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EDITORIAL

This volume of *Meher Journal of English Studies* features articles on a range of subjects pertaining to literary and cultural studies. Texts, trends and tropes from diverse literary traditions are examined with detailed focus on their contextual resonances. The articles also use a wide variety of theoretical frameworks and attempt a highly nuanced understanding of the inter-relatedness of the text and the contemporary world order.

The article by N. Nagaraju focuses on the *itihasa-purana* tradition and attempts to understand how forms of historical consciousness shape certain socio-cultural formations. Himadri Lahiri's article studies transnational migration with special focus on the Global South. Lahiri argues how precarity has become a prominent phenomenon in recent times, shaping certain representations in media images. The article by Asima Ranjan Parhi and Madhumita Nayak attempts to read Bira Kishore Parhi's *Mali, Dhuli, Malukha* with particular attention to the dynamics of the autobiographical narrative and the use of poetry. Bishnupriya Hota and Rajendra Bhue attempt to examine bridal lamentation songs of western Odisha as a site of construction of gender identity and resistance. In his critical survey of recent trends in Indian English writing, Chitaranjan Misra attempts to study the paradigmatic shifts and reorientations against the backdrop of cultural change.

In her article on Diane Glancy's historical novel *Pushing the Bear,* Mousumi Patra looks at the representations of the Cherokee Indians in the context of the horrific Trail of Tears, and argues how the novel encapsulates a range of positions through the plurality of voices. In her reading of Sharath Komarraju's trilogy based on the Mahabharata, Neena Gupta Vij focuses on political formations with specific reference to the constructions of Hastinapur as one of the most powerful kingdoms of its time. Raj Gaurav Verma explores the subversive dimension of myths in graphic/mythological picture books. With specific focus on Devdutt Pattnaik's books for children, Verma establishes how such retelling of myths questions the authority of the grand text. Tyagraj Thakur's article on "re-storying" Africa highlights the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's remarkable shift from Western narrative paradigms to indigenous modes. Thakur establishes how such narrative experimentation is crucial to Achebe's project of contestation of the derogatory images of Africa in Western discourse. In her article on Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi,* Ankita Panda argues how the protagonist Mir Nihal embodies the helplessness of the absurd man, confronting the devaluation of Muslim cultural values in a period of high colonialism. Arijit Mukherjee's article on M. S. Sathyu's film *Garam Hawa* studies the communal crisis of post-partition India and the increased marginalization of Muslims in the face of rising Hindu fundamentalist forces. Siddhartha Sankar Chakraborti's article focuses on stardom with specific reference to the Bengal film industry in the 1980s and 90s.

Taken together, the articles in this issue of *MJES* offer fresh theoretical perspectives on literature and culture and present a rich repository of ideas for further research. Through rigorous critical engagement with histories, genres, texts, authors, and related questions, they problematize diverse contemporary issues that are often taken for granted.

Anjali Tripathy
P. Muralidhar Sharma

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Forms of Knowledge and their Transmission in the Puranic Tradition of Early Indian History

N. Nagaraju

Abstract: This article, as the title indicates, attempts to understand forms of historical consciousness in the *itihasa-purana* tradition. Appearance of forms, *dana-stuti*, *vakhyana*, myth, epic and purana in that order are linked to historical progress of early India from lineage to state. While some of the historians quoted in this article argued about the way time and history are embedded in these forms, the focus here is the emergence and articulation of consciousness in growing number of forms and the way these form reflect the social formations and functions to the extent of some of them becoming the self-images of the then culture. Implicit in the article is the way forms grow, merge and transform keeping with the growing complexities of evolving culture and society, and reflections on and visualization of time.

Key words: Forms of historical consciousness, *itihasa-purana* tradition, Lineage and State, Myth, Epic and Purana

I

An attempt is made in this paper to understand certain rules of conduct, ideological as they are, their formation as knowledge, their continuation to this age along with the transmission of some relevant cultural forms through history; a concern noted cultural historians have been engaged with relative success. The limitations they have pointed out in understanding history, especially early Indian history is worth mentioning here.

Interpretations of early Indian history, disputably seen as hardly useful, need to move away from the "preoccupations of the historiography of the colonial period" (Thapar, *From Lineage to State* 157). Records of the administrators—Indologists / orientalists—relatively easily accessible and influential, right upto James Mill's *History of British India* supported a historiographical pattern of Indian past, obviously and erroneously as Thapar elaborates with evidence, in the theories of Aryan Race and Oriental Despotism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the views of these theories are the racial attitudes formed "around" *arya* and other "philological evidence." Mill's "critical investigations of the traditional institutions of India" done in early nineteenth century and by standards of utilitarianism found them "to be static, retrogressive and conducive to economic backwardness." Based on these "findings," he recommended "a radical alteration of Indian society, to be achieved by imposing the correct legal and administrative system in India" (*History and Beyond* [*H&B*] 5). This view obviously became part of the "furniture of the empire."

Nationalist Historians, opposing the Oriental Despotism for obvious reasons, accepted Aryan Race theory as its depiction of early Indian society suited their "nationalist polemics." They found two themes of the theory useful: religion is important to Indian society; and the bipolarity of Indian society as spiritual and the western culture as materialistic or based on material concerns. In other words, they questioned the individual aspects of the theory rather than the pattern and historical validity of the theory. Thus, nationalist ideology delimited the nature of their questions. What, however, is acknowledged is that they recognised the "role of ideology in historical interpretations" and prepared "the way for questioning the accepted theories" (9).

An implicit suggestion for understanding and historical interpretation of early Indian society, in spite of the contestations it may provoke, is the need to move away from historiographical preoccupations of the colonial period towards seeking an analysis "which might take into consideration, at least in broad outlines, the *itihasa-purana* view of the early Indian past" (*From Lineage to State* 156). Such a view, Romila Thapar opines, may not record factual history but may well provide pointers to historical factuality. The changes recorded in the *itihasa purana* tradition synchronize with the argument supporting "a change from lineage society to state system" (*H&B* 9). But before going into this in details what is required is an understanding of the recording of the forms of historical consciousness early Indian society.

Two forms of articulating historical consciousness may be noticed in early Indian history which Thapar calls as embedded history and external history. The former is evident in the literature of the lineage based society and the latter emerged with the transition to the state systems. The transition from lineage to state is marked not just by change in political systems but by multiple social changes. She writes:

> The term "state" would refer to a society registering political polarities, an increasingly vertical hierarchy of authority, social inequalities, differentiated economies and distinct ideological identities; not that these characteristics are completely absent in lineage societies, but there are endemic differences between the two. Sometimes these differences are blurred in the texts. Lineage society derives its validity from different sources of authority as compared to state systems, with which we are in any case more familiar. The central role of lineage in the earlier society has reference to more than just the ordering of kinship for it dominates virtually every aspect of activity. (117)

Lineage as term is preferred over "tribal" as it has narrow focus and emphasizes "succession and descent" which in their implication are "decisive in determining social status and control over economic resources" (*H&B* 117). It also marks the difference between the chieftainship "where lineage dominates" and kingship which as a different category "invokes a larger number of impersonal sanctions." *Vamsa* has a similar meaning and is used to mean succession among the "*rajanyas* and *ksatriyas*" (117); *vamsa* is central to Vedic society with its emphasis on succession. Further, "lineage also becomes important in the structure of each *varna*, defined by permitted rules of marriage and kinship and by ranking in an order of status, the control over resources being implicit. In this sense the emergence of four *varnas* is closely allied to the notions of lineage based society" (117).

The State, on the other hand, would refer to a society registering political polarities, an increasingly vertical hierarchy of authority, social inequalities, differentiated economies and distinct ideological identities, the introduction of taxation and the centrality of sanction of religious ritual (unlike in the lineage society where it is marginal).These changes occur gradually over time and mark the state as an impersonal authority (*Readings in Early Indian History* 120). Sometimes these differences are blurred in the texts.

Myth and fragments of literature like *dana-stuti* (eulogies on gift-giving) hymns, *gadha*, *narassam* (eulogies on heroes) *akhyana* (cycle of stories which are recited at the time of *yajnas*, commemorating rajas and heroes) and the *kathas* (cycle of stories generally involving heroes) are the embedded forms. All these forms are linked to the ritual of sacrifice, the *yajna* which imparts sanctity and continuity coeval with the performance of the ritual. The event is limited to the activities of the *ksatriyas*, but the audience was much wider and included the entire tribe. "The deepest layer of the embedded form is myth. Events are assumed to have happened, and time is almost proto-chronos since it involves gods and the supernatural in an active role with humans and animals. The significance of myth to the historian lies more in its being the self-mage of a given culture, expressing its social assumptions. The role of myth in this context is often explanatory. Origin myths are concerned with cosmogony and the start of events such as the Flood myth" (*H&B* 140).

These fragmentary forms led to what are called the first gropings of epic forms in India, referred to as the *kathas*. *Mahabaratha* and *Ramayana*, both had their earlier versions in *Ramakatha* and *Bharata* or *jaya* (140). In their later forms, as they are available now, distinct locales were added and narratives were woven into the two lineages. The epic as a literary form carries within it less embedded and conscious historical traditions. Its historicity lies "in the fact that it is a later age reflecting on an earlier one, the reflections taking the form of interpolations interleaved among the fragments of the oral bardic traditions. When epic literature ceases to be a part of the oral tradition and is frozen into written form, reflections begins to tail off. The pastoral-agricultural society of the world of the heroes structured around lineage gives way to the more clearly agrarian societies and to the rise of urban centres controlled by what is visibly emerging as a state system…" (148). Epic, unlike myth, does not "explain the universe or society". It lays bare the problems of the society, even without seeking solutions as the "ultimate solution is the dissolution of the system" (149). Society, experiencing greater stratification, asks for an "overall authority" to maintain the strata; when such authority arrives and is eulogised, "that eulogy becomes the dirge of a truly epic society" (149).The literature, in laying bare the conditions in transition from lineage society to the state systems, reflects a number of "bi-polarities", which give an added edge to the image of the past and the contours of the present: The *grama* is contrasted with the *aranya*, the kingdom with the exile, the orderliness of the *grama* is opposed to the disorder of the *aranaya*; "the kingly ethic arises out of governing people and claiming land, the heroic ethic emerges from war and confrontation. The monarchical state is seen as superior and successor to lineage state" (149). (Sabhaparva and Santiparva where rajdharma is discussed are examples).

II

The more overt manifestation of historical consciousness becomes visible in the compilation of *itihasa-purana* which "veers between perceived past and historicity." Purana was initially part of the oral, bardic tradition, where the suta and Magadha are said to be its earliest authors. "There is evidence to suggest that the Puranic texts were translated from the oral prakrit to the literate Sanskrit" (152). The compilation was dated to the mid first millennium AD. The genealogical sections were reordering of the earlier material in new format. The lesser and multiple *puranas* (upapuranas?) borrowed their form from major *puranas* (eighteen in numbers), though their content is different.

The structure of the *Puranas* was an attempt to provide an integrated world view of the past and present, linking events to the emergence of a deity or a sect, since each *Purana* was dedicated to such a one, the *Visnu Purana* being regarded as the model. The historical epicentre of the *itihasa* tradition was the *vamsanucarita,* which, as the name suggests, was the genealogy of all the known lineages and dynasties upto the mid-first millennium AD. It was not a parallel tradition to the earlier *kathas* and *akhyanas* since it incorporated many of these forms of embedded history. The genealogical core pertaining to those who were believed to have held power in the past was carefully preserved after it had been worked out into a systematic pattern. This was because it not only purported to record the past, but was also later to become essential to future claims to lineage status, and was therefore linked with historical writing. Evidently, there was a need for a recognizable historical tradition at this time (152).

In early Indian society transmission of areas or forms of knowledge need to be touched to contextualize or further understand the *itihasa-purana* tradition. The sociology of knowledge (knowledge is being defined as the ways in which people organise their everyday experience of the social world) "would include not only ideologies, philosophies and belief systems, but also everyday concerns" (*Cultural Pasts* 195). Among these forms of knowledge, "the organisation of knowledge as abstract understanding," and knowledge as the practice of a technique, are particularly essential "when literacy is not universal and techniques have to be practiced, improved upon and handed down as part of an oral tradition" (196). The point of historical importance is when such handling of knowledge is converted to a literate form. The methods of transmission, of the oral and the literate, involve "three situations: firstly, the oral pre literate tradition; secondly, the interface between the oral and the literate; thirdly the use of the literacy" (197). What needs to be understood is the continuation of the oral-literate interface.

The oral tradition in India is never uniform and that reflects in the demarcation between a "carefully preserved oral tradition" and a "relatively free oral tradition," based on presuppositions, functions and forms. The two dominant oral traditions which were converted to a written form in the first millennium BC are the "Vedic texts on the one hand and the epics on the other" (197). Vedic hymns were composed and handed down orally over many centuries even after writing became current in the third century BC (they are handed down orally even now in some places). One of the reasons for their meticulous preservation is the theory that sound was of fundamental importance as any mispronouncing renders the purpose of the ritual ineffective. "The unstated aim was to limit the availability of the texts, for oral memorisation was closed to those whom the priests wished to exclude" (197). In contrast the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* were of free oral traditions. The original composers, the bards, the *sutas* would wander from place to place reciting their compositions, usually at large sacrificial rituals conducted by the *rajas*. The institution of *guru-sisya parampara* too demonstrates the oral-literate interface. "In the dialogue between the teacher and the pupil there would be the intervention of the text which may have become the third participant in the trilogue.... With the establishment of literacy there is shift to include together with list of teachers various categories of texts...." (199).

Time:

The colonially (turn of the eighteenth century) developed notion of Indian time being cyclic and tied to infinity of repetitive cycles and did not recognise historical change is contested through an analysis of concepts of time available in the puranic texts. "Notions of time are also cultural symbols and .... involve visualization of forms of time," the distinctiveness of mythical time from historical time, association of time with eschatologies, utopias and moral and social decline (*E&H* 8). Thapar writes, "Time concepts and historical change interact in as much as change can be projected as either repetitive, recurrent or periodic, pointing to a wide stretch of time concepts, ranging from what are viewed as the cyclical to the continuously progressive and directional, suggesting a linear form, with many in-between positions such as a wave or a spiral" (8). "The theory of the four ages as a conceptualization of cosmological time is more elaborate in the *Puranas* which are generally dated to around the mid-first millennium AD" (14). In the *Puranas*, especially in one of the five sections of *Visnu Purana*, there was a mechanism of segregating the mythical time from chronological time in narrating the past. In the first section the universe, the reign of the seventh Manu and the great Flood is described; in another section, that is *vamsanucarita*, succession of those who ruled is narrated. The measurement of time "changes from the cyclic time associated with the Manus and the *manvantaras*, to reckoning time as generations through lengthy genealogy" (27). The suggestion, thus, is the change from cyclic time to reckoning in generational time through genealogies are "mechanisms of demarcating myth in cosmological time from that which occupies the ambiguous area approaching history" (27).

III

Garuda Purana is one of those *Ashtaadasa Maha-Puranas*. It is called *Garuda Purana* because it is in the form of a dialogue between Garuda, the Divine King of Birds and Lord Vishnu. Later, Garuda recited the same to Sage Kashyapa (Vyasa and Suta are also mentioned as part of the chain) that percolated down the line. It contains about 19000 slokas and is classified as *Saattvika Purana*. It is difficult to date *Garuda Purana*; as several revisions would have taken place approximately it is dated to the later part of first millennium (Sage Vedavyaasa edited and revised all *Puranas*?). This *Garuḍa Purāṇa Sārodhhāra* (Extracted essence of the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*) was compiled or written by one Navanidhirāma, son of Śrī Hari Nārāyaṇa, who lived in the city of Jhunjhuṇū, which was ruled by a King Śrī Sūkhalālajī.

Garuda Purana deals with the incarnations of Lord Vishnu, geographical description and origin of the Universe, Creation, Procreation, Genealogy of Gods, etc., but most importantly it narrates the journey of a soul after death. The entire epic is in the form of interesting conversation between Garuda and Lord Vishnu regarding the meaning of human life. *Garuda Purana* also talks about the origin and propagation of Garuda. It describes different kinds of austerities, methods of worship, atonement for sin and divine and sacred *Manthras*.

Uniqueness of *Garuda Purana* lies in the fact that it is “the only sacred text” that talks about the life after death, the journey of the soul, death and its aftermath, rebirth or reincarnation. Even the modern science could not break the mystery of death and after, whereas *Garuda Purana* has spelled out these realities ages before. Among the sixteen *Samskaaras* prescribed in Hindu Dharma, last one called *Anthyeshti samskara* is related to funeral rites and other ceremonies. This samskara is exclusively and exhaustively covered in *Garuda Purana*.

Garuda Purana also covers description about the Nether worlds — *Yama-Loka* and various kinds of *Naraka Lokas* (Hell). It explains the experiences of the Soul when it leaves the body and the cycle of countless births the Soul takes. It dwells on the Law of *Karma*, Fruits of *Karma* (action), *Moksha* (Salvation) and various types of punishments for the sins committed during life time. It gives a detailed description of the Funeral rites, its rituals and the ceremonies starting from death till the completion of one year.

The power of *Garuda Purana*:

As a custom we find in traditional Hindu families, recital of *Garuda Purana* takes place whenever there is a death in the family till the completion of 13th day ceremony. Great merits (*punya*) are acquired from reading or listening to *Garuda Purana* during that time. Those who narrate and those who listen to this sacred *Purana* within ten days or even after the death of a person will get absolved from sins and are assured of happiness in this world as well as in the next world.

One who listens to *Garuda Purana* on the occasion of his parents’ death, such parents would attain *Mukthi* and also he will be blessed with good progeny. He or she will get rid of sorrow, suffering and will be blessed with peace and prosperity. It is believed that by listening to *Garuda Purana*, a Brahmin will be bestowed with *Vidya*, a Kshatriya with Land and a Vysya with wealth. Listening to or reading of *Garuda Purana* during *Pithr Paksha* is sacred and meritorious that pleases our dead.

Rulers who abuse their power and adulterers are thrown in *Vaitarani* (River of Filth). Among the various forms of punishments of Yama, it is the most terrible place of punishment. It is a river which is filled with human excreta, blood, hair, bones, nails, flesh and all kinds of dirty substances. There are various kinds of terrible beasts as well. Those who are cast into it are attacked and mauled by these creatures from all sides. The sinners have to spend the term of their punishment, feeding upon the contents of this river.

The sixteen chapters of *Garuda Purana* along with several orally transmitted myths about it show the way rules of conduct, ideological as they maybe, are practised and passed on generationally in various forms, evidencing both historical thinking (albeit embedded) and evolved institutional functioning within the Indian societies.

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Transnational Refugee Movement and Precarity: Reading Media Images as Texts

Himadri Lahiri

Abstract: The twenty first century may be regarded as an age of large-scale migrations of displaced people. These include both internal and transnational movements. One is aware of the experiences migrant workers went through during the Covid-19 outbreak, particularly in the Global South. Transnational migrations are/were triggered by coercive situations such as civil war in nation-states, state violence, threats to life and career, extreme hunger, environmental factors, and different forms of threat perceptions. Exceptionalism has become the norm in many countries. Inhuman treatment of minority communities, Civil War in nation-states, fatal sea passages of the Syrian refugees across the Mediterranean, crowds of Rohingya refugees camping in Bangladesh, Afghans fleeing their country – all these indicate that the condition of precarity has become a prominent and recurrent phenomenon in the last two decades or so. Images of precarity circulate in popular and social media. The phenomenon of precarity (in Judith Butler's sense of the word) raises humanitarian issues. This article argues that despite the fact that there is evidence of widespread politics of pity and sympathy in the context of refugee crisis, particularly in the West, consideration of ethical issues (in Immanuel Levinas' sense of the term)is crucial in contemporary contexts. This will be discussed in this article with the help of some media images of Syrian and Afghan refugee migrations that went viral in social media in the recent past.

Key words: migration, image, transnational movement, Syrian and Afghan refugees, precarity, Levinasian face

The first two decades of twenty-first century have witnessed some of the large-scale migrations, both internal and transnational. One is aware of the experiences of migrant labourers during the Covid-19 outbreak, particularly in the countries of the Global South. Transnational migrations in the present century were triggered by coercive situations such as civil war, state violence, threats to life and career, different other forms of threat perceptions, extreme hunger, environmental factors and so on. Such is the impact of these dislocations on the global situation that in 2015 António Guterres, the then United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, observed that "[t]he twenty-first century is proving to be a century of people on the move" ("21st Century"). He lists several reasons for the displacements, chief among which are: population growth, urbanization, climate change and food, water and energy insecurity. All these, he said, created a sense of instability. In a research paper Robert Muggah Abdenur and Adriana Erthal Abdenur state that "[t]he world is confronting a series of unprecedented population displacement crises" and offer some statistical data about the situation: "As of 2018, there were around 25.4 million refugees, 3.1 million asylum seekers and another 40.3 million IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons]… worldwide — more than at any time since World War II". They point out that "reportedly just 30 percent of all refugees live in planned camps administered by governments and international agencies (2). The fate of the rest who live outside these camps can easily be imagined.

Experts in refugee studies note "new patterns of forced displacement" in the recent transnational migration scenario and feel that "[t]he international community ha[s] to recognize the growing complexity of the link between people forced to flee because of conflict and persecution — refugees according to instruments of protection — and those forced to move for other reasons, or even moved just because they wanted a better life" ("21st Century"). Each displacement should be considered according to its specific context and nature. Forced migration[1] (such as that of the refugees) entails an intense sense of precarity which cannot be usually seen in the case of voluntary movements. This article is mainly focussed on refugee movements and the precarity associated with them. We also need to recognise the fact that sudden, largely unanticipated, large-scale migrations impose upon the host nation-states a huge demand for hospitality that tells upon their socio-economic resources. One can imagine the gravity of the situation in already resource-poor host nations of the Global South. In all cases, the impact of refugee influx is huge as it unsettles the infrastructure of the host nations and create anti-migrant sentiment among the citizens. The initial waves of sympathy and the impulse to help the victim/s may evaporate soon. The traumatic effect on both the migrants and the host society, and the affective representation of the situation in cultural media demand an in-depth critical analysis. This article examines some media images to understand the precarity of the refugees in the context of contemporary scenario of large-scale forcible displacements.

Precarity: What It Means

Since this article draws on the concept of "precarity," its connotations need to be fleshed out. Elena Gasiukova and Ovsey Shkaratan offer a useful definition of the term:

> An individual's precarious status is characterized by instability originating from a multitude of sources. First of all, this instability results from an individual's *volatile job situation and financial vulnerