re-rooting of the tree had several technical bottlenecks, as raised by the contractor, but our resolve was to do what we had thought. We decided that on a

holiday our mission will be to somehow Re-root the tree. An enthusiastic team was formed—I remember some names like the contractor Abu Backer, Scientists and Officers, Sukhendu Sharma, Anand, G. K. Sahu, K. V. Ranga Rao, G. S. Chalam, B. Apparao, Rayulu and many others who willingly joined the mission.

Morning 0900 hrs onward on a Saturday, we started our operation against so many odds and finally completed it by 4 P.M. The Director, Mr. Malleswar, came to the spot in the morning and inspired us. We took necessary precautions by putting a boundary around so that tree should not fall on somebody in any eventuality of wind gust etc. It was indeed a day of joy for all of us in the laboratory.

Subsequently, we contacted the Horticulture Department of Andhra University. They had given some advisories which were strictly followed. Every day, thereafter, while going to office, I used to stop by OMI and see that the tree was standing firm like a log of wood. We started taking care of the tree like anything. One day, after 29 days, few leaves were visible on the tree. Tears of joy rolled down my eyes—I cannot express the feelings in words. Gradually, the news of fresh leaves in the tree became viral in the Laboratory…OMG Peepal Tree reborn! Nature Sprang back, keeping all of us awestruck.

Later on, we found the technical answer to the question of the structure being intact. It had not got uprooted by the same gusty wind force of cyclone because of the louvres in the structure, rigidity of the plates, and conical form of the same which had helped it in neutralizing the dynamic pressure gradients generated out of wind loads. However, the irony of it is that when the structure was built, no cyclone wind loads was considered. We had just gone about it based on aesthetics only.

Life goes on… A great experience of lifetime … probably the most satisfying job I had ever handled! The words of the great Scientist Albert Einstein, “Look deep into Nature, and then you will understand better”… still rings in my ears…

- **Debasish Chakraborti**, an Outstanding Scientist & Former Director, ADRDE (DRDO), Agra has had an eventful tenure as Principal Associate Director, NSTL, (DRDO), Visakhapatnam. His areas of interest include music, painting, social work and philanthropy.

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KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *NOCTURNES:* ODE TO THE NUANCE OF MUSIC

Mini Nanda

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki in 1956 and his family moved to Guildford in Southern England when he was five. He did not return to Japan for twenty-nine years. He became a British citizen in 1982. In 1995 Ishiguro received an OBE for Services to literature and in 1998 the French decoration of Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Letters. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017. He composes lyrics. Influenced by Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, Ishiguro started writing songs. Most recently, for the jazz chanteuse Stacey Kent, their collaborative CD, "Breakfast on the Morning Tram," was a best-selling jazz album in France.

Nocturnes is Ishiguro's first collection of short stories, after six novels. Nocturne comes from the French which means nocturnal. From Latin *Nocturnus*, it is usually a musical composition inspired by the night. In the Middle Ages, nocturnes applied to the Night Offices; it was divisions in the canonical hour of Matins. The five stories are independent with the notes of music and the love of music bringing them together.

In the story "Crooner," a Polish guitarist in Vienna, narrates his magical encounter with a legendary singer. The setting in Vienna is rich in symbolism. The "City of Music'' as Vienna is popularly known was home to the eminent composers Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). It is also called the "City of Dreams," as it is home to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). In a dream-like situation, Jan receives a request from one of his favourite singers – Tony Gardner – to play the guitar with him on a gondola. Gardner wished to serenade his wife of twenty-seven years, "You and me in a gondola, she comes to the window. All her favourite numbers" (12). Jan, the Polish expatriate, though never a part of any band, was called a 'gypsy', as he moved around to different cafes and bands where he could be given a place. That afternoon he played the *Godfather Theme* or "Autumn Leaves" with nine different bands. Tony Gardner was an icon from Jan's childhood, the years of struggle of his mother as a single parent, in spite of economic constraints and restriction in Communist Poland; she had managed to possess the whole collection of Tony Gardner from the black market. The miasma of xenophobia hangs over the gondola; the gondolier Vittorio, despised

Jan as "The foreigner from the new countries" (13). In the night as Jan strums his Spanish guitar and American crooner Tony Gardner begins to sing, Jan is transported to his small flat in Poland, his exhausted, heart-broken mother listening to Tony Gardner's album spinning in the corner. The trip down the canal at night is meant to be a surprise for Lindy Gardner. They pass a well-lit restaurant, full of happy diners who are impervious to the star in the passing boat. Much like taste in music that keeps changing with time, Tony Gardner is dismissive of his own eminence; he reflects that a singer of a bygone era would hardly get a group of people enjoying their dinner excited. Jan holds music in much higher esteem as it does not come with an expiry date, "You're a classic" (16). Ishiguro subtly weaves humour when Jan inwardly wonders if Lindy the wife would come to the window with a gun to shoot them down. "And these were Americans after all" (17).

Tony Gardner recounts that Lindy used to be a star-struck teenager who fled her small-town home in Minnesota and hitch-hiked to California, to embrace an uncertain destiny in Hollywood. Waiting tables in Los Angeles, the wayside diner was her "Harvard and Yale" about the lives of film stars (20). Tony continues his reminiscent monologue and Jan convinces the sad and weepy singer that his songs had helped his mother tide over her lonely life. In the evenings she would sing along with Gardner's albums. Jan shares his conviction that like his mother, many more must have gained solace from Gardner's music. "Your music helped my mother through those times; it must have helped millions of others" (24). The underlying dirge through the whole performance was meant to be a surprise and Tony's parting gift to his beautiful wife. The compulsions of the heartless and unpredictable showbiz world made it incumbent on the couple who still loved each other to part ways. It was mandatory if Tony Gardner wanted a comeback, he would need a younger woman on his arm. It was ironical as it would serve Lindy best as she was still beautiful and could still forge a fresh relationship.

The writer in remarkable way brings the contrast between the two worlds, the Gardner's and his own. Jan's mother lived alone most of her life, never felt the need to "go out" to get another life for herself. Maybe her social and economic status constrained her; maybe she found her role as a mother more fulfilling. The demands of the world of glitz compelled the Gardner's to part ways, after almost three decades of living together. Love and fidelity play second fiddle to a successful comeback. Whereas music sustained Jan and his mother, the same music could not keep the couple together. Nevertheless, the singer

leaves lasting memories both for his wife and Jan who dreamt of playing while Gardner sang. On the floating stage, the boundaries of nation, class and age collapse, as music creates new relationships.

Love of old American Broadway songs creates a lasting bond in the story "Come Rain or Come Shine." Raymond, Emily and Charlie continue their London university friendship for years. Though Emily and Charlie prosper materially in London, their marital life diminishes; while Raymond continues to teach English in Spain, where with each passing semester his students change as does their taste in music. Their friendship abides and erases the social and economic differences and both rely on Raymond whose presence lends a perspective to the estranged couple. Waltzing with Raymond on a starlit night, to Sarah Vaughan's 1954 version of "April in Paris," Emily whispers in Raymond's ear, "You're right Raymond…Charles all right. We should sort ourselves out" (86). Love of music had sustained their friendship, it united the three many times, it brings back together friends of long standing, and unites a couple on the edge. Differences fall away as calmness descends on each of them.

The story "Malvern Hills," set in England, refers to the range of hills in the English counties of Worcestershire, Herefordshire and a small area of the northern Gloucestershire. It has a rich music and cultural history. This area is famous for its spring waters from the regions with many holy wells and later developed in the nineteenth century as a spa town. The English composer Sir Edward Williams Elgar was from this area, who walked, rode bicycles and flew kites on these hills. The Malvern Hills were the inspiration and setting for the famous fourteenth century poem "The Visions of Piers Plowman" (1362) by William Langland, "And on a Maye mornynge on Malverne hylles" (78-79). W. H. Auden taught for three years here in a school, he wrote a long poem about the hills – "The Malverns" – and his early love poem "Lay your Sleeping Head" and others. Elizabeth Barrett Browning spent her childhood at Hope End near Malvern Hills and the surroundings inspired her to write her Epic "Aurora Leigh" (1857).

The struggling song writer and musician, faced with a spate of rejects, decides to leave London for some time and moves to his sister's café at Malvern Hills. Where he had grown up, in the summer now the hills and the house seemed to be "…the most beautiful place in the world; that in many ways I'd come from and belonged to the hills." He seemed to discover the hills anew and could almost taste the swell of new songs in his mind (94). At home sitting on the bay window as he

strummed the chords on his guitar, he felt the music reverberate around the whole nation. The Swiss couple, musicians themselves, had come to explore the hills which Edward Elgar had inhabited; a documentary on Elgar inspired their trip to the Malvern Hills. They found the countryside beautiful and the hills full of gentleness and charm (98). Krauts, the Swiss musician couple, told the nameless narrator that they performed in restaurants in Switzerland.

Ishiguro subtly leaves the narrator nameless, perhaps as homage to all the struggling artists. The metropolitan city gives no space for retreat; nature restores and refines their talent. The chance encounter with the couple and the temporary stay with his sister and her grumpy husband, lends a new perspective to him. Though he couldn't get the bridge passage for his song, the narrator is able to bridge the age gap and create a special bond with the Swiss couple. The Krauts own son had turned away from them. Ironically the narrator felt his own sister had turned away from her childhood love of music. Families drift apart, grow silent and turn incommunicado but total strangers strike a chord with their love of music. They encourage and help and are able to do something worthwhile for each other.

Ishiguro's third novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) won the Booker Prize and it was made into a memorable film by Merchant Ivory, with the screenplay by Ruth Prawer Jhabwala. Talking about the Butler in the novel, who is an emblem of one who leaves the big political decisions to someone else, Ishiguro tells Susannah Hunnewell in an interview, "many of us are in that position, whether we live in democracies or not. Most of us are not where the big decisions are made. We do our jobs, and we take pride in them, and we hope our little contribution is going to be used well" (*The Paris Review*).

Echoing a similar refrain about the plight of the artists in music in India, those that come from the marginalised economic and social class, T. M. Krishna, the doyen of Carnatic music, activist and writer bemoans the total lack of concern and support for the arts and asserts that artists have been neglected and those coming from the lower caste are doubly marginalised. Krishna, in his book *Sebastian & Sons: A Brief History of Mrdangam* (2013), writes that the *Mrdangam* is an instrument played by the upper caste – Brahmins on Brahaminical stage – but it is made by the lower caste Dalits. There is structural discrimination against all artists coming from the socio-cultural and economic margins. Their talent is trivialized and written off. "What is

worse is that this is paraded as objective intellectualism" (EPW 2020, 11).

Ishiguro is writing about the malaise of affectation and glamour in the world of music. Talent is not an end in itself but a means to an end to success and prestige. For those seeking to attain wealth and privilege, their talent becomes secondary, physical looks and demeanour become primary. The eponymous story "Nocturne" is set in Beverley Hills, America. It is not about the musical arrangement drawing inspiration from the mystery and beauty of the night; but about the darkness, the lurking challenges and insecurities, the compulsions of plastic surgery. "Nocturne" is the dark underbelly of the world of music and showbiz, beneath the glittering lights of the proscenium. Ishiguro reflects upon the perceived value of music, its cultural and economic compulsions and reception. The wild demands of the capitalist world of glitz, the dehumanization is lamented by Theodor W. Adorno, in his remarkable essay, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1991): "Vulgarisation and enchantment, hostile sisters, dwell together in the arrangements which have colonized large areas of music…. It destroys the multilevel unity of the whole work and brings forward only isolated popular passages" (41).

There is the history of the Third Reich and their esoteric taste in music. Leon Botstein writes that the Second World War showed the paradox of radical evil merging with refined taste in music. The tale of one survivor testifies to this dark conjunction. During one of the raids in the ghetto to round people up for the camps the SS officer noticed an upright piano in the house. The officer ordered his men to go ahead and the survivor saw, through the crack in the closet door, the officer sit on the piano with a beatific expression and play Beethoven, Schumann and Chopin elegantly and movingly for an hour (225). Music played an important role in the cultural strategy of the Third Reich (226). Beethoven's opening of the Fifth Symphony became the Allied motto for victory, and the Ninth Symphony was consistently used by the Nazis for staged public propaganda shows. Mozart and Beethoven were used by the Allies and the Nazis for their agenda (228).

Ishiguro in "Nocturne" highlights the contradictions in the world of an artist. Steve – the saxophonist – was not successful in spite of being hugely talented, because he was not considered good looking, just "loser ugly" (129). He understands the predicament, "I was twice as talented as most other people in this town. But it seemed that didn't

count for much these days" (131). The image and its marketability mattered. The facial surgery is viewed by the thirty-nine year old Steve as a "moral Descent" (138). Interestingly Lindy Gardner from the story "Crooner" and Tony Gardner's ex-wife is also on the same floor of the hotel, bandaged after plastic surgery like him. The post-operative floor is a leveler of sorts. The high and the struggling artist find common ground, in music and in reminiscences. Lindy Gardner confesses to Steve that she was stunned by his amazing, natural talent as a saxophonist. She felt a deep jealousy for him: "It's sublime. You're a wonderful, wonderful musician. You're a genius" (158). Late at night, after surreptitiously taking away a trophy from the award venue in the hotel, Lindy confers the award to the deserving Steve, overlooked by those who make the important pronouncement. Both are bandaged patients in this private small commendation ceremony at night. Adorno perceptively observes, "Before the theological caprices of commo-ditties, the consumers become temple slaves" (39).

Steve has a moment of epiphany when he wishes to consign all trophies and fake winners to the garbage. The irony doesn't escape the reader that the moment of epiphany is juxtaposed as both these artists are in the process of having their faces reconstructed. They have gone to extreme lengths of physical, mental and emotional privation to meet the contingencies of the musical world. As Hamlet in the garb of insanity deprecates Ophelia, "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another" (Act III, Scene I). Later T. S. Eliot sums up the charade, "To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (Prufrock, 27). Nevertheless, the artists prepare a face and hide in the dark to prepare to meet the dazzle of their world.

The final movement in the *Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* is "Cellists" which brings the narrative full circle, back to Italy. A Hungarian Cellist, Tibor, meets a self-confessed American Virtuoso Cellist, Eloise, who had stopped playing after she was eleven in order to preserve her art and keep it pristine: "The fact that I've not yet learned to play the cello doesn't really change anything…. I am a virtuoso. But I am one who's yet to be un-wrapped…I've been trying to help you to shed the layers" (212). Eloise had heard Tibor play at San Lorenzo church, the oldest Medici family church in Florence. She decided to hone his talent every afternoon in her luxurious hotel.

Italy becomes the meeting point of expatriate artists from Poland and Hungary. The strand of loss, pain, struggle and conviction runs through

the stories. Musicians endeavour to do their work consistently, away from the centres of power and capital, where all the "big decisions" are taken. They try every which way to meld, to fit in, to persist. Beyond the web of intrigue and manipulation, they recognize the rare talent in a fellow traveller and encourage him. There is never a doubt that the path would be easy, most of them persist.

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- **Dr. Mini Nanda,** Professor and former Head, Department of English, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur is a frequent contributor to *Re-Markings*. Her areas of specialization include South-Asian, Canadian, Caribbean and Diaspora Literature.

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FROM DALIT RICKSHAW-PULLER TO CELEBRITY AUTHOR: A CONVERSATION WITH MANORANJAN BYAPARI

Anuradha Sen

A few years ago, the venue of the Patna Literature Festival was abuzz … a rickshaw puller from Bengal was to address the august gathering! Interesting snippets of information were doing the rounds and arousing audience curiosity and excitement. Manoranjan Byapari, it was said, had requested the organisers to book a plane ticket for him from Kolkata, 'only one way,' he said. He had seen the world for long from the ground level, he wanted to have a glimpse of that world '…once from above.' A flair for significant metaphors!

That day Manoranjan Byapari kept the audience enthralled for two hours! And I had been wondering how he would communicate, considering his mother tongue was Bengali. However, he was a wonderful communicator and an entertainer, and in workable Hindi he had the audience chuckling and clapping throughout. He spoke about various things – his difficult life and the life of the poor and the oppressed in general, the need for social change, the simmering rage of the Dalit writer such that only a Dalit could write about their life not any other writer, howsoever sympathetic to their condition they might be. In this context, even while acknowledging the contribution of writers like Munshi Premchand, Byapari felt one cannot really write the Dalit story on a full belly and from the sanctuary of a cushioned existence. He expressed his disappointment, for instance, on the ending of Premchand's famous short story "*Kafan,"* where the chamar father-son duo are seen drinking liquor with the money meant to buy the *kafan*, for their deceased wife/mother. Byapari sees this as the age-old upper caste prejudice in type-casting all lower caste and passing judgement on them. Byapari said, being a Dalit who has felt the pangs of raw hunger and privation, he would have ended the story differently – he would have shown the father son opting for a good square meal of lovely white rice with the precious money. In an interesting exchange at the venue, when I spoke to Alok Rai (grandson of Munshi Premchand and retired head of the English Department at Delhi University) and asked him what he thought about Byapari's critique, Rai smiled and came up with a blasé rejoinder: 'maybe there should be another story called "Phir se Kafan."

I was invited to be in conversation with Manoranjan Byapari on the 27th of August 2017 by 'Kalam,' an initiative of the Prabha Khaitan Foundation and a Kolkata based organisation which hosts a literary event at Patna every month. An author is invited for interaction with a select group of interested book lovers.

My interaction with Byapari was a life altering experience; during my conversation I was transported from the comfort zone of my life of privilege and security into a hitherto untraversed world of life lived at the margins. Byapari was a man who had lived life at the edge – a life of privation and hunger, oppression, and neglect, of crime, violence, and punishment. The trials and tribulations of a Bangladesi refugee, a Chandal, the lowest in the caste hierarchy … real lived experiences, anecdotes, of exile, jail, police beatings, in refugee camps, in different locations all over the country. Here are some snippets of that rather long conversation.

A.S.: Tell us your life story…

M.B.: I don't know when I was born, probably 1950. I came from Barisal in Bangladesh when I was about 3 years old. Mine is a life story of hardship and privation. We survived on dole for seven years at the Bankura Shiromanipur Refugee camp. One day the government stopped the dole and sent all the refugees to the Dandakaranya. There, I collected firewood from forests to help my family make a living. As a hungry ticketless traveller, I travelled all over in search of work – Darjeeling, Assam, Uttar Pradesh etc. As a child I worked as a cowherd, a tea stall boy, a washer of dishes and later as a cook, labourer, munshi, a rickshaw puller, a crematorium guard and as a forest chowkidar in Naxal infested Chattisgarh. I came in close touch with Shankar Guha Neogi, the legendary labour leader in the tribal belts of Madhya Pradesh. His murder by contract killers left an indelible imprint on my mind. He was champion of the oppressed and ignored people of this society. I had a close brush with death at least thrice in my life. But all this and more I have narrated in detail in my autobiography *Itibritte Chandal Jeevan* which was published in 2012.

A.S.: How did you become a writer?

M.B.: Mine is a strange story. I learnt my letters at age twenty-four in one of my sojourns in jail. (With a chuckle he added) Jail for me those days was a haven and a respite as there at least I did not have to worry about getting a square meal and a warm bed. My experience in jail proved life altering. I came across an inmate who claimed to have gone mad after reading Sarat Chandra Chattopadhya's novel *Charitra-*

heen. I was surprized. One kind inmate seeing me distressed and feeling hopeless suggested that if I became literate, the tasks assigned by the authorities wouldn't be as exacting as those assigned to illiterate inmates. Also, there was the added incentive of my jail term getting shortened. He taught me my letters on the jail floor with sticks and later with chalk. Then I read and read, whatever I could get.

Many years later while reading a novel, waiting for passengers in front of a girl's college at Kolkata, an elderly lady with a young student got on my rickshaw. She evinced surprize to see me reading, and I surprized her further by asking her the meaning of the Bengali word 'jijibisha' which in Bengali means, 'will to live.' It was my lucky day! The lady who had boarded my rickshaw was none other than the famous writer-activist Mahashweta Debi herself! She was taken aback to see that it was her novel *Aghigarbha,* that I had been reading. She then asked me if I had ever written anything, and she encouraged me to write for her magazine *Bartika,* a Bengali quarterly – a forum for peasants, agricultural workers and urban proletariat. My article was very well received upon publication. Seeing this I wrote four more stories and sent it to four different magazines. Thus began my journey as a writer.

A.S.: Who are the writers and personalities who influenced you?

M.B.: I have read some Hindi and Bengali writers, as well as some translated Russian works. From Mahashweta Debi I learnt the expression of unrelenting rage. Srilal Shukla I admire for his portrayal of powerful characters. Jajabar's use of language influenced me. My heart has expanded after reading Samaresh Basu and I find Shankar Guha Neogi's leadership qualities inspiring. The Adivasis have taught me simplicity and honesty.

A.S.: Do you feel that a Dalit alone can narrate the Dalit experience? What about the efforts of writers like Munshi Premchand?

M.B.: While I acknowledge the efforts of these writers who took up our cause, I feel it is impossible for them to actually narrate the experience of hunger, oppression, deprivation and the consequent simmering rage of the Dalit. They cannot empathise, they can only sympathise. Besides, I have read the works of the greatest writers whose language and mindsets are tainted with the age-old caste prejudices. How will they know about the pangs of hunger I have experienced … when one's entrails curl up into hard knots of pain and one's vision gets blurred and hazy? How will they know about the struggle for survival in

an unjust, discriminatory society such as ours when they come from the privileged 'bhadralok' class?

A.S.: You have been awarded the highest literary award of West Bengal, the Paschim Banga Academy award. How much literary value is embedded in your writing?

M.B.: I wish to convey through my writing the oppression Dalits are subjected to. I wish to tell their untold stories, to make them visible to society. I should not be judged according to preconceived literary parameters. I am not a scholar, I merely tell my story, my lived experience is not fiction.

A.S.: Why did you feel the need to write your autobiographical novel?

M.B.: I had a strong urge to document my life-story in print, or else it would be lost with me. That I survived is a wonder. Thrice I have come back from the jaws of death. Police thrashings, starvation, jail, physical and mental torture, homelessness, and a fugitive's life, I have borne it all. My writings represent all those like me who continue to live in such inhuman conditions. People need to be made aware.

A.S.: What is Professor Meenakshi Mukherji's role in your life?

M.B.: I am eternally grateful to her. She wrote an article in *The Economic and Political Weekly* (2007) where she referred extensively to my work. The article was titled "Is there Dalit Writing in Bangla?" I became known in both national and international forums as one of the first Dalit voices coming out of Bengal.

A.S.: What do you hope to achieve through writing?

M.B.: I give vent to the seething rage of my people through my writings. My stories are actual lived experiences but they depict the social realities of our times. I hope my writings will make people aware of the gross injustice, discrimination, neglect the marginalised in this democratic country professing equality for all, are subjected to. I am very hopeful that social change will come with justice. That is my firm hope and belief. I write with purpose. I am hopeful of a new society which can provide justice, food, clothing, and medical service for all. My literary characters resemble me.

A.S.: With 10 novels and 100 articles that you have published, I hope your days of hardship have ended?

M.B.: My struggle has not ended. I still work as a cook in a school. It's a hand to mouth existence. An injury from old police beating incapacitates me. As I raise my voice against the present regime, I get no

state aid as do people who kow-tow to the powers that be. I am lauded at Literature Festivals and am a frequent invitee to Presidency College and Jadavpur University. Students and scholars write their thesis on me. For them I have become a 'topic', a 'discourse,' for them I am no longer a human being with needs. My lot remains the same where I still have to worry about my next meal.

A.S.: What about the royalties from the books that are sold?

M.B.: In my autobiography I have written about the murky world of the publishing industry. Since mine is not part of mainstream fashionable literature, the big publishing houses are not interested. I had to pay Rs.16000, to get my book of short stories published. I was given 498 copies which I was required to sell myself. The print and paper quality are terrible. I was later told that I had been grossly overcharged and fleeced. The presentation and packaging of my autobiography is not attractive. There are proofreading errors, the narration is not organised into chapters. All these factors adversely affect sales. Such books are summarily dismissed by the elite readers and critics as the output of the 'chhotolok' (lower caste).

A.S.: Perhaps if you wrote humorous or entertaining books it would gain more popularity. You are gifted with a unique sense of humour…

M.B.: I have often thought so myself. But whenever I tried, it was the angst of the underprivileged which gushed out. That is what life has made me; I guess I cannot really change.

A.S.: Meeting with you has been a life altering experience and a trek into an unknown, untraversed world. Hope that your works get translated so that more people can read the Dalit story, and slowly social change will surely come? Already you are an entity in literary circuits. Alka Saraogi, the Hindi novelist, has created a character resembling you in her novel *Sesh Kadambari*. Joydeep Ghosh has screened his documentary film, *Subaltern Ego,* on your life. In the international film circuit, he is also shooting a feature film based on a story penned by you. There is hope yet, Dalits have moved from the margins to the centre, at least in literary fashions. Wish you the absolute best in all your endeavours!

M.B.: Thank You.

- **Dr. Anuradha Sen** is Associate Professor in the Department of English at A.N. College, Patna.

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ATHEISM OF A VISIONARY MARTYR: BHAGAT SINGH AND HIS SELECT WRITINGS

Roopali Khanna

> The judgement has been delivered. I am condemned to death … perhaps I am the only man amongst them who is anxiously waiting ... when I will be fortunate enough to embrace the gallows for my ideal (Bhagat Singh, 2017: 214).

At such a young age, if anyone could be seen smiling just before being hanged to death, it was Shaheed Bhagat Singh. He was the one who led the greatest and the most powerful revolution embracing death for his ideals. With the greatest roar ever, he declared: "I will climb the gallows gladly and show to the world as to how bravely the revolutionaries can sacrifice themselves for the cause" (Virender Singh 214). Even today his roar resonates in our ears. Not only India but the whole world remembers Bhagat Singh as one of the greatest revolutionaries whose life, work, struggle and the way he kissed and embraced death put him in the league of the world's great revolutionaries such as Socrates, Bruno, Joan of Arc and Che Guevara.

Born on September 28, 1907, Bhagat Singh was sentenced to death in the Lahore conspiracy case, along with other freedom fighters, Rajguru and Sukhdev. Bhagat Singh grew up in a patriotic atmosphere where his uncle, Sardar Ajit Singh, as well as his father were great freedom fighters. Early signs of valour were quite evident in him since his childhood when he thought of 'growing guns in the fields', so that he could fight against the British. Just hours after the 1919 massacre, the 12-year-old Bhagat Singh visited Jallianwala Bagh, kissing the earth sanctified by the martyrs' blood and bringing back home a little of the soaked soil to keep the flame of revolution ignited in his heart.

The Ghadar movement was another incident that left a deep imprint on his mind. Kartar Singh Sarabha, hanged at the age of 19, became his hero whose picture he always carried in his pocket and whom he quoted often in his revolutionary meetings. At the tender age of 17, he could even write an article on "Universal Brotherhood," playing a historic role in shaping the destiny of Indian nation and the world. He asked people: "If you truly desire to propagate the ideal of peace and happiness in the entire world, then first learn to react to the insults thrown at you. Be ready to die in order to cut loose the shackles of your motherland." The article was published in two issues (13-14,

1924) of Calcutta's weekly, *Matwala*. Chronologically, the dates of these issues are: 15th of November, 1924 and 22nd of November, 1924 (Bhagat Singh, Web).

Bhagat Singh wanted the "haves" to devote themselves for the emancipation of the "have-nots" and the intellectual class to introspect and fight for the cause of the poor. A resolute 19-year-old Bhagat Singh ran away from his home in Lyallpur (now in Pakistan) just to avoid getting married in the service of his homeland. In his letter to his father Singh wrote: "My life has been dedicated to the noblest cause, that of the freedom of the country. Therefore, there is no rest or worldly desire that can lure me now" (Juneja 193). In search of revolutionary groups and ideas, he met Sukhdev and Rajguru. Singh, along with the help of Chandrashekhar Azad, formed the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA), imbued with the fire of revolution and ideas of socialism. The manifesto of HSRA clearly stated:

> The immediate object of the revolutionary party in the domain of politics is to establish a federal republic of the United States of India by an organised and armed revolution. The basic principle of this republic shall be universal suffrage and the abolition of all system which makes the exploitation of man by man possible. In this republic the electors shall have the right to recall their representatives if so desired, otherwise the democracy shall be a mockery (Mazumdar 173).

This was the unconquerable spirit and stuff of which Bhagat Singh was made. It is ironical that India has not been able to think about such ideas even after seventy plus years of her independence. Bhagat Singh assassinated British police officer J. P. Saunders to avenge the then recent death of Lala Lajpat Rai, the Punjabi activist, due to the brutal beating by the police. Bhagat Singh firmly asserted that "the use of force is justifiable when resorted to as matter of terrible necessity" (Bhagat Singh; 2020: 7). A few months later, in 1929, he threw a smoke-bomb in the Delhi Legislative Assembly, proclaiming *Inqilab Zindabad* (long live revolution), and awaited his arrest. S. Irfan Habib gives a good account of the assembly bomb incident in his book *To Make the Deaf Hear* about their slogans after assembly bombing. They shouted "long live revolution," "down with imperialism" and "long live proletariats." Singh's idea was very clear about the surrender:

> Our sole purpose was "to make the deaf hear" … we have only hoisted the "danger signal." We have only marked the end of an era of utopian non-violence, of whose futility the

> rising generation has been convinced beyond the shadow of doubt (Bhagat Singh, 2020: 40).

Inspired by the speech made in 1894 by Auguste Vaillant, the French revolutionary who, prior to receiving the death sentence, had declared that an explosion was necessary to "make the deaf hear," Bhagat Singh displayed his zeal for the freedom of his motherland from the clutches of the oppressive British rule by affirming in equally bold words:

> Let the Govt. know that, while protesting against the Public Safety and the Trades Disputes Bills and the callous murder of Lala Lajpat Rai on behalf of the helpless Indian masses, we want to emphasise the lesson often repeated by history that it is easy to kill the individuals, but you cannot kill the ideas. Great empires crumbled but the ideas survived. Bourbons and Czars fell while the revolution marched ahead triumphantly. We are sorry to admit that we who attach so great a sanctity to human life, we who dream of a glorious future when man will be enjoying perfect peace and full liberty, have been forced to shed human blood. But the sacrifice of the individuals at the altar of the great revolution that will bring freedom to all rendering the exploitation of man by man impossible, is inevitable. Long Live Revolution! (Bhagat Singh, 2017: 195).

Also, during the historic trial, in the statement before the Lahore high court, he put himself across convincingly saying that: "Bombs and pistols do not make a revolution. The sword of revolution is sharpened on the whetting-stone of ideas" (Virender Singh 50). Singh's writings show that he was in favour of using violence only in extreme situations. In fact, it was his non-violent struggle and supreme sacrifice for the nation which made him Shaheed-E-Azam (King of Martyrs) and a household name in India. But ironically most of us, do not seem to know the real Bhagat Singh, though we refer to him with reverence.

In India before 1920 Bhagat Singh was one of the most famous revolutionaries of the Indian independence movement as he represented the biggest anarchist movement influenced by Western Anarchism and Communism. He wrote in his journal *Why I am an Atheist*, "I studied Bakunin, the anarchist leader. I read a few books of Marx, the father of Communism. I also read Lenin and Trotsky and many other writers who successfully carried out revolutions in their

countries. All of them were atheists" (Bhagat Singh, 2020: 8). Singh believed that there are many reasons for thinking that an atheist stance is crucial for revolutionaries to take. Because politically, their commitment is to this world since they do not have a back-door escape of some god looking after them in the next life.

Though some people believe that there is a strong connection between Atheism and Anarchism, others believe there is no such connection. It is certainly true that Anarchist thinkers have been strongly unsympathetic to organized religion and tend to be atheists, but the reverse has not been true. But if you ask atheists why they see the need to label themselves and discuss atheism, they will almost invariably answer that religious dogma infiltrating itself in the schools and politics is the main issue. Therefore, atheism does reduce itself to a social issue to some extent. What links them both is the concept of authority, rejecting the authority of god over man and the existence of hierarchy respectively.

There is no doubt that Singh's revolutionary ideas were greatly influenced by Marx and Engels and also by anarchists like Bakunin, Trotsky and Lenin. The *Jail Notebook and other Writings* traces the sole surviving scripts written by Bhagat Singh while he was in jail. It is not so well known that Bhagat Singh wrote four books in jail which were smuggled out, destroyed and are lost forever. What survived was a diary that the young martyr kept in jail, full of notes, poems and jottings from what he was reading. In sharp contrast to his popular image as a gun-toting revolutionary, Bhagat Singh's 404-page jail diary is filled with excerpts, notes and quotes on a wide variety of subjects that reflect not only his serious study and intellectual insight, but also his social and political concerns. When we look at the content of his writings we are impressed by the range of books he read. He apparently read with a purpose and not just to keep himself occupied. While there are quotes from stray literature and poetry, most of the *Notebook* is focused on definite themes and it seems that he was keenly studying radical Western critical tradition and trying to assimilate its diverse strands with an open mind.

Bhagat Singh's *Why I am an Atheist* shows his journey of mature understanding of social, political and religious issues. As Marx pointed out, "religion is the opium of the masses," Singh drew the conclusion that theology, that is, a theological doctrine institutionalized through social structures characterized by privilege and oppression, was contrary to natural law. He was of the view that revolutionaries should

never compromise in the pursuit of social change. Singh had a message for the ruling class:

> We believe that had ruling powers acted correctly at a proper time, there would have been no bloody revolutions in France and Russia.… The ruling people cannot change the flow of the current (Virender Singh 50).

In his discussion of *God and the State*, Bhagat Singh blithely places Bakunin alongside Lenin, Trotsky and Marx: all four men had, for the young thinker, put forward convincing cases that state power relied on the suppression of masses through appeals to transcendence. In the words of Bakunin:

> There is a class of people who, if they do not believe, must at least make a semblance of believing. This class, comprising all the tormentors, all the oppressors … believe that "if god did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him…" The people must have a religion (Bakunin 89).

Republished by Jalandhar-based Universe Publications, *Reminiscences of Lenin* gives us an idea how Lenin had influenced the freedom movement in India by leading the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. From May 1928 to September 1928, Singh published several articles on anarchism in Punjabi periodical *Kirti*. He wrote, "the people are scared of the word anarchism. The word anarchism has been abused so much that even in India revolutionaries have been called anarchist to make them unpopular. As anarchism means absence of ruler and abolition of state, not absence of order," Singh continued to explain, "I think in India the idea of universal brotherhood, the idea of the Sanskrit phrase, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, has the same meaning" (M. K. Singh 84).

Singh began to question religious ideologies after witnessing the Hindu-Muslim riots that broke out after Gandhi disbanded the non-cooperation movement. He did not understand how members of these two groups, initially united in fighting against the British, could be at each other's throats because of their religious differences. Bhagat Singh declared that religion distracts people from addressing real problems and issues and hindered the revolutionaries' struggle for independence. The young leader wrote that his thinking about god underwent a radical change after he studied anarchist and related Leftist literature by Bakunin, Karl Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, all of whom he said were 'atheists.' In the long essay, *Why I am an Atheist*, written and completed in 1931, a few days before his hanging, Bhagat Singh

laid bare the nature of his lack of faith. Later, even when his execution was imminent, religious belief remained conspicuous by its absence:

> By the end of 1926, I was convinced that the belief in an Almighty, Supreme Being who created, guided and controlled the universe had no sound foundations. I began discussions on this subject with my friends. I had openly declared myself an atheist (Bhagat Singh, 2020: 8).

In a nuanced and well-argued stance, he traces how his atheism came to be. Clearly, atheism wasn't a part of his childhood. He insisted:

> Atheism was not something I chose; it was where I ended up after discovering that I could no longer believe in gods ... instead of using the experiments and expressions of the ancient thinkers as the basis of our future struggles against ignorance, lethargic as we have proved to be, we raise the hue and cry of faith … and thus are guilty of stagnation in human progress (Bhagat Singh, 2020: 13).

Clearly atheism seemed to be the outcome of the extensive programme of the reading of revolutionary literature that Bhagat Singh had embarked on in the years prior to his final lapse of faith. And it was his atheism that did not waver till his dying day. Singh states in the essay *Why I am an Atheist*:

> Belief softens the hardships, even can make them pleasant. In god man can find very strong consolation and support. Without Him, man has to depend upon himself. To stand upon one's own legs amid storms and hurricanes is not a child's play. At such testing moments, vanity, if any, evaporates, and man cannot dare to defy the general beliefs (Bhagat Singh, 2020:10).

But, given that many trials and tribulations lay ahead of him, what is perhaps of interest is how faith did not make a comeback to Bhagat Singh's life. He wanted to make people realize that religion is the tool of elites to keep people ignorant and distracted by the promise of a world to come after death. He claimed:

> My dear friends, these theories are the inventions of the privileged ones. They justify their usurped power, riches and superiority by the help of these theories. Yes, it was perhaps Upton Sinclair that wrote at some place, that just make a man a believer in mortality and then rob him of all his riches and

> possessions. He shall help you even in that ungrudgingly (Bhagat Singh, 2020:18).

Relatedly, Bhagat Singh's challenge to Gandhi's 'Satya' is not that 'truth' does not exist, but that 'truth' is unavailable. It is here that Bhagat Singh makes obvious his revolutionary stance: it derives not from vanity but rather from humility and egalitarianism. It seems likely that Bhagat Singh may have read Bertrand Russel's "Why I am not a Christian" in some form. On the other hand, the connection between these two texts relies primarily on the similarity of their titles. Bhagat Singh had access to other writings on Christianity and Christian agnosticism by Bertrand Russell, most notably Russell's 1927 pamphlet, *Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?* whose first paragraph appears in Bhagat Singh's *Jail Notebook*. He drew upon the critique of religion from a number of traditions, Russell, Marx, Gorky, Ingersoll, Tom Paine, Rousseau, Upton Sinclair and others. He wanted to teach people how religion dulls radical consciousness and how it is used by the ruling classes to reinforce authority.

Clearly, faith had completely left him leaving no traces behind. Bhagat Singh's objection to faith and god seemed to be both philosophical as well as springing from the severe religious unrest that he observed around him which marred regular life in 1920s India. This was a matter that Bhagat Singh had also written on prior to 1931 in an article entitled *Religion and National Politics* published in the journal *Kirti* in May 1928. Similarly, in another article, *Communal Problem and its Solution*, published in the same journal the following month, Bhagat Singh remarks forebodingly on the then recent Lahore communal riots prompted by the publication of a controversial book called *Rangila Rasul* by an individual with Arya Samaji inducements which the Muslim community found offensive. On the other hand, cow slaughter was a sore point with the Hindu community. The article reprimands the members of all three religious communities (Hindu, Muslim and Sikh) for their inability to keep a cool head in the face of provocation and the political leadership for their inability to play a constructive role.

Supporting Marxist-Leninist atheism Singh refers to the origin of religion and explains methods for the scientific criticism of religion. He remarks:

> As regards the origin of god, my own idea is that, having realized the limitations of man, his weaknesses and shortcomings having been taken into consideration, god was

> brought into imaginary existence to encourage man to face boldly all the trying circumstances (Bhagat Singh, 2020: 20).

Hence, even if it is a tease to say this without explanation, I think it is valid to say that Bhagat Singh was an atheist, who believed in a god who is us, humanity, past, present and future, for better or worse. For him Atheism is an attitude, a frame of mind that looks at the world objectively, fearlessly, always trying to understand all things as a part of nature. He believes that if there is anything beyond human experience it might as well not exist.

In today's scenario remembering Bhagat Singh would be to look at his thoughts and philosophy in the light of his humanist agenda, socialist ideas, and fight against exploitation, inequity and injustice. His ideas should reach the masses in a way that he and his comrades actually thought and implemented. That would perhaps be the greatest tribute to Bhagat Singh. One should not forget the last words of Bhagat Singh which he noted in his *Jail Notebook*:

> I desire that on no occasion, whether near or remote, nor for any reason whatsoever, shall demonstration of a political or religious character be made before my remains, as I consider the time devoted to the dead would be better employed in improving the condition of the living (Bhagat Singh, 2017: 51).

We still feel the loss that our country suffered at his untimely death. It was not for nothing that the British imperialists hanged him and the future rulers of India preferred to remain silent on his death sentence. At times, it seems, to be a "conspiracy" that deprived us of reading and understanding Bhagat Singh at the school/college level. The rebel inside us was not allowed to grow. We never learnt the language of sacrifice. As a result, most of us today tend to remain silent or be part of the corrupt, unjust and criminal system rather than stand up against it. This also explains the popular saying 'people want Bhagat Singh to take birth again but in the neighbourhood'. The impression that one gathers after re-reading his articles is that little has changed in close to a hundred years. The distractions that media and political leadership throw at us are not going to go away. It is up to us to look away.

In a country like India, while atheism is bound to have limited appeal, can we hope to worship our nation with the same zeal and ardour that we reserve for our theistic slogans and godmen? Can we forsake our selfish vested interests and challenge the status quo as did Bhagat Singh? Can we look away from our religious and caste differences and

concentrate on more compelling matters instead? Instead of garlanding his portrait on various anniversaries, if we, the people of India, read, reflect and practice what the writings of this great visionary martyr ask of us, it would perhaps be the greatest tribute to Bhagat Singh.

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- **Dr. Roopali Khanna** is Director, Kala Sadhana Art Gallery in Agra. She has been associated as Guest Faculty with the Department of English at B.D.K. College, Agra. Her area of interest is inspirational literature.

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HUMANISM WITHOUT BORDERS: NIBIR GHOSH AND *RE-MARKINGS*

Margarita R. Merino de Lindsay

My acquaintance with Nibir Ghosh began in 2017 when I received his kind invitation to submit poems for the *Re-Markings'* special number, *A World Assembly of Poets.* His endearing note put me under a mysterious Indian spell that tempted me to join a vibrant platform that encouraged me to accomplish the dream of my old children poem: "Come on to Defend the Beauty of the World." I have greatly enjoyed his recent *History News Network* interview by Robin Lindley as much as going through his cogent, eclectic book entitled *Mirror from the Indus*. Its pages lit many lamps for me as an extraordinary guide and source of keen intellectual thinking. I think of Nibir Ghosh as a torch of flames, a lighthouse for the world where death and desperation have taken a toll over already ten hard months of the year 2020 and two of 2021.

As the "Tower of Hercules"—an ancient Roman lighthouse, a symbol of antiquity cast in stone modeled on the Pharaohs of Alexandria—that overlooks the Atlantic ocean from La Coruña, the Galician city where my mother was born in north-western Spain, I perceive that the mythical tower has a contemporary twin in flesh and blood in India: Nibir Ghosh, who raises his research with such mysterious grace to vindicate courage and dignity in a style of rare respect for diversity and universal understanding. It happens to be done in parallel care for words and ideas of his preferred world authors from India, Europe, Africa, and American, British and Postcolonial literature—and many others from different backgrounds—he studies the whole to sustain his beliefs. He looks in his analysis for some healing too of human problems, environmental crisis and their interpretations. Christianity, Buddhism, war, hostile bureaucratic systems, hierarchy, honor, power, oppression, Untouchable-Dalits, the "American Dilemma," "Black-Untouchables," religious tensions, "return to nature," affluence and poverty, universal fraternity, global crisis. He recalls Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" syndrome and points how "real communication takes place in a spirit of easy give and take." Or he remembers Tagore's premonitions: "the idea of multiculturalism that Tagore envisaged ages ago ought to serve as a valuable road map to the future of mankind."

Both, tower and man, bring to us light, direction, conviction from their roots in countries they elevate far away from these lands with pride as a message from the legacy of ancestors who forged them in their own

making: in its light enduring along centuries of navigation; or in his resilient way to enrich others with a mind like a stained-glass window. Nibir Ghosh brings cool wisdom to the air, shares and melts it with rushing winds in the wish to reach for rumbling stars to make these ideals stay among us for our fulfillment from the full spectrum of their rainbow colors—emotion, spirituality, tolerance, humanism, freedom, peace, truth, compassion, faith, sacrifice, kindness, harmony. More than ever, we need to listen to the calm music of these abstractions to happen in a tough reality when still the blind madness of some politicians urges for greed and fast dollar in a sick world in which Nature is agonizing and cries out to slow down.

Nibir Ghosh with his wide knowledge crosses every boundary to inspire others with the models or figures of moral behavior and enduring ethics as Gandhi—referring to his astute observation that "an eye for an eye would make the world blind"—and his followers—as Dr. Martin Luther King,Jr. has said: "Our life begins to lose meaning the day we become silent about things that matter." Through deep readings of world authors, philosophers, thinkers, poets, activists or religious servants of community in the *Sulaha Kul*—"the essential oneness of all religion"—and—from understanding of universal literature and art, he reminds us—we have the capability to become better human beings and that we must extend beyond our privileged lives enriched by such exposure. Or how to increase our strength by joining forces and hands: we, united, can make the world a better place in a quiet but wild, non-violent revolution.

Nibir Ghosh reflects how "Mindsets cannot be changed with speeches and slogans; they can be broken only through sterling acts of self-sacrifice." He encourages learning as a tool of personal and social salvation and to inspire the young to be public servants: "it is necessary that leadership must spring from the youth who will be able to project and guard the interests and concerns of their respective communities without bothering about promoting their own vested self-interests."

Because the world becomes a more welcoming place when the ones who suffer caste, racism, disparity or discrimination by brutal exploitation or segregation are able to rise as strong individuals to stand against the status quo and to fight those walls of rejection with weapons of education, steady work to conquer knowledge and its facts against the darkness of political corruption or divisions of class. Through reflecting and sharing the giants of "truth and non-violence," the work of classic or contemporary authors, Nibir Ghosh underlines "the voices of philosophers, poet-prophets, writers and intellectuals who have warned us time

and again…—as Rousseau or Wordsworth— to refrain from entering the whirlpool of the endless cycle of getting and spending." He enjoys spreading the beneficial news of the humanities to others less fortunate. Through the experience of his own meeting with the unforgettable Mother Teresa, he urges us to surrender to kindness because "the language of caring is universal." It is no wonder that many health workers and providers today are making big sacrifices to care for all of us today.

So, this is a crucial time for teachers who are so needed, and for students to learn as much they can. The ones who have been blocked by materialism or by class arrogance stocked in situations without any social mobility can become successful by challenging themselves with intellectual guides and education in the path of the humanities. By choosing to actively learn throughout life and by creating works of art, no matter whether they get recognition or not, individual consolation and growth are guaranteed. There is hope, satisfaction, a move for the best in the act of self-construction without focus in the obstacles involved to pursue it even with the lack of support. With the lessons of great masters spread across Orient and Occident surpassing agony, rage, habits of costumes, inbreeding, nepotism; the prison of prejudices, labels, barriers of caste, race, gender, religion or nationality, political bias or interests, he makes us hopeful that we will survive the pandemics—beyond Covid-19—of ignorance, violence, stereotypes, fanaticism, propaganda, temptation and fear by reaching a new era of brotherhood-sisterhood.

With compassion, creativity, perseverance for truth and tolerance we will also survive the culture of cancelation which sometimes calls to replace the old monsters for new ones. Struggling with dangerous surroundings of new prejudices, we should always keep our minds lucid and away from the forbidding waves which limit us from reading the masterpieces in which stories and lines are multifaced jewels that can empower and light all of their readers irrespective of the shades that may be contained in some of them only because these notable pieces of art were created in different epochs of history. Nibir Ghosh underlines how "masterpieces are eternal contemporaries of mankind and have value and significance beyond the immediate confines of a particular moment in history."

Many writers—including myself—ask themselves often why "universal literature" is defined by the books written by men, when the ones written by women are classified as "feminine literature"? Now, for some writers who are women, it seems that women should read just literature written by women authors—to stay in their genre range to avenge and binge

from the unfair forgetfulness and violent repressions that others have suffered. Nothing against preferences. But if we change a boundary for others we will still be caged and haunted. Putrid patriarchal ways work as self-punishment to the men chained in those confinements when, as persons, they are so minimized in their possibilities to become human beings in plentitude.

Nibir Ghosh's sensitive parents and family would be very proud of him and his deserved success in how he is improving the lives of others. We learn that his nurturing childhood languages were Bengali, Hindi and English. His wife—Dr. Sunita Rani Ghosh, a dedicated professor as well, to whom *Mirror from the Indus* is dedicated—is a Punjabi, but his travels, experience, studies, attitude, have made him a citizen of the world. He always addresses other people with the humility he learned from his high models and ideals, especially when his choices have been made from his kind mind and his warm heart: for the areas that brought peace and pleasure to him and he wanted to share in his teaching profession the Chemistry of English Literature.

Nibir Ghosh has, very close to his home in Agra, another legendary twin cast in stone: The Taj Mahal which is a reminder of love that he has in his spirit and flesh too.

I am truly grateful to have been able to meet his spirit and to celebrate it in *Re-Markings* with great joy when so many circumstances around are so uncertain and sad. Each edition of *Re-Markings,* under his exemplary leadership, beckons us all to open our minds to make us stronger in celebration of education, solidarity, life. We NEED those values in our wounded world. Many congratulations and Happy 20th Birthday!

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- **Dr. Margarita R. Merino de Lindsay** is a Spanish Writer, poet and painter currently living in USA. Her interview was featured in *Re-Markings* (Vol. 18, #1. March 2019). Critics highlight her talent as "total poetry" through the vitality of her voice.

SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY

Mandeep Kaur

Salman Rushdie is better known for the use of magical realism. He combines it with historical fiction in all his writings starting with his first novel *Grimus* to his latest work *Quichotte.* He deals with magic realism, border/boundaries, science fiction, independence, migration, exile, homeland and countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Postcolonialism refers to a period after colonialism. Colonialism means when the powerful country has control over weak countries and on the resources that they use for gaining power and wealth. Postcolonial writing deals with suffering, pain and resistance that was experienced by colonized people in history. It talks about social class structure, gender, and caste. Postcolonial writings are also about marginalized classes.

This paper analyzes Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* from the postcolonial point of view. It was published in 1981 and was hailed as a postcolonial meta-fiction. It won the Booker Prize (for fiction), an Arts Council Writers' Award and the English-Speaking Union Award, and in 1993 was judged to have been the "Booker of Bookers," the best novel to have won the Booker Prize for Fiction in the award's 25-year history.

Salman Rushdie became famous after publishing this work. The novel highlights the transformation from British colonialism to independence and the partition of British India. It is considered a foundational text of postcolonialism. It depicts the postcolonial setting after British rule. The writer depicts Saleem Sinai's life who was born at midnight of 15th August 1947. Saleem says: "I was born in the city of Bombay…once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? Time matters too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more…on the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was to be no escape" (MC 2).

From the above statement, we see historical references. It is one of the postcolonial elements. There are many more elements like mimicry, hybridity, nation, and nationalism, metanarrative that I will explain fur-

ther. Rushdie successfully uses Magical Realism that makes this text very interesting because of children who are born on an independent day have supernatural powers inside them; they are not common kids. For example, Saleem's sense of smell and his telepathic power etc.: "what made the events noteworthy...was the nature of these children every one of whom was, through some freak of biology or perhaps owing to some pre-natural power of the moment or just conceivably by sheer coincidence, endomed with features, talents, and faculties which can only be described as miraculous" (MC 270).

Magical realism is an amalgamation of realism and fantasy. Another aspect of magical realism is the age of Tai. He did not have an idea about his age. He says: "I have watched the mountains being born. I have seen emperors die...I saw that Isa, that Christ when he came to Kashmir. Smile, smile, it is your history I am keeping in my head" (MC 13). He is as old as the Himalayas and sounds mystical. The reason why Rushdie had shown such longevity of Tai is that he wanted to represent old and pre-colonial India through the character of Tai. From the beginning of the novel the passage which deals with Saleem's grandfather in Kashmir is a wonderful instance of blending the magical and real elements: "One Kashmiri morning in the early spring of 1915, my grandfather Aadam Aziz hit his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray. Three drops of blood plopped out of his left nostril, hardened instantly in the brittle air and lay before his eyes on the prayer-mat, transformed into rubies" (MC 4).

Another key element of postcolonialism in the novel is the multiplicity of voices. It exemplifies literal polyphony. We hear many external and internal voices in the novel. We know that Rushdie and the hero of this novel Saleem were quite similar as regards their birthplace and year, religious and general family background, early schooling and migration from India to Pakistan etc. We even think that we hear Rushdie's voice behind Saleem's. It is a very interesting incident; he hears voices from all over India inside his head seeking solitude. Saleem lets his newly awakened inner ear which is connected like all ears to his nose. His head had become All India Radio which receives voices: "He said that the voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow, Urdu, to the southern slurring of Tamil" (MC 232). He also hears voices from the southern to the northern Himalayas, from the eastern frontier to the western border of the nation. He says, "there is not a thing I cannot know!" (MC 174). The original point of view shifts its attention to each of the objects of attention and we get to hear the various other voices.

A character may serve as a center of consciousness through which everything could be seen and felt. Matching with the dispersion of voices, there is also a multiplicity of genres in this novel. Rushdie comments on this need for plurality: "What I was trying to do in *Midnight's Children* was to make a plural form, since it seemed to me that I was writing about a world as manifold as a world can be. If you were to reflect that plurality, you would have to use as many different kinds of form as were available to you: fable, political, novel, surrealism, kitchen sink, everything and try to find an architecture which would allow all those different kinds of writing to co-exist" (Reder 45).

This novel can be seen as a historical novel of the twentieth century India because it narrates many of the major events in India's history. For instance, national strikes by Indians on April 7, 1919 under the guidance of Gandhiji, the infamous massacre at Jallianwala Bagh on April 19, 1919 in Amritsar city, the "Quit India" movement, the Partition of India, the first Independence Day celebration of free India on August 15, 1947, the assassination of Gandhi in 1948, the infamous emergency rule enforced in 1975 by Indira Gandhi, and the subsequent general election in 1977 etc. They provide various views of the history of the nation in the twentieth century up to 1977. Notably, every play is similar to Saleem's history and two histories are interconnected so that in telling one the other is also narrated.

Nation and nationalism are important elements of *Midnight's Children* in the story of an emerging nation like India. It shows the birth and development of Pakistan and Bangladesh and even offers details about the British. Rushdie describes the parallel between the private destiny of Saleem and the public destiny of India. Events leading to the simultaneous birth of the nation (India) and its body (Saleem) between August 13 and 15 are presented in an interesting way. M. A. Jinnah announced the midnight birth of a Muslim nation and on the other side, the birth of a new myth, the myth of a nation that is India.

Midnight's Children can be seen as a sequel to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography*. The dream that Nehru had about India's freedom turns into reality only with the birth of Saleem Sinai. Saleem's central position is ratified by the Prime Minister and his photograph appeared on the front page of the *Times of India*. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: "Dear Baby Saleem, my belated congratulations on the happy accident of your birth. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention. It will be in a sense, the mirror of our own" (MC

167).

Another historical event was the language riots of 1957 in India. In 1955, a report upon language riots was submitted to Mr. Nehru. Acting upon its recommendations, India was divided into fourteen states and six centrally administered territories. But the boundaries of these states "were not formed by rivers, or mountains or any natural features of the terrain…they were instead walls of words" (MC 261). Then there was violence in Bombay which wanted two parts of Bombay on a linguistic basis: Gujarati and Marathi. Here, we see that the linguistic war does not leave Saleem because when he learned cycling, he wanted to demonstrate his cycling skills to Evie. But Evie pushed him. He slipped and crashed into a procession of Marathi mobs. Marathi marchers asked Saleem to speak some Gujarati words. He does not know Gujarati. In order to escape from embarrassment, he recites a Gujarati rhyme. After this, both parties fall upon each other and fifteen are killed and a hundred wounded. Saleem becomes indirectly responsible for this violence and its result is the partition of the state of Bombay.

In the chapter "Love in Bombay" Jan Sangh, Congress, DMK, regional parties started their election campaign. This campaign rhetorically describes Saleem's indirect courtship for Evie but she rejected his love. She says, "That sniffer! He can't even ride a bike" (MC 256). Then he started to learn cycle riding. Evie burns teaching the Methwold children her bicycle arts. During one trail she pushed Saleem and he fell and got an injury in the head. It connected with the other midnight's children born during that midnight hour. His relationship with Evie shows American's aid in 1950 towards India.

Mimicry plays a vital role in Rushdie's novel. It is seen in some moments when Methwold sells his estate to Sinai's family and the colonizer becomes ironically displaced by the colonized. Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, for example, was a mockery of the monologues of Stalinism. In this novel mockery becomes audible in the voices of Ahmed Sinai and his wife's, Amina Ahmed's, changed voice in the presence of Methwold. In the presence of an Englishman, it becomes a hideous mockery of an Oxford drawl.

In *Midnight's Children* Saleem travels throughout the subcontinent by his magical powers. The notion of fixed identity does not work and characters in this novel are hybrid, are products of diversity and intermingling of cultures. in his essay "Imaginary Homelands" Rushdie observes, "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures, at other times that we fall between two

stools. But how ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for the writer to occupy" (Rushdie 1992:15). Shiva represents the dream of a nation and constitutes a political threat to Saleem's plural India. Narrator Saleem is born of Vanita, a Hindu wife of a magician singer, by an Englishman, Methwold, and nourished by Muslim parents. He is related to Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. we can see that the narrator is endowed with plural identities and stands for postcolonial India.

The story of Saleem Sinai is the story of postcolonial India. He is related to the country's fate and future. His life reflects the country's ups and downs, good and bad times. 1001 children are born with magical powers. Children who are born near independence night all have some extraordinary powers. When Saleem discovered this gift, there were only 581 children who were alive. His gift of telepathy allows him not only to immerse himself into the mind of other midnight's children but also India itself.

All children are from different background and religions but they interconnect with their special gift: "The children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered you understand, by history. It can happen, especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream" (MC 158). Saleem and Shiva both are born during independence midnight but both are opposite in nature. Shiva is named after the God of destruction, while Saleem represents Brahma, the God of creation, like Ganesh. Shiva's personality has different traits, he was born into poverty, he was expected by his father to be a beggar, so his frustration can be justified. Rachel Trousdale says, "If Saleem embodies the Indian history of pluralism, Shiva embodies Indian history of intolerance and oppression" (Trousdale 101).

Feminism is another aspect of postcolonialism. There is no doubt that India is male-dominated where women are suppressed by the male in many ways. In *Midnight's Children* there are three generations of ladies, Naseem, Amina, Jamila. Sometimes we term these suppressed ladies as subaltern. Naseem is the young daughter of Ghani and remains in a veil. She is very strict. When she has a stomach ache doctor inspects her through the medium of a perforated sheet. She is treated by a Europe-returned doctor, Aziz. Ghani's comments are ridiculed: "You Europe returned chappies forget certain things Doctor Sahib, my daughter is a decent girl. It goes without saying. She does not flaunt her body under the noses of strange men. You will understand that you cannot be permitted to see her, no, not in any

circumstances; accordingly, I have required her to be positioned behind that sheet. She stands there like a good girl" (MC 22*).*

When Doctor Aziz marries Naseem, he tells his newlywed wife to move, to come out of her veils and become a modern Indian woman despite remaining a decent Kashmiri girl. She starts weeping into her pillow and asks: "My God, what have I married? I know you Europe returned men. You find terrible women and then you try to make us girls be like them! Listen, Doctor Sahib, husband or no husband, I am not any bad word woman" (MC 3). After her marriage, she's transformed from a shy girl into a modern girl. Her transformation from Ghani's veiled daughter into a domineering mother in Aziz's house can be understood in the light of the portrayal of women characters.

The second generation started with Mumtaz who is renamed after her second marriage as Amina Sinai. The first husband Nadir Khan, who is related to Mian Abdullah, represents a male dominant society. He is very strict. Nadir Khan left three years after the marriage declaring Talaq. She loved her husband bit by bit. We can say that she fell under the charm of the perforated sheet of her parents. She is an eternal mother and shows a feminine principle. From conception, it seems that the child has been a public thing. The public announcement of the birth of her son saved a life. She knows that Saleem is not her biological son but she acts like a mother.

Thus, we can say that Rushdie has discussed in *Midnight's Children* ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, and hybridity. It teaches us to accept and respect other religions as well as nationalities.

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- **Mandeep Kaur** is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at K.L.S.D. College, Ludhiana.

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OVERCOMING DISASTER: VICTOR FRANKL'S *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING*

Saurabh Agarwal

Literature based on World War II reveals to us the horrific carnage that were unleashed on the Jews in Nazi Germany and forces us to think whether a parallel to such an act could have existed in the annals of the history of mankind. Writers, through their works, fictional and non-fictional, time and again have provided us with "the accounts and facts of the events" (17) that were suffered by millions of prisoners who led life in sub-human conditions and were subjected to mass brutality which may put even the barbarism of uncivilized world to shame. But, as Victor Frankl, remarks, *Man's Search for Meaning* is a book that takes us to "hopeless, meaningless world" (52) where attempts were made to preserve the sanity in the state of utter despair. The book is ranked by Library of Congress as one of the ten most influential books in America. The original English title of this work was "From Death-Camp to Existentialism."

Victor Frankl's fame stands on his widely read Holocaust testimony, *Man's Search for Meaning* (originally published in 1959). Born in Vienna in 1905, Frankl was the founder of a school of psychotherapy known as logotheraphy, an existential form of analysis he described as therapy through meaning. He, from his first-hand account of his days in the concentration camps, has chosen to bring forth a book which seeks to overpower the pain and suffering with inherent love for life by treating them to be the integral part of it. The book resonates and follows the philosophy which embodied in the words of Nietzsche, "He who has a Why to live for can bear almost any How" (84). It explores the meaning of life when life itself is nothing but misery without end. It is in the opening passage that the author states that this book" is not concerned with the great horrors, which have already been described often enough (though less often believed), but with multitude of small torments" (17). The book resets the capacity of humanity to undergo suffering and be able to retain ability to love and survive. "Auschwitz – the very name stood for all that was horrible, gas chambers, cremations, massacres" (22) – is where author has been brought to and enslaved. Conditions at the camp in which he and his fellowmen are made to live may not be fit even for the animals. Devoid of their identity through a system which reduced a person to just a number, one thousand five hundred prisoners were put up in a shed that had the capacity to accommodate only two

hundred. A diet of a few ounce of bread and a pint of watery pea soup were given to sustain their body which is subjected to hard labour in harsh climatic conditions; for clothing, they were given "uniform of rags which would have made a scarecrow elegant by comparison" (33). Unprovoked beating by Capos and no news from family are factors enough to drive any person to terminate his own life by running into electrified barbed wires. The prisoners at these camps look at themselves not as an individual but as "only a part of an enormous mass of people; his existence descended to the level of animal life" (60). In their earlier part of lives they may have occupied prominent positions in the society but in camps they would barely mention that. Here the structure of society has taken new shape with Capos occupying the helm.

The author had ensured his survival by enduring the suffering that came to him within the world fenced by barded wires. This discovery of his new self in the "world which no longer recognized the value of human life and human dignity, which had robbed man of his will and had made him an object to be exterminated" (60) and "he thought of himself then as only a part of an enormous mass of people; his existence descended to the level of animal life" (60). Frankl's work attempts to chalk out a road map which is to be seen as "effort to save his self-respect" (60) and regain the "lost feeling of being an individual, a being with a mind, with inner freedom and personal values" (60).

The signs that people are giving up faith abound. It is under these inhumane conditions that Frankl begins to see a pattern for survival through "delusion of reprieve" (20), revisiting past, revival of spiritual and moral being, looking for cultural escapes, humour and seeking bliss in trivial beauty. Frankl says, "In psychiatry there is a certain condition known as delusion of reprieve. The condemned man, immediately before his execution, gets the illusion that he might be reprieved at the very last minute. We, too, clung to shreds of hope and believed to the last moment that it would not be so bad" (23). But then these shreds of hope don't come easy in the grim times; they have to be sought out and though however small, have to be looked at as if magnified many times. This is seen when author clings to the image of his beloved wife, talks to her and seeks respite in the thought that one day he will be united with her, though simultaneously he is aware of the reality that she may not be alive. These lines reveal the epiphany he experiences through this fancy: "A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers" (48). Frankl's longing for his wife obviously preoccupied him during his internment and eventually led him to have

semi-mystical experiences. As he says, "The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present, that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and grasp hers. The feeling was very strong: she was there" (52).

Love for the important person in life who had existed in the world outside the camps became a pivotal point around which one could rally all his emotions which would have eventually gone dormant in the environment so frigid that didn't leave any other though but of death alive:

> The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment" (49).

Through this he had developed an escape mechanism which brought to him temporary respite from the heat of reality and through these fantastical musings he wove himself a rope of hope to cling to. These thoughts became his sanctum sanctorum which helped him preserve his sanity. This was done simply by revisiting the past. He terms it as "intensification of inner life" (50) by letting him escape into the past. The following statement by Frankl exemplifies this:

> When given free rein, his imagination played with past events, often not important ones, but minor happenings and trifling things. His nostalgic memory glorified them and they assumed a strange character. Their world and their existence seemed very distant and the spirit reached out for them longingly: "In my mind I took bus rides, unlocked the front door of my apartment, answered my telephone, switched on the electric lights. Our thoughts often centered on such details, and these memories could move one to tears" (50).

The fearsome surroundings of camps, the torture at the hands of Capos and SS, impending death and filth in which the inmates dwell have smashed their ability to rejoice in art and nature. These trips down the memory lane had a therapeutic effect on the author and his inner ability to perceive joys in small things was restored. If one looked at the inmates watching the mountains of Salzburg, while being transported

from Auschwitz to a Bavarian camp through barred windows, one "would never have believed that those were the faces of men who had given up all hope of life and liberty" (51). Similar experience of watching the changing colours of sky during sunset are used by Frankl as the "last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death" (Ibid.)

In concentration camps it should have been moronic to be thinking of entertaining oneself through any form of art. But for the author, who was on good terms with the Capo, because of certain service he had rendered, he comes to see crude form of art in the camps. On certain days the Capos "came to have a few laughs or perhaps to cry a little; anyway, to forget. There were songs, poems, jokes, some with underlying satire regarding the camp. All were meant to help us forget, and they did help" (53). The effect of these activities was such that some of the prisoners missed their daily portion of food.

It is important to note what Frankl says about art: "Generally speaking, of course, any pursuit of art in camp was somewhat grotesque. I would say that the real impression made by anything connected with art arose only from the ghostlike contrast between the performance and the background of desolate camp life" (53).

Another strong link that Frankl discovers to keep himself connected to life was humour. Like art, humour in the times of war can be ephemeral but he saw it as "another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humour, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds" (54). Journey in a train, which is so cramped that a person can take turns to squat "on scanty straw which was soaked with human urine," (56) ended up in the camp without gas chamber or chimney had inspired prisoners to crack jokes and share a laughter in spite of the knowledge that new ordeals awaited them. Frankl collates these rare pleasures, which may be as scant as two in several months, in the balance sheet of good memories.

There had been episodes where people succumbed to state of despair so deep that no amount of punishment or beating would bring them out as they lay in their own dirt and filth. It is mentioned that once cannibalism too had broken into the camp. Thus, Frankl has this realisation that the hope is the biggest factor that keeps a person going in the face of suffering. An individual has to come to terms with the sufferings for they are his own and no one else can suffer in his place: "Sometimes man may be required simply to accept fate, to bear his cross. Every

situation is distinguished by its uniqueness, and there is always only one right answer to the problem posed by the situation at hand" (85).

It is evident that only the person who enjoys highest degree of sadism could have been able to perform the tasks assigned to them. Frankl has rightly questioned the "psychological make-up of the camp guards" (91) who could bring themselves to perpetuate the kind of crimes we see being committed. But here too, Frankl shows a balanced view where he refuses to classify them strictly as good and bad: "From all this we may learn that there are two races of men in this world, but only these two—the "race" of the decent man and the "race" of the indecent man. Both are found everywhere; they penetrate into all groups of society. No group consists entirely of decent or indecent people. In this sense, no group is of 'pure race'—and therefore one occasionally finds a decent fellow among the camp guards"(94).

Frankl does recount helping several prisoners who were suffering from typhus though he is without any medical amenity at his hand. It is his perusal of an active life at typhus ward that makes him realise, "if there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete" (76). In a significant statement Frankl tells us that it is we ourselves, who permit others to "rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become moulded into the form of the typical inmate" (75).

Frankl's work can be seen to be germinated out of pain that is intricately linked to the horrors of war and crime on humanity perpetuated in name of protecting nations, race and religion. Emptiness of the cause that can be seen in the life of concentration camps doesn't leave the psyche of inmates unscathed. Their lives after being released from the camps were never the same. Many went to their homes to discover the fact that the individual in whom they had vested all their hopes and dreams was no longer there in the world. Their ability to integrate with the outer world had been marred by the torture they had undergone in the camps. Many of them had come to acquire the sadistic tendencies of their predators and would unflinchingly inflict pain to others as a justification to what they underwent. For many the sub-humane treatment that was accorded to them left their dignity in shreds.

It was Frankl's existentialist approach that helped him find meaning in an oppressive and dehumanized situation. His testimony is full of many

uplifting statements which form the basis of the popularity of this book. His solution relied upon the promotion of attitudinal values where he claimed that even in extreme circumstances, one can overcome apathy to find meaning in suffering. Through his work, Victor Frankl, not only shows the way employed by him for coming to terms with his experience but lays down the strategies for persons who need to resolve their psychic turmoil through the events in life on which any human may not be having control.

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- **Saurabh Agarwal**, a Management graduate, is an Agra-based entrepreneur and freelance writer.

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN BALLI KAUR JASWAL'S *INHERITANCE* AND *SUGARBREAD*

Anjali Singh

> Kristen to Pin: "'No fanatics allowed,' she said. She looked pointedly at my 'kara'. 'I have to wear this. It's for my religion. I'm Sikh,' I told her, just as I had tirelessly told the prefects, the teachers and the girls on the school bus who had asked. 'I'm not a fanatic.'…Abigail Goh raised an eyebrow. 'Sikhs are disgusting,' she informed Kristen. 'The men have beards and they wear these funny looking turbans. They only wash their hair once a week.' She wrinkled her nose. I felt my face grow hot. I couldn't breathe." – Balli Kaur Jaswal, *Sugarbread* (2017: 261)

Balli Kaur Jaswal, a transnational diasporic writer, belongs to an up-coming new breed of writers. As an individual, she identifies herself as a Singaporean Sikh **(**Makhijani**)**. She won international acclaim when HarperCollins, the publishing giant won the bid on her unpublished novel at a London book fair. Besides, her novels are a part of the curriculum of Singapore's undergraduate and post graduate courses. The major themes of her writing include those within the margins of diasporic sensibilities – inter-generational conflicts, migrant communities, cultural expectations of Indian women, especially those who live on the fringes of society and racial prejudices**.** Her debut novel *Inheritance* won Sydney Herald's Best Young Novelist award in 2014. It is also the first English-language novel about Singapore's Punjabi Sikh Diaspora (Makhijani**)**. *Inheritance* is a coming-of-age story of a nation which is paralleled with an immigrant Punjabi-sikh family that is dealing with the disappearance of its matriarch and the immigrant issues the family grapples with; all this in the backdrop of the racial prejudices in the air. *Sugarbread* was a finalist at the 2015 Epigram Books fiction prize; it is the highest literary award in Singapore (Nur). *Sugarbread* is another coming-of-age story of Pin, a ten-year old girl who belongs to the third generation of the immigrant family. The narrative is from her perspective and mirrors some of Jaswal's own experiences of racial prejudices during her growing up years in Singapore.

The setting of both the novels is predominately Singapore. Amongst other issues, they also examine the endemic racism of Singapore

which has been declared illegal by the government. It is a taboo topic; especially in context of its race riots and its impact. Racial discrimination can be explained as the prejudices displayed towards an individual or community because it/they are the 'other' and different. Singapore as a nation has four national languages – English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Its population includes predominantly Chinese, Malay and South Asian; and their corresponding religions. The Punjabi-Sikh is a minority within the minority Indian community. However, Singapore is not the only place that has it, it exists heavily in the perceived most advanced nation of the world – America as well. This paper explores the racial discrimination in these two novels and how it impacts the characters experiencing it.

Inheritance

Of all the characters, it is Narain who is most profoundly impacted. His childhood memories are laced with the unpleasantness of the prejudices by his classmates for being 'different'. This extends into the adulthood and America:

> He was ignored in Iowa, just as he had been all his life in Singapore…. He drew curious looks for his turban and his beard. As a young boy in Singapore, he used to complain that people stared and his classmates made jokes…. 'You are Sikh…Be proud.' But pride was measured no differently in America. Classmates didn't invite him to parties or include him in their study groups. They cleared their throats and lowered their voices when he passed them on the quad or in the library (8).

In an incident at the library, there is an accidental miscommunication on his end which invites coldness from the librarian when she attributes the error to him being 'different'. Narain chooses to apologize and hurries off as he feels the "familiar shame of an intruder" (9). He plans on a transformation. He decides to get rid of his long tresses that symbolise the faith of the race he belongs to but hesitates to carry it to its ultimate goal. Later when he returns to Singapore he attempts to conclude his plans of transformation that he had initiated in the American University. He finds that none of the barbers are willing to help him, even when offered a higher sum, for fear of a backlash from his community – the Punjabi Sikh. Despite all his attempts to fit in, he finds it difficult to understand the 'language' spoken by the majority.

Amrit's brush with racial prejudices is slightly of a different nature. Termed as 'casual racism' it involves name calling and cracking jokes

around it. In one incident, Amrit is drying off on the beach after a swim in the sea; she is approached by a group of men who make a racial comment – "…when we saw you sitting alone, we thought, this is just a quiet Punjabi girl. Sitting near the seaside, maybe praying to your guru or something. Laughter scattered across the beach. Amrit closed her eyes and felt the laughter rock her body" (178). In another incident two Chinese women at a bus stop use gestures and name calling to impose their supposedly perceived racial supremacy. During one of her cab-rides, the driver quizzes her about her racial background and the colour of her skin. He is surprised to see Amrit, a fair skinned Indian who does not speak in Tamil as he believed that Indians were all dark-skinned. Mrs. Rosario, Amrit's Eurasian employer always eyes her 'kara' with a disdain and is surprised that even the men of the community wear it; she believes that the rosary ring of her faith is much less trouble than the cumbersome 'kara'.

The race riots that occur in Singapore crop up in the conversation of Narain and Gurdev. Both the brothers witness it and are haunted by it well into their adulthood. Narain shares with Jenny, his white American girlfriend, "…race riots, and the odd calm that descended over the island after curfews were imposed to keep the Chinese and Malays from clashing in the streets (17-18). Gurdev too recalls it especially because his father Harbeer had worked overtime to help set up cordons. He remembers seeing it being reported on the news; images of policemen lining the streets and their staunch expressions giving them an identical hardness flash before his eyes. The taboo topic crops up during the conversation between Gurdev and a Chinese shopkeeper.

> The night of the race riots – you remember that? I was very scared. My son spends so much time playing football in the sun that he has dark skin. People often think he's Malay. I thought, if this thing takes over our country, how do I convince anybody he's my child? The Chinese will attack him, thinking he's Malay. The Malays will attack him if he insists he is Chinese (46-47).

The impact is quite severe to lodge itself in the memory of these characters to make Gurdev wince, for Narain to share it with Jenny, his most intimate partner and Amrit who responds physically by either closing her eyes to shut out the humiliation or breaks into a run that quickly tires her out. Then there is Harbeer who has accepted the fact that his roots had been a hurdle in the professional promotions that was rightfully his. To fit in, he converses in English, Punjabi and Malay;

he gets angry in 'English' and haggles in 'Malay'! Thus, he attempts to learn the national languages to assimilate with the racial identity of his adopted nation.

Sugarbread

Parveen or Pin is third-generation of the Punjabi-sikh immigrant family. She is earnest in her observations and has a bubbling curiosity about the world around her, reflected in her conversations with God. She tackles the racial slurs she encounters daily in different forms – the Bus Uncle, her classmates like Abigail Goh, Roadside and the neighbourhood boys.

Pin experiences the dark side of being different, most noticeably in her school – First Christian. She finds herself giving explanations about the faith of the race she belongs to. She finds that her community, the Punjabi-Sikh is often misunderstood and there is confusion about it being clubbed with the South-Indian Tamils. Often, another student with 'Kaur' as the last name is considered to be her sibling. A classmate of hers, Siti believes that another student with the last name 'Kaur' is Pin's sister, to which Pin denies. Siti continues to insist her stand when Pin's friend, Farizah rescues her and speaks up for her; Farizah is able to do so because she endured similar questions about her 'differences' and understood Pin like nobody else. The South-Indian Tamils being an Indian majority community, Pin is often questioned about it as well.

Within the Indian community, she is different, as she has a fair skin and speaks Punjabi. She is often given the unwanted advice to take up Tamil as her mother tongue like other Indian girls. Then, there is her daily encounter with the racist Bus Uncle. He not only verbally abuses her, but also intimidates her physically. He takes sadistic pleasure by calling her 'Mungalee' and sees her shrink away in fear and shame. She understands that 'Mungalee' is a mean and ugly word used for Indians, especially due to their dark skin colour. Next is her friend 'Roadside', a member of the neighbourhood boys' informal football club. They find her 'kara' offending and insist that she could be the goalie provided she removes it. Abigail Goh, her Chinese classmate is delighted at every opportunity to cast racial insults, including targeting the new teacher, Mrs. Parsuram, a South-Indian. She makes racist remarks about Pin's Punjabi community.

In addition to her own experiences of racial prejudices, there are ones she witnesses. Her friend 'Roadside' and his gang is a racial-mix and there are instances of 'casual racism' – name calling based on their

racial differences, collective joking and shoulder-punching following it etc. In one instance, the teasing and counter-teasing is about the colour of the skin. Malik, one of the boys, teases a Chinese boy about being so pale that he had to strain his eyes to see him against the white walls. The Chinese boy retorts that the walls under his blocks are so 'dirty' that they matched his dark skin. This is followed by a quick pause and a tension in the air, before Malik bursts out laughing.

Another instance is that of the 'question-game'; it consists of dividing the players into teams based on their races. Then each race-group poses a question in their own language to another race-group who has to answer with a 'Yes' or 'No'. Thereafter, the question is translated for everybody to understand and if the answer matches the question suitably, then the team scores a point. "The Chinese girls asked the Malay girls, the Malay girls asked the Chinese girls, and the Tamil girls asked the rest; their language being the most fascinating—fast and rough like pebbles rolling around in a tin can" (65). Pin, mostly joined the 'Malay girls'. Gayathiri Vengadasalam is a South Indian, liked by nobody for her apparently undesired behaviour, lack of English-speaking skills and her very dark skin. During the bus-ride home, Abigail invites Gayathiri to play the 'Question game'; with her malicious intent to make her an object of ridicule. Abigail poses the question to Gayathiri which is laced with racism.

> 'Are you black?' she was asking…. Gayathiri did not understand. I wanted to warn her, but I was frozen with shame. If I said something, would the other girls call me black too? 'I choose Yes! No…no…yes! Okay, yes.'... The Malay and Tamil girls looked confused; they asked their Chinese friends what Abigail had asked, but nobody would say it because Gayathiri was still giving her answer. 'Yes! Yes!' she said excitedly (67).

Next, she is a witness to Abigail Goh's insulting racial taunts on the new teacher Mrs. Parsuram that are aimed at her oily hair and dark skin; on Farizah when she taunts her that Muslims were descendants of pigs themselves which is why they did not eat pork.

Pin shares with her father, the Bus Uncle's 'Mungalee' remarks. He tells her that as a young boy he too faced it; that their own teachers addressed them as 'Blackie' and 'Darkie' and all kinds of names. He responded by not reacting as it was better to let ignorant people make fools of themselves; there was nothing he could really do. He believed that Pin was lucky to be living in a time when there is a greater tole-

rance; one could not get away with making racial remarks. When Pin tells Mrs. Parsuram about the cutting and insulting racial taunts Abigail makes on her, the teacher seemed unaffected. She tells her that one cannot change how others think but one can surely change how one reacts to such racism as the behaviour speaks of the upbringing and the education one received. Farizah's response to the racial slurs was 'forgiveness' as it was something her religion taught her.

Listening to other people's responses angers Pin who believes that one should retort and inflict the same hurt back at the racist. This is extraordinary as she is surrounded by those who believe in ignoring it. Yet, she listens to the voice within. The shame and humiliation she feels leave deep scars on her psyche. She finds it hard to forgive someone like Abigail Goh. She finally summons up the courage to respond despite her shaky voice when she says, "There is nothing worse than being Abigail Goh" (261); she earns Mrs. Parsuram's praise for standing up for herself. With the Bus Uncle too, she realises that nothing could erase the shame she felt every time she heard his racial taunts; when he grabs her by the elbow, leans close to her and hurls abuses at her, she stomps on his feet before escaping down the bus step and running away to her block. She boldly tells Kristen that she is not a fanatic and that the 'kara' symbolises her faith. From being a timid voiceless girl, she grows to be a person who learns to mirror her humiliation and throw insult back at the perpetrators.

Pin's earnestness and innocent responses closely remind of another character, six-year-old Jean Louise Finch, nicknamed Scout from the Pulitzer Prize winning novel *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. Both of these novels highlight racial discrimination. "*Sugarbread* is an important book, especially right now, and I believe that it could easily become Singapore's *To Kill a Mockingbird* … Pin has to brook taunts by Bus Uncle… as well as vile comments from classmate Abigail Goh and others. Pin's outrage and how she deals with these encounters illustrate the consequences of this casual racism and how the Chinese majority tends to treat South Asians and Malays, and her endurance of it "is a social justice punch right to the gut," says Jason who interviewed Jaswal about the issues raised by *Sugarbread*.

Both the novels highlight the racial discrimination lodged deep into the psyche of the characters and how they deal with it. While the first generation immigrants accept and adapt around this disturbing reality, the second and subsequent generation immigrants question it and find their own individual ways of dealing with it. In *Inheritance* the racial

discrimination falls under the blanket term of Asians. Though the central characters are Indians, the others like the Malay also voice their concerns around the riots that erupt due to the racial differences. The government imposes strict laws to discourage the behaviour; however, subtle behavioral patterns reveal how deeply it is embedded. The second generation immigrants are mature adults and the references are subtle and rooted more deeply in the past. These characters face it in locations beyond their host country. Having followed the first generation's values and solutions to respond to these, they invent their own responses; in the process encouraging the subsequent generations to be better equipped to deal with it. In *Sugarbread* the prejudices are restricted to a geographical location of the host country and within the Asians. Furthermore, the narrative being that of a third generation immigrant, she invents her own way to deal with it. She is better equipped to make choices and have a voice. She has the space to think freely aided by her parents and a teacher – Mrs. Parsuram. She gains control of her perception around it rather than accept what is dished out to her.

When Balli was questioned about her own experiences being mirrored by Pin, she says that they were limited to a few similarities – the Bus Uncle and the blatant racial remarks by others of the older generation. She also shares how *Sugarbread* had a shaky start when she was unable to find publishers for it in the racially prejudiced Singapore. However, Sleepers Publishers from Australia agreed to publish it following which Epigram books UK re-published it. Even in the twenty-first century the racial prejudices are so deep-rooted that it is no coincidence that COVID-19's highest number of casualty in UK's 'health workers' happens to be those belonging to the BAME – Blacks, Asians, Minority Ethnics. Yet at the same time one incident of 'George Floyd' has united humans across their differences. In the midst of these issues, *Inheritance* and *Sugarbread* take it a step further by creating awareness that would lodge itself in the consciousness of the people.

Just like George Floyd's last words *"Please, I can't breathe,"* Pin too is unable to breathe when subjected to this 'mental disease' – racial discrimination. There is a need for a vaccine against it which is more fatal than the current COVID crisis. It is commendable that writers like Jaswal can be termed as the academic warriors in the fight against this immensely infectious mental disease. In an interview published in *Constellations*, magazine of the School of Humanities at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Jaswal's social aim can be

summed up in the following quote: "Writing about injustice and hypocrisy was my way of making the invisible visible" (Jaswal).

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- **Anjali Singh**, UGC NET, is a Ph.D. Research Scholar at Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra. Her areas of interest are Gender Studies, British, American, European, and Post-Colonial literatures.

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FROM SYMBOLS TO COGNIZANCE: ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

Sangeeta Verma

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie from Nigeria has carved a niche for her writings in Nigerian Literature through the publication of three extraordinary novels – *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americannah.* Her debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* which was published in 2003 was shortlisted for Orange Prize 2004 and was longlisted for Booker Prize. The second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), that won her the 2007 Orange Prize for Fiction, deals with the Nigerian-Biafran War. *Americannah* (2013) focuses on the themes of race and identity. Besides these thought-provoking novels, she has also written a collection of short stories – *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and a play titled *For Love of Biafra* (1998). In her works, she expresses ideas through the use of symbols from Africa that transcend geographical boundaries.

As a writer, she is influenced by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe who is often described as the father-figure of Nigerian fiction. In *The Writing Life*, Adichie acknowledges that reading Achebe gives her 'permission' to deliver her thoughts. She has been hailed as 'the twenty-first century daughter of Chinua Achebe' by the *Washington Post Book World*. Adichie's prominent novel *Purple Hibiscus* is a symbolic one. The novelist uses a rich network of symbols which help a reader to understand the deeper nuances of the novel. The significance of the purple hibiscus plant, repeated references to the figurines, the use of palm, the presence of the earthworm and the snail, the change of weather, the different colours, the missal and above all the section titles add sauce and lend charm to the varied ramifications of the novel. What do the "hibiscus" and other symbols signify? The aim of the paper is to delve into the novel and interrogate the ambivalence inherent in the symbols.

From beginning to end, symbols of nature, especially of varieties of flowers and trees, abound in the novel. The title of chapters, bear a plant's name, besides the Christian Biblical reference—"Palm Sunday," "Before Palm Sunday" and "After Palm Sunday." In addition, Kambili, the narrator, frequently draws the reader's attention to the presence of various florae—pine, cashew, gmelina, coconut, orange, mango, frangipani, palm—surrounding the places where the characters live. For instance, in the first chapter, coming back to her

room to change her clothes after attending Palm Sunday Mass, Kambili describes her bedroom and the compound bordered by flowers and trees as well as the impact of natural environment on human beings:

> I sat at my bedroom window and changed; the cashew tree was so close I could reach out and pluck a leaf if it were for the silver-colored crisscross of mosquito netting. The bell-shaped yellow fruits hung hazily, drawing buzzing bees that bumped against my window's netting […]. It was early rainy season, and the frangipani trees planted next to the walls already filled the yard with the sickly-sweet scent of their flowers. A row of purple bougainvillea, cut smooth and straight as a buffet table, separated the gnarled trees from the driveway. Closer to the house, vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seem to bloom so fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church altar and how often visitors plucked them as they walked past to their parked cars (*PH* 8-9).

Characters in the novel are exhibited frequently in contact with the green environment of vegetation, using their shade, flowers, leaves, oil or fruits. Sometimes, it is as if the trees are not happy being outside and do their best to make their presence felt indoors. For instance, the narrator observes that it is "as if the high walls locked in the scent of the ripening cashews and mangoes and avocados" (*PH* 252). Trees also become a measure of time, as when Kambili tells the reader that "Aunty Ifeoma came the next day, in the evening, when the orange trees started to cast long, wavy shadows across the water fountain in the front yard" (*PH* 71) or of her being awakened by "the rustling of the coconut fronds" (*PH* 58). Actually, the Egyptian farmers used the palm tree like a clock or calendar measuring months because it gives a bud regularly every month (Abrams 122).

It appears that nature and characters are interconnected in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus.* To such a point the use of the narrative device "pathetic fallacy" can be argued in this novel in the sense of "the ascription of human traits to inanimate nature" (Hassett). Characters' emotions are carried out by natural elements in the novel.

Hibiscus is found in warm-temperate subtropical and tropical regions and is symbolic to many cultures all over the world. The title of the

novel – *Purple Hibiscus* – conveys a symbolic meaning. The flower of the title is a hybrid one which represents a change in the characters of Kambili and Jaja forever. The Purple Hibiscus plant symbolizes the children's independence. In settings of the novel—Enugu, Abba town, Nsukka—the presence of hibiscus is mentioned, though not the purple one. For example, Kambili tells at the beginning of the novel about their house in Enugu:

> Vibrant bushes of hibiscus reached out and touched one another as if they were exchanging their petals. The purple plants had started to push out sleepy buds, but most of the flowers were still on the red ones. They seemed to bloom so fast, those red hibiscuses, considering how often Mama cut them to decorate the church altar and how often visitors plucked them as they walked past to their parked cars. It was mostly Mama's prayer group members who plucked flowers; a woman tucked one behind her ear once—I saw her clearly from my window. But even the government agents, two men in black jackets who came some time ago, yanked at the hibiscus as they left (*PH* 9).

The Hibiscus is used for make-up or for decoration. In the Pacific Islands, it is said that women wear the hibiscus metaphorically behind their ears. "Behind the left ear, a hibiscus represents the woman as a desirous lover; behind the right ear, the woman is taken; behind both ears, the woman is taken but prefers another lover" (Smith). The color of the hibiscus is usually red, but can be white, pink, yellow, reddish orange or purple. Such vibrant flowers formed "a circular burst of bright colors" in the garden in front of Aunty Ifeoma's house in Nsukka as "Roses and hibiscuses and lilies and ixora and croton grew side by side like a hand painted wreath" (*PH* 112). The first time, at their Aunt's home, Jaja and Kambili saw the plant, they were curious. This plant was something different from other hibiscus plants.

"That's a hibiscus, isn't it, Aunty?" Jaja asked, staring at a plant close to the barbed wire fencing. "I didn't know there were purple hibiscuses." Aunty Ifeoma laughed and touched the flower, colored a deep shade of purple that was almost blue. "Everybody has that reaction the first time. My good friend Phillipa is a lecturer in botany. She did a lot of experimental work while she was here. Look, here's white ixora, but it doesn't bloom as fully as the red." Jaja joined Aunty Ifeoma, while we stood watching them. "O maka, so beautiful," Jaja said. He was running a finger over a flower petal. Aunty Ifeoma's

laughter lengthened to a few more syllables. "Yes, it is. I had to fence my garden because the neighborhood children came in and plucked many of the more unusual flowers. Now I only let in the altar girls from our church or the Protestant church" (*PH* 128-129).

Jaja seems attached to it when he first sees it. Jaja takes some of Ifeoma's purple flowers to plant in the garden by his own house, like his independence. Soon afterwards he gathers up the courage to defy his father. Jaja's rebellion may be seen synonymous with Aunty Ifeoma's purple hibiscus. Both are rare and are emblematic of freedom. It is this clarion call of freedom to which Jaja responds. The typical hibiscus plant that grows in Aunty Ifeoma's house serves as an objective correlative. Indeed, the purple hibiscus summons Jaja and Kambili to break the offensive silence. At the end of the first chapter: "Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus rare, fragrance with the undertones of freedom…. A freedom to be, to do" (*PH* 15-16).

Some colours are also symbolized in the novel. It may be seen how the red colour is associated with Eugene and their home place in Enugu. It represents abstract ideas and values (anger and passion). For example:

> "Red was the colour of Pentecost." (*PH* 28).
>
> "Amaka and Ifeoma's red lipstick." (*PH* 89).
>
> "Papa's red pajamas" (*PH* 41) – papa (Eugene) is associated with red most when he is feeling tired, remorseful and weak.
>
> "Red eyes" (*PH* 182) – papa (Eugene) has just learned Kambili and Jaja are staying in the same house as papa Nnukwa.
>
> "Red eyes, red pajamas" (*PH* 209): when papa (Eugene) discovers the portrait of papa Nnukwa.

Red is allied with Pentecost – possessed by the Holy Spirit. Papa has a rule bound idea about religion and "mushroom Pentecostal Churches." Red might indicate his inability to resist the power of the Holy Spirit which is profoundly democratic spirit. At the same time, red is connected with his rule in the house by means of the hibiscus: purple hibiscus – represents freedom, but red is related with the time before Kambili began to feel free. The colour blue, often associated with feelings of calm and solitude, is repeatedly combined with the characters of Father Amadi, Aunty Ifeoma and other positive figures. Father Amadi's car smelt like him, a clean scene of "a clear azure sky.

Her grandfather, papa Nnukwa, dressed in a "wrapper with faded blue edges." Besides the symbolic meanings of hibiscus and colours, there are various references to palm fronds in the novel. In Christianity, palms are connected particularly with Palm Sunday. The first part of the novel is entitled "Palm Sunday" and describes Father Benedict speaking of Jesus Christ's "triumphant entry," inviting his congregation to reflect Christ's victorious entry into their lives. Jesus is triumphant over sin and death by dying on the wood of a tree and rising again. Palms signify victory or triumph. It is in this sense that in ancient Roman culture, a lawyer who wins his case in the forum would decorate his front door with palm leaves (Kabore 205-206). As a symbol of victory in *Purple Hibiscus*, the palm refers to the victory of Beatrice and her children, Jaja and Kambili, over Eugene, her husband and her children's father. Eugene used to beat them over their observance of Church laws. Mama (Beatrice) is the one who is allied with the palms in the beginning of the novel:

> Mama placed the fresh palm fronds, which were wet with holy water, on the dining table and then went upstairs to change. Later, she would knot the palm fronds into sagging cross shapes and hang them on the wall beside our gold-framed family photo. They would stay there until next Ash Wednesday, when we would take the fronds to church, to have them burn for ash. Papa, wearing a long gray robe like the rest of the oblates, helps in distributing ash every year" (*PH* 3).

Mama (Beatrice) holds the palms and Papa (Eugene) the ashes that indicate the end of the narrative, where Papa becomes ashes by being poisoned by Mama who thus gains victory over him. The person who helps in distributing ash becomes ashes and Mama contributes to making him become ash by waiting until next Ash Wednesday to offer the palms back to the church; in other words, she waits for the suitable time to turn Papa into ashes by killing him. The children, Jaja and Kambili, share in this victory by being one with Mama. This unity is expressed in the fact that Jaja willingly accepts to go to prison in lieu of Mama. The palm branch is thus an ambivalent symbol offering different ways of reading the novel.

In the novel the breaking of figurines serves as an effective symbol. The novel opens with a reference to the breaking of figurines: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and

broke the figurines on the étagère" (*PH* 3). This represents a dissembling and shattered family. The figurines are always mentioned in connection with Mama. For example, commenting on the incident, the narrator says that the missal "missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass étagère, which Mama polished often" (*PH* 7).

The figurines personify Mama and the heavy missal may personify Papa. Mama (Beatrice) is so preoccupied with the figurines that she spends some time with the ballet-dancing figurine. She treats them with utmost care. The glass of figurines is delicate, easily breakable, that is a sign of fragility of Mama in comparison to something stronger like weighty missal. The author creates a link between the figurines and Mama's gentle attempts to cope with her husband's violence. Each time she is beaten by her husband, after her miscarriages for example, she spends some time with the figurines as if retracting to think over and find solution to stop such abuses.

There are many passages symbolized in the novel. This passage is one of Adichie's uses of symbolism: "He (Obiora) walked up slowly holding something that turned out to be a grasshopper. 'It's so strong', he said. 'I can feel the pressure of his wings'. He spread his palm and watched the grasshopper fly off" (*PH* 285).

This symbol foreshadows Kambili's immediate future in particular. This passage represents Kambili's recent spiritual journey. Obiora's hands represent papa's firm emotional grasp on Kambili. Kambili is emotionally dwarfed by papa, whose physical and perceived spiritual size gives him total control over her, much as the giant Obiora has over the tiny grasshopper. However, Kambili has recently been pushing the borders of papa's control, and this rebellion has become quite apparent to papa. Similarly, Obiora has noticed the pressure exerted by the grasshopper's wings. Eventually, Kambili will break free from papa and reach her full human potential. In a sense, Kambili will fly.

At the end the narrator mentions, "The new rains will come soon" (*PH* 307). The new rains symbolize new joys and new hopes in Kambili's life and rain is considered sacred in cultures all over the world. This ending may be Adichie's response to the first line of *Purple Hibiscus* in that things may fall apart but they can be put together.

The novel is a mosaic of rich symbols that makes the novel unique and unitary. When Kambili is taken to a parlour to have her hair plaited, she notices a snail gradually coming out of the basket. Like the snail Kambili is also trying to crawl out of her imprisoned state. After her mother's miscarriage, she sees the print turning red that may hint at

her bloody mental condition. Further, weather also assumes a symbolical role. After the death of Ade Coker, the editor of *The Standard*, there are heavy rains. Yet, the symbols are ambivalent, revealing the complexity of characters which are full of strange contrasts and contradictions.

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- **Dr. Sangeeta Verma** completed her Ph.D. in English from the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.

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WOMAN AS NONCONFORMIST REBEL: BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *JASMINE*

Raja Pandey

Literature is the mirror of society. According to an article published in *The Times of India* on 21st December 2016, the depiction of women in literature has been evolving continuously through different epochs right up to the modern period. During early ages women were considered second class citizens subservient to men. In those times almost all authors were males owing to their high literacy ratio as compared to females. This led to a highly biased portrayal of women characters in literature. Women were portrayed as innocent, passive, physically weaker and inferior to men.

Female authors had to write under pseudonyms like George Eliot (Mary Anne Evans); Currer Bell (Emily Brontë), as they felt their works would not be taken seriously if published with a feminine name. The female characters in literary works during that period represented submissiveness. Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Jane Eyre in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* are demure protagonists, who are eventually contented to settle with the right man.

With the advent of society, males have been calling the shots in major decision-making owing to the patriarchal set up. The patricentric culture influenced the language as per their ideology. There was no division of labour and it was the females who had to sacrifice their interest in majority of the cases. Rights of women were restrained in all fields be it social, political or economic. This also echoed in the condition of women on the literary fiction scene.

On the contrary today there is a rise of 'new woman' in the modern age. Literary women characters are independent, bold decision makers, breaking the stereotypic images represented earlier. Indian writers in English like Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Sahgal have powerfully portrayed the new woman in their fictional works. As compared to the patriarchal setup of ancient times in which an ideal woman had an obedient, self-sacrificing image like Sita, in the present era the new woman rebels against the age old customs and even adopts the role of Kali for retribution against her sinners. There is a gradual erosion of the stereotypical cliché that existed around women in the past.

Born and educated in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most significant authors of the Indian Diaspora. She immigrated

to America in 1961. Mukherjee had a bitter experience as an immigrant in Canada and had to suffer the prejudice of racism, later naturalized as an American citizen in 1988. She also opposed being called an Indian-American rejecting the hyphenated identity. She wrote two novels *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* while she was living in Canada, coping up with bitter racial discrimination at both literary as well as social levels. Both these novels portray female characters trying to get accustomed to a hostile environment experiencing alienation, rootlessness and displacement. While recalling her Canadian ordeal to Alison Carb, she says,

> The 70s were horrendous years for Indians in Canada. There was a lot of bigotry against Canadian citizens of Indian origin, especially in Toronto, and it upset me terribly when I encountered this or saw other people experiencing it. There was a pattern of discrimination. I was refused service in stores. I would have to board a bus last when I had been the first person on line. I was followed by detectives in department stores who assumed I was a shoplifter or treated like a prostitute in hotels. I was even physically roughed up in a Toronto subway station. I found myself constantly fighting battles against racial prejudice. Toronto made me into a civil rights activist (Carb).

There is a gradual shift in Bharati Mukherjee's later novels with the women protagonists becoming liberated individuals taking bold decisions, even posing a rebellion against their offenders. The immigrant characters leave behind their past, overcoming expatriate experience by embracing the new culture and assimilating it with open hands.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is a portrayal of a rebel woman who rejects subjugation of females in the Indian society. The protagonist not only combats the age old ideology related to women and society but also rebels against the values of societal patriarchy. In spite of this Jasmine is able to sustain a balance between the traditional and the modern. Her various transformations and personifications represent her robust feminist soul. The strength of a woman is celebrated in the rebellious emergence of a common village girl Jyoti to Jasmine, an American citizen. Jasmine evolves herself during the course of the novel changing from Jyoti - Jasmine - Jazzy - Jase - Jane. There is a gradual Americanisation of the name but the letter "J" remains undeterred. She undergoes acculturation and assimilation willingly to

adapt herself to the American way of life but the indomitable spirit and never-say-die attitude of Jasmine holds true throughout the novel. Jasmine takes her own decisions, rejects the primordial customs of patriarchal society and rebels against reprobates, ultimately assimilating the new culture and becoming Americanized.

Bildungsroman, *Jasmine* begins as Jyoti born in Hasnapur, Punjab. She is the fifth girl child in her family, where girls are considered a curse as they should have dowry for getting married, impossible for a poor family to manage. For Jyoti in Hasnapur the order of patriarchy expects surrender to the system, limited education, marriage arranged by the family and constant reproduction. Dida, grandmother of Jyoti, is a perfect embodiment of these stereotypes. She is against the education of women and believes that their duty is just confined to the kitchen and home. She also grumbles and disapproves of Jyoti going to school and wants her to be married to a widowed landlord at the age of eleven.

Jyoti, a bright student by the standards of the village, refuses to yield to her grandmother's ideas. She says, "My grandmother may have named me Jyoti – light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter" (*Jasmine* 40). She is supported by her mother in this endeavour who doesn't want an incessant child bearing fate like hers for her daughter. Jyoti vehemently opposes her marriage proposal and takes a stand against the patriarchal customs; her mother supports her in this decision and the marriage never materialises. Jyoti wants to get educated and live her life passionately following her dreams. She boldly faces whoever comes in the way of her right to live freely whether the rabid dog, the monster Half-Face who attacks her personal honour or the old astrologer prophesying about her widowhood and exile. She never capitulates to the situations of life and like a born fighter retaliates with all her strength in pressure situations. She kills the dangerous rabid dog which is a risk to her life and also rejects prophesy of her exile by the astrologer. Jyoti denies the prediction of the astrologer when she says, "I know what I don't want to become" (5), receiving star shaped wound on her forehead in return. But the wound is accepted by her as a sign of Lord Shiva's third eye broadening her vision and understanding of the world. The reference to the third eye underscores the tremendous annihilating power of Lord Shiva eliminating all the wrongdoers of the world. Jyoti in her own life follows a similar pattern.

Jyoti, an iconoclast, marries a Christian Prakash Vijh in court pursuing her dream of becoming a city woman and a modern man's wife at the age of fourteen. Prakash is a new age city man who considers her as his equal expecting to make Jyoti a 'new woman'. He renames her Jasmine signifying a break from her feudal and orthodox past. Jasmine reads his technical repair manuals deciphering them enabling her to contribute to mechanical repair work. They work together and repair a VCR with equivalent division of labour. They also envision establishing their own repair firm Vijh & Vijh. Prakash guides Jasmine about being an individual and also shares his dream about America.

The seeds of rebellion in Jasmine are nourished by Prakash when he guides her in being an individual and making a life for themselves in America. The American dream which they envision is shattered when Prakash is killed in a bomb blast targeted at Jasmine. The attack is carried out by Sukhwinder (Sukhi), a member of Khalsa Lions, a religious fundamentalist group. These hardliners have staunch belief in patriarchal society based on subjugation of women. Therefore, Sukhwinder targets Jasmine who poses a threat to the traditional male dominated society by becoming a liberated woman.

This incident is a point of inflection in the life of Jasmine. She is left with hardly any choice; she has to either join her mother in widowhood thrust upon her by Sukhi, or become 'sati' and commit suicide by burning herself on the pyre of her husband like other women of the village – both options resulting in a submission to the prevalent customs.

But instead, Jasmine responds assertively with dogged determination rebelling against the age old societal order and decides to embark on an odyssey to America. Jasmine is a strong-willed heroine who refuses to submit as a meek woman passively accepting her destiny. She dreams of fulfilling the last wish of her husband by going to an American college in which he had sought admission and burning herself as 'sati' on the pyre of his wedding suit. She is a loving wife and doesn't want to live a life devoid of the love of her husband but, at the same time, she also rejects being subjected to sufferings of widowhood. Jasmine is a strong woman, loves freedom and is ready to emerge as a new woman fulfilling her husband's aspirations. Hence, she discards the genderist, feudal and regressive society, and moves on a perilous journey to America with forged documents.

She travels from Hasnapur to the United States by unauthorised ships and aircraft on a fake passport. But before reaching Tampa, her desti-

nation, Jasmine finds herself in a Florida motel room where she encounters Half-Face, the captain of a ship which carries illegal immigrants. He is named Half-Face as he lost one eye, an ear, and half of his face in Vietnam War serving as a demolition expert. Half-Face belongs to the old school of thought who believe women to be second grade citizens of the world, surrendering themselves passively to males without resistance in all situations. He believes women are vulnerable, docile and would inexorably accept their subjugating hierarchal conditions. Jasmine is remorselessly raped by Half-Face in the motel room.

This juncture again marks a crucial turning point in the life of Jasmine. She had renounced the life of a widow in Hasnapur, taken a stand against the feudal patriarchal customs, but again in the U.S. she has to face similar challenge in the form of Half-Face who wants to exploit and dominate women labeling them as the weaker sex. Jasmine is entangled in a dilemma whether to commit suicide and succumb to her fate or take revenge. Eventually she realizes that her personal dishonour must not deter her from achieving life's mission. Mukherjee depicts Jasmine here in exactly similar circumstances when the rabid dog had attacked her in Hasnapur. On that occasion Jasmine had crushed the snout of the demon and ensured her survival. The attack by Half-Face on her honour is analogous to the earlier assault; Half-Face becomes a grotesque re-embodiment of that rabid dog. Jasmine says, "I could not let my personal dishonor disrupt my mission. There could be plenty of time to die…. I extended my tongue and sliced it" (118).

Jasmine retaliates violently, murders Half-Face and becomes the personification of Kali, the Goddess of strength and destruction. Mukherjee emphasizes the role of Jasmine as Kali in an interview with Connell, "Kali is the goddess of destruction, but not in a haphazard, random way. She is a destroyer of evil so that the world can be renewed" (Connell et al. 21). Jasmine realizes her right to live, to be free, and yet again emerges as an assertive woman opting for her own life, taking radical decisions. She refuses bowing to male dominance, and instead of conceding to her fate, burns her husband's suit and her Indian clothes as a symbolic 'sati', transforming into a modern woman. Mukherjee metamorphoses a girl from a village to the Goddess of strength and destruction, who can set aside the docile and subservient image expected of her, alchemizing to a strong-willed assertive manifestation, in order to punish the wrong doers and kill the devils of society.

Moving on while recovering from the traumatic experience in no time, she meets Mrs. Gordon who trains and guides her about the nuances of American society. Jasmine quickly undergoes makeover – shedding off the shy attributes of her personality, dresses up in T-shirt, tight cords and running shoes. Jasmine, now renamed Jazzy, willingly adopts the new culture and becomes more Americanized. She meets Prof. Vadhera and starts living with his family. At Vadhera's traditional household, she again faces the old customs which had been rejected by her in Hasnapur. She is expected to observe a widow's austerity. Jasmine rebuffs the conservatism of this Punjabi family, moving to New York becoming 'day-mummy' for Duff, the adopted daughter of Taylor and Wylie Hayes. Taylor is a magnanimous man who believes that America is a free country where all individuals possess democratic rights. She takes up her new role in Manhattan and acknowledges, "I changed because I wanted to" (185). She thus becomes "Jase, the prowling adventurer" (177). Jasmine falls in love with Taylor and tells him everything about her past life. But one day she spots Sukhi, the terrorist who killed Prakash, at a park, and to protect Taylor and Duff she flees to Iowa.

In Iowa she inadvertently meets Bud Ripplemayer, a banker, who falls in love with her. He gives Jasmine a new persona as Jane. She willfully changes her name instead of submissively accepting it, in order to assimilate the American milieu. Bud is crippled due to an attack by a flustered farmer, on whom his bank has enforced foreclosure. He is also separated from his wife Karin. Bud expects Jasmine to adopt the role of Jane Ripplemayer. But as Jane she only feels affection towards him. She knows that accepting the proposal and settling as his wife in Baden would be same as being confined to Hasnapur. Mukherjee accentuates Jasmine's perspective in an interview with Connell, "regression, like going back to village life, a life of duty and devotion" (Connell et al. 31). She would be required to relinquish the desire of being in control of her body and fate preventing the fulfillment of her American dream.

Taylor and Duff re-enter Jasmine's life, informing her about their arrival in a letter. She feels relieved as being with Bud makes her feel constrained under the pinions of obligation. She aspires for freedom and liberation, and despite carrying the child of Bud she decides to embark on life's voyage with Taylor moving to California. Jasmine once again emerges as a true nonconformist, breaking the shackles of rotten societal customs.

Mukherjee's Jasmine wants to be free and in complete control of her destiny just like women described in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. She accomplishes the American dream by discarding marriage arranged by her family and thrust upon her, gets educated against the convention of the society, marries a Christian as per her own preference, retaliates against 'sati' and embarks on a hazardous journey to the U.S. without job, husband or passport on her own, annihilating the wrongdoer who rapes her, and opts out of a marriage bound by duty for the sake of love. Jasmine moves from tradition to modernity, from a country-dweller to a cosmopolitan citizen, from a confined patriarchal set-up to a free society where one can define one's role by self-reinvention. She emerges as a bold and emphatic protagonist who never yields to the troubles caused by circumstances or people. Jasmine establishes her self-hood by exercising her own freedom of choice in each and every decision of life. Mukherjee projects Jasmine as a woman of strength who transforms from Jyoti to Jane surviving through an onerous odyssey during the course of the novel. Jasmine is a born rebel, iconoclast, a combatant and survivor.

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- **Raja Pandey** is Ph.D. Research Scholar in English at Jiwaji University, Gwalior

Shernavaz Buhariwala

THE LAST FIGHT

A soldier of high renown
Resplendent in his stars.
Of birth and bearing nobly cast,
An ordained son of Mars.
His sword did slash the battle lines
And earned an honest fee,
'Tis noted that on land, by far
Invincible was he.

And then a siren crossed his path.
Her arms entangled him.
This veteran of many wars
Was sodden to the brim.
Cushioned on her comely curves,
Such ecstasy he felt
"Here is my space" he cried aloud
"Let Rome in Tiber melt."

So passed their days in indolence
Till she undertook to teach:
"You'll fight no more on land, my lord
The sea is at your reach.
Neptune will resign his charge
And hand the keys to thee.
Then you and I will be crowned.
Joint monarchs of the sea!"

The Field Marshal did an about turn
And donned an Admiral's hat.
"Your word, my love, is law to me.
Forthwith from the seas I'll bat
And score a century."
His vision newly fired
He readied for the task at hand
By wine and wench inspired.

Then Caesar charged, the barges turned
Unused to naval strategy

While the coming hours unpacked
An unwanted tragedy.
Ponder well you readers dear.
This tale I tell is sad but true
On the rolling watery wild
The Transgender met his Waterloo.

How Octavius laughed and Antonius wept.
"This whore hath ravished me.
Her fangs have sucked my very blood
And torn my galaxy."
The fields of Actium did compose
A dirge for Antony
And History on its part replied
"God, what fools these mortals be!"

- **Dr. Shernavaz Buhariwala** has been associated with the English Department of RTM Nagpur University, Nagpur. A frequent contributor to *Re-Markings*, she has also taught at Hislop College, Nagpur and the State University of New York. Her area of specialization is Shakespearean drama.

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Asmat Jahan

THE CRY OF A MIGRANT

I am a lonely migrant,
Wandering for ages, in search of home.
My history inscribed in the sculptures of Ajanta and Ellora,
My story buried in the ruins of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.
My rough hands carved soft cradles to put
Your children into a blissful sleep.
My rustic imagination created
Imposing tombs and high minarets as
My tired body rested near the gutters.
My practised hands moulded diyas
To eliminate the darkness from your lives.
My poverty, my hunger overshadowed with such ease
By the splendid glory of your magnificent growth.

Exulting in your happiness I forgot
The pain inflicted on me for ages and laboured tirelessly,
Happy to see the fruits of my labour flourishing.
Firm in my faith and believing that
Your story is my story.
But now when I'm bleeding to death,
Why can't you hear my bootless cries?
If my story is your story,
Why are you silent when I'm bleeding?

AGNI PARIKSHA

They call me Devi—the goddess,
Thousands genuflecting before me in veneration,
I'm also the sacred cow, hundreds bowing their heads in worship,
But I am also the witch on the street,
My clothes torn, my hair entangled,
Stray dogs barking at my madness and
Human hands hurling stones at me,
I am also Nirbhaya encountering ravenous arms and teeth,
My body raped and butchered,
Bleeding in the thorny bushes,
I am Sita fated for an unending agni pariksha,
My story scripted by the guardians of my honour,
My fate sealed forever and ever.

- **Dr. Asmat Jahan** is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

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SHORT STORY

WORM'S EYE VIEW

Seema Sinha

At age 17, life is like a highway, beckoning you on, inviting you to sing the song of the road. But here I was, my self-confidence severely dented by constant comparisons – between me and my brother. In a typical rural patriarchal set-up, being born a girl was a crime. I don't blame granny – she had practical reasons to detest the birth of a girl child. It was not just about dowry. Girls had to be kept safe, untouched, pure, unsullied, for the lord and master to come and claim her. And that was a tall order.

I was dying! One day at a time! In my Khap being 17 and not married was by itself a crime. Saying yes to the kind of grooms my people were choosing for me would have been living death. One cooked, cleaned, bore children, got beaten up daily – I was not ready for this! In my village no girl ever went to school. In this set up, I wanted to study. I wanted self-respect. I wanted the right to make my own decisions. I wanted the moon.

I had no other option. I had to leave home. I had heard of Delhi. I had seen pictures of girls who belonged to a different planet. I wanted to be one of them. It was now or never. The early morning bus left at 4 o' clock. It was still dark when I set out for the bus stop. Clad in a thick 'Odhni' I was unrecognizable. The only danger was that I will be missed at home. I did not want to imagine what would happen if I was unfortunate enough to be caught. I had banked on the nippy winter morning when everyone was snug in bed, even Granny, who would not sleep through the night, coughing and repeatedly asking me to warm her 'Hukka'. I could breathe only after the bus had left. My 'ghoonghat' had saved me from unnecessary questions at the bus stop, but now I could sense my co-passengers taking an undue interest in my well-being. 'Ke bhhabhi, chai pila doon?', asked one. I did not dare speak, till I had reached a distance safe enough, so I just kept quiet. Baddi Sharmili hai! Quipped another, and then lost interest in me, for his attention was now riveted on a young lady who had just boarded the bus. Clad in blue jeans and white kurta, long hair pinned up in an untidy bun, she fixed the man with a solid stare, then took out a book. The bus moved on.

Soon half the passengers dosed off, lulled by the steady pace of the bus, huddled against the icy winds that threatened to pierce their inadequate winter clothing. When the person next to her let out a loud snore she

smiled and asked me how long the next stop was. She was desperate for a cup of tea, and if I watched her luggage, she would bring me a cup too.

The driver blew the horn a second time. But the girl was nowhere to be seen. I was worried she would be left behind, and it almost happened when she rushed in. Immediately the taunts began – Madam! Next time travel in a limo! This is a bus – not your private helicopter! I was scared for her, but her answer was a disarming smile. This girl was all I wanted to be.

Caught in the excitement of the early morning escapade, I did not spare a thought as to what would have happened back home. Would there be a reception committee waiting for me at the next stop? Or in Delhi? If I got caught I would be killed. I knew my father and his brothers. But now the step had been taken and I was hovering over an abyss. In any case, staying there was worse than death. I refused to be in that subhuman class where life was a grey monochrome. I wanted fireworks! The bus stopped, and there literally were fireworks. It was the season of weddings. A wedding party had come to see off the groom. The gloom of the morning was lit by a sparkler – which also lit the bloodshot eyes of my uncle. They had arrived!

I had no other option. Keeping my face veiled, I quickly joined the wedding party which was now in the process of boarding yet another bus. To my relief, I was not spotted in the dark. With the speeding bus, my dreams of making a new life of my own were also gathering speed. The marriage party straight away moved to the wedding venue. No one asked me anything – in the largesse that is a rural Indian wedding, even 10 people could be accommodated without any fear of getting caught. But, for how long? The wedding was over. The 'barat' was going to return with the bride, a chit of a girl, barely 13. What do I do? I couldn't stay. I couldn't go back with them. For want of a better option I boarded the bus along with others. An old hag started talking to me –'Ladke wali hai? Ladki wali hai?' (Are you from the girl's side or boy's?), and in no time raised an alarm. Here is a tramp, a thief! These are the ones who join marriage parties to commit thefts! I was forced out of the bus, which then moved on, leaving me stranded in the middle of nowhere. The bright sun was giving me the worst headache I had ever experienced, and when a car swerved right in my path I lost consciousness.

I woke up in a hospital. There was no one in the room, which gave me an opportunity to check my limbs. But for superficial scratches, and perhaps a twisted ankle, I was none the worse. My first impulse was to get up and scoot – till I saw someone standing in the doorway. He was

concern personified – 'How are you? Are you OK?' So this was my benefactor. I could not share my story with him. Next I would be parceled off home, and even the thought made me shudder. I was released from the hospital by evening, and I took the first train out of Delhi. I could not risk getting discovered. Not yet. Not ever. I knew the penalty would be death.

When I entered the second class waiting room at Nizamuddin Railway station little did I know that my life was about to change. In the bathroom I found a pair of huge earrings – uncut diamonds, set in rubies – and as I came out, I spotted the owner, an old lady who was frantic with worry. You should have seen the sense of relief on her face when I gave back her earrings – 'Amma Talli! Bangaru talli! Manchi papa' (O my golden girl! God bless)! Those earrings were the last remembrance of her old man who was no more, and it would have been bad omen to have lost them. Lucky I found them – had it been someone else! The old lady insisted that I join her for a treat – soft idlis, hot wadas, spicy sambar – typical south Indian fare made by hands that had done so a lifetime. The family was on its way to Kuttanad, and if there was any place my family won't come looking for me, it was this. I bet they didn't even know it existed!

The old lady was more than happy – Ayyo amma, so you are also going to Kuttanad. No reservation? No problem! Nenu unnanu kada (I am there)! After what you have done for me! Come along! More the merrier!

The bleak plateau region was a stark contrast to the green, fertile plains of the Ganga. The people darker, perhaps shorter. Change was also obvious in the behavior of the people – gone were the lascivious glances that make you feel like a woman before time. Yellow feet smeared with turmeric, the life-giving spice, and Kanjivaram saris – Dark green and Magenta, Purple and Indigo. Every woman bedecked with all that she had, a walking, talking jewelry store. It was my first chance to see God's own country, so far seen only in pictures. Lush green countryside with hardy vines creeping up the lamp posts, swarthy men and buxom women, ducklings on tank bunds, tender green tendrils of tapioca snaking on the ground, and money! Good old gulf money. Money that had resulted in magnificent mansions springing up in the remotest of countryside. Money that bought off mortgages and pledged ancestral property. Money that meant Education and Self-respect. Almost every-one had a relative – a son, a daughter, an uncle working in the gulf. They never said 'living' because no one 'lived' in the gulf.

Stories abound and whet my appetite for more. The old lady – who I fondly called Amamma – lived alone and had kind of adopted me. In the

anonymity of this remote hamlet I felt safe. I needed to pick up the threads of my life – I could not be Amamma's guest lifelong – but what could I do? Till I came across the advertisement for a job of an au pair in, where else, the Gulf!

Agencies that recruit workers for the gulf were dime a dozen. All you need is a medical certificate and a Visa. And of course the seed money. When I volunteered to go to Abu Dhabi Amamma was alarmed. But ultimately we entered the seedy office of Messrs Balakrishna and sons, Agent, Gulf Expatriation. I had no passport, no date of birth certificate, nothing – but Amamma had money, and more important, connections. The Emigration department was a well-oiled machinery, made slick over time. I could not believe my luck. At the moment I was going on a visit visa of six months, but the moment I reach there I would get a work visa – as an 'au pair' in a nursery school.

The 4 and a 1/2 hour flight from the Trivandrum International Airport to Abu Dhabi went uneventfully. I stepped out of the airport bracing myself for the legendary heat of the Arabian desert, but was pleasantly surprised at how mild the weather was. September to March, the weather was beautiful. It starts getting hot in May and June, reaching a crescendo in July and August when Abu Dhabi turns into a ghost town. The locals travel to Switzerland, and the expats, who form 80% of the population, travel home.

Buff sand, bleached white earth, clear blue sky, and as evening fell, dark minarets silhouetted against the waning moon – Abu Dhabi was an aesthete's delight. Beige colored buildings against the burnished sand, no higher than a couple of stories – unless they were in the West Bay, and then they were straight out of Hong Kong. The skyline was illuminated at night with one high rise crazier than the other – a tower that zigzagged, one that looked like a torpedo, another like an ocean liner. And all brightly lit like it was Diwali. In fact there were wonderful firework displays that lit the night, on any given occasion. The people of Abu Dhabi sure knew how to live it up. Come winter, and the sidewalks bloomed. Where there was nothing yesterday one would find a whole garden flourishing today – full grown palm trees transported and replanted, their feet caressed by swaying savanna grass. Hundreds of sparrows clamored in the shrubbery. From the air, Abu Dhabi looked like a regular desert country. At eyelevel, it was a garden city.

It was not easy to make grass grow in the regular desert sand. Drip irrigation came to the rescue, so did rich mulch and fertilizers. Desalination of sea water ensured that water was never an issue. The city moved on extremely efficient wheels, greased of course by expat

labor. The same Indians who would not think twice before splattering a wall with tobacco or irrigating the plants with you know what, thought 10 times out here. Model behavior came at the cost of a stick. The biggest stick was deportment. 'I will cancel your visa' was the biggest threat. What was it that made this such a potential threat? First, the exchange rate. As Rupee lost its value Dirham gained, and the expat crowd cheered. Second, no taxes! Petro dollars lubricated everything, even relations.

The nursery school I worked in was run by a lady called Aradhana. Bubbly, curvaceous and smart, Aradhana had put her looks to good use and hooked a successful investment banker. They had been to Bali and had stayed in the Grand Hyatt. The Facebook was ablaze with her raunchy pics in see-through sarongs. I must agree that she did make a deh-licious arm candy to her dashing Romeo, but certain things should be banned in the interest of good taste. And heartburn. What was it that forced some people to hang their entire life out in the open, to be admired, or rather envied, by all and sundry? Was it the need to be appreciated? Look, I've arrived! Or see, how much better off am I, dear! So sorry for you, but see my pictures, if u won't believe my words. Luhscious! Aren't they? Or was it the giddy light headedness of those who were still drunk on the pleasures of life, unlike the others who had had enough. If only life was as easy. A gem from the Facebook – "Muskurane wale, sabr karen, zindagi apki bhi legi." I could not even share pictures for fear of detection.

My host was a mild-mannered Malayali – a Maths teacher in a local school. He was living alone after his wife had left him for another man. Or rather when he had had an affair with a colleague which forced his wife to leave him for another man. The object of his attention was promptly dispatched to India, and a crisis was averted. Fani Sir was not sent because Maths teachers were hard to come by, and the Director had to run the school. I regretted having accepted his hospitality when I came to know of the aborted love story, but it was too late. Fani sir was at his hospitable best. Long years of staying home alone had made him a pretty good cook. He decided that the way to a girl's heart was through her stomach and plied me with homemade goodies. That he was approaching 50 was not a deterrent – everything was fair in courtship and war. With a job of my own I did not really have to live as Fani Sir's would be bride. He was crestfallen, but a good sport. I was still invited anytime for a plate of onion pakoras. Fani sir was an incorrigible optimist.

I was given a room in a flat which I shared with three others. A room of my own! The dream of every woman ever born! She may wallow in luxury, but in reality she still did not have a room of her own – a corner in her life where she could be just herself. Expectations, obligations! But no assurances – against old age, illness, neglect, desertion, penury, loneliness. A man at 50 was an eligible bachelor, but a woman at 30 was over the hill. Frustrated Spinster!

One such 'frustrated' spinster was Nima Ma'am, who did not marry for want of money. And perhaps good looks. And definitely good advice. At a time when all other girls were busy making eyes at the boys of the neighborhood she sat and prepared for SAT. Her younger sister got fed up of waiting for her and got married. Nima Ma'am still had hopes of a Knight in shining armor galloping into her life, but in all likelihood he was going to arrive on a second hand vespa, and not on a black charger. So insecure was she about her future that she would not even eat properly. She would buy one brinjal or one bitter-gourd at a time and would sniff at the 'curry pattas' hard, and leave them on the shelf because they were two dirhams a bunch. "40 Rupees for karia patta? In my town they were given for free!," pronounced Nima Ma'am. As the accountant of the school she was being paid quite well, but there were other responsibilities.

I found one of her habits extremely annoying. She would enter the mall and straight away head for the gold Souq. I knew she was never going to buy anything. She knew she was never going to buy anything. But fortnightly, this sickening ritual would unfold, to the extent that even the Souq attendants started coughing when they saw us. One day she took me to IKEA. Meant for high end customers, IKEA was not really a shop for schoolteachers. Still I saw Nima Ma'am enthusiastically stuffing odds and ends in her shopping bag. I was happy for her – for once the lady was allowing herself to let go – 'This lemon squeezer is for my aunt. It will help her, her skin has turned raw – too much masala grinding, you know', 'and this pepper mill is for my bhabhi, she loves such fancy stuff'. Suddenly her eyes lit at the sight of a shawl – pristine white and gorgeous – an elegant Italian knit meant for some discerning fashionista. 'I was looking for something exactly like this. It would look so good on my mother. I must buy it' – her voice went hoarse with desire. On the Teacher's day they were given gift vouchers of 300 Dirhams each – I thought Nima Ma'am was putting the money to good use – till we came to the cash counter. Suddenly she 'lost' her bag – the entire collection of goodies that she had taken two hours to pick – "God knows where did it go! No problem, I can always come back here again. In any case,

I did not really need the stuff!" I felt like crying. I had seen Nima Ma'am hiding her bag under the table.

The labor class lived on Kubbus. This amazing bread (a kind of pita bread) was the mainstay of the itinerant laborers, and the lazy housewife. And, of course, the busy professional. It went beautifully with anything. You could dip it in tea, use it as a pizza base for your hummus or tahini, soak it in laban, drizzle it with olive oil and zatar, use it as a spoon to mop up your curry, smear it with honey, top it up with condensed milk, slake it with Mayonnaise, pile it up with slices of ripe tomatoes and crunchy onions – your creativity couldn't find a better canvas. And at 1 Dirham a packet, the Kubbus was a welfare measure, claimed the Emiri Dewan. In fact there were shops which informed the public that they could pick a packet for free if they were not able to afford it. Nima Ma'am was one of the regular beneficiaries of their largesse. Her money was saved to be kept aside as dowry for the groom who would turn up one day.

Give it to the Malyalis – they can survive anywhere. Vishu, the driver, had come up with this lovely idea of making hot idlis at home, and bringing them to the school for sale. Pristine white hot idlis, anointed with a big tablespoon of coconut chutney – beige, dotted with tiny black mustard seeds, and glistening black-green curry leaves. This small business supplemented his meager salary, and more important, got him noticed by the doll like Filipino maids. The object of his attention was Gloria. Petite, soft spoken and gorgeous, she did not really belong there. With the brooms, and the mops, and the dusting plates. She of course noticed Vishu's mooning eyes which followed her everywhere. But saw no future in this relationship.

One day he mustered enough courage to offer a plate of his idlis to Gloria, of course for free. Would she marry him? He was not one for philandering. His mother was looking for a wife. Of course she would not be too happy with a Nepali (Just as all South Indians were Mallus, all Orientals – Filipinos, Indonesians, Malays were Nepalis), but he would not at all mind this fair a bride. Is she game? He would love to have little baby girls who look like Gloria.

She had a doubt – What if the girls were born looking like Vishu. Pitch black, and six three, he was a giant – a gentle giant, the best driver of the fleet. Didn't she notice how he negotiates through traffic? How he glides over the road bumps – it won't wake a baby up! Life would be smooth sailing, a grand ride with him. Gloria was not convinced. Vishu would have to be more innovative in his courtship.

Rina, the Malyalam Teacher, was 29, and did not at all look it. Dark, slim and pretty, she could have passed off as an unmarried miss. But this petite mother of three, all under 6 years of age, had a big agenda – that of sending her kids over to the best school in Trivandrum. The nights alone meant so many things to her – a private English medium school for her kids, a two storied house with a small banana grove, a computer center for her husband. I came back to the villa to see a unique scene. The preparations of a large-scale birthday party were on. Rina was on Skype, and her kiddos jumped in glee, as she blew out the candle and cut the cake. An identical cake on the other side gave a third dimension to this virtual birthday party. I saluted the grit of the modern Indian woman to make it big, despite all odds. Did she miss her children? 'Nah, I see them every day!' In the absence of the mother, the roles had reversed. The father had become the primary caregiver – it was heart-warming to see him complain about the kids not doing homework and not eating properly, just like a mother.

Amamma's letters informed me of her waning health. She considered me family and was very happy that I had added to my qualifications and become a trainee nurse in the school dispensary. I wasn't prepared for the post that informed me of her death. Shattered, I reached the school to find that Shawn, the six-year-old sweetheart entrusted in our care, had met with an accident. No, not on the premises, thank God! The school would have been locked up! It was at home. The father had sent the child downstairs to buy bread. From the 5th floor balcony he watched in horror as a parked vehicle suddenly decided to back up, with the child standing right behind. Shawn did not have a chance.

I had never attended a Christian funeral before. There was no wailing or beating of chests. I could with difficulty identify the mother. She sat with burning eyes – there were no more tears to spare. It happened last night. The 3 by 3 coffin was brought out to the lounge. This child would be buried under foreign soil. There was a Christian cemetery on the out-skirts of Lusail. Tombstones the size of a pillow sheltered little hearts that had stopped beating. I visited the cemetery on the All Souls' Day. People lighting candles for the dear departed. People reliving the loss that was too deep to heal anyway. Gravestones of all sizes. People of all communities – whites, blacks, Asians – waiting for the day when they would meet their loved ones. 6 feet under there was no distinction of color, caste, race, region, religion. And of course, gender.

Today was a particularly busy day. I was relieved when the clock struck five. As I was packing my stuff all hell broke loose – a young girl, profusely bleeding, was dragged in by a middle-aged woman. The

woman was shrieking. The girl was a 'khadima' (servant maid) at her place. Her mistake was that she had eaten before the family members did. Her punishment was swift – a blow on the head with a hand mirror – which had resulted in the cut on her face. The mistress was unapologetic. After dressing the girl was taken back home (if you can call it that). Her real home in Sri Lanka was 3000 miles away. It was dark by the time I left the school dispensary. I almost missed the frail figure standing huddled against the evening chill. But a closer look left me in no doubt – it was the same girl who had visited the facility. I moved closer. The white bandage on her forehead had caked brown stains on it. She was sobbing. The mistress had left her behind and driven away. She had nowhere to go.

An eerie sense of déjà vu hit me bad – I had been in the same situation before. On our way home I learnt that she was a runaway – the mistress was unfriendly, which was ok, but the master was a little too friendly, and there lay the problem. Now she was free, albeit illegally, to rent herself out by the hour to wealthy patrons – as a char-woman, or a masseuse – to be used, or abused, as per will. She had no papers on her. No protection. If she was caught she would be jailed. What was the desperation that forced her to leave home? Do her parents know that she was a 'persona non grata', illegal, unwanted, tired and hungry in an alien land, hurt with no place to go? They did not. She would rather be dead than give them the real picture.

Home? Where was home? My father's home has never been mine – I was a guest from the day I was born. 'Beti paraya dhan hoti hai' (Daughters belong to someone else). My mother's home never existed at all. 'Maike pahuncha doonga' (I'll dump you at your parents' place) was a very potent threat even for the affluent who could afford to keep their daughter home, for it was more about 'Izzat' (respect in society) than about Economics.

Suddenly it all started making sense. I realized that I have found the purpose of my life. Life gave me an Amamma when I was in need. Today someone else was in need, and it was my turn to pay back with interest. From woman to woman – I knew Amamma would have approved.

- **Dr. Seema Sinha** is a Ph.D. from BITS Pilani, Pilani Campus, Rajasthan. A UGC-JRF History scholar from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, she is the Academic Editor of *Rupkatha.*

REVIEW ESSAY

REFLECTIONS 'UNMISTED': NIBIR K. GHOSH'S *MIRROR FROM THE INDUS*

Rajesh Sharma

Nibir K. Ghosh's *Mirror from the Indus* is one of the sweet fruits of Covid-19. It took shape in 2020, the year the pandemic ploughed through continents, yielding the dread harvest of death and pain. But Ghosh sat down and edited himself. Out of nearly 150 pieces written over 40 years he picked up 19 and decided to put them together between new covers.

Why did he turn to these 19 pieces to assemble his mirror? He doesn't tell us, but we can guess. The hint lies in the retrospective gaze that embraces and searches *Oedipus Rex* and *The Plague* for answers to the enduring questions to which the pandemic returns us. Ghosh hopes that the pandemic will awaken the complacent classes to their essential humanity and vulnerability. Literature deals with enduring questions because it doesn't offer false consolations. Neither history nor 'theory' exhausts literature because literature is more than 'material'. Literature is art, and so its deepest fidelity is to truth.

Ghosh is one of those few readers whom the Helen of post-structuralist theory could not seduce. You can see this in the way he writes. He writes with clarity and he writes to illuminate. He is modest, far from those who try to dazzle and delude. He trusts his insights and intuition and doesn't need the stilts of jargon. He ranges widely instead of limiting himself to a narrow strip in the name of specialization.

A token of Ghosh's love of literature is the charming phrase he composes to describe the Taj Mahal: "the monument of love encased in alabaster." Such elegance of language is not the hallmark of the post-literature, post-truth academics.

The book rightly opens with an essay on Rabindranath Tagore, whom Nehru called "the poet of humanity and freedom." Ghosh notices Tagore's pioneering interventions in the cultural consciousness of the subcontinent: his empathy for the downtrodden, his attention to children, and his insistence on women's equality. In an insight that rewrites the myth of Adam and Eve, he speaks of "the banishment she [Eve] secured from a ready-made Paradise." The rewriting restores agency to Eve. Ghosh also quotes Tagore's words that definitively define modernism as "freedom of mind, not slavery of taste."

Ghosh's essay on Aurobindo Ghosh focusses on his "spiritual nationalism." As a reader, I would have been happier to see him writing also on Aurobindo's work as a poet, critic and translator.

But it is a delightful surprise to find an essay on French Revolution and Edmund Burke. That Ghosh chose to write on a man who was not blinded, unlike many contemporaries, by the romantic clouds woven around the bloody events of the revolution is in itself a proof of the convictions Ghosh holds (and holds with firm quietness). He then comments at some length on Burke's aesthetic philosophy in the context of his view of human passions and reason, an investigation that in the West goes back to Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. An attentive reader can see how deeply Burke's engagements with aesthetics had influenced his view of the French Revolution and what Burke recognized to be at stake in the events.

Ghosh's selection also includes pieces on W. H. Auden, Byron, Nissim Ezekiel (and V. S. Naipaul), Dom Moraes, Gauguin and Maugham, Girish Karnad, Rajinder Singh Bedi, and Namdeo Dhasal. The last essay is on women in literature, a cultural survey in representative glimpses.

Probably the latest piece in this fine assemblage is a short account of his meeting with Mother Teresa, written 42 years after the event but kept fresh in memory with love and veneration and without nostalgia.

It is a treat to read someone who can so well blend lucidity and academic rigour.

REFERENCE

Ghosh, Nibir K. *Mirror from the Indus: Essays, Tributes and Memoirs.* Authorspress, 2020. pp. 208. ₹ 800.

- **Dr. Rajesh Sharma** is Professor in the Department of English at Punjabi University, Patiala. His areas of specialization include Literary and Cultural Theory, Criticism, Creative Writing, Film Studies, Classical Indian Literary Theory and Aesthetics, and Translation Studies. He is Co-Editor of *South Asian Ensemble*, a Canadian-Indian journal of literature, arts and culture.

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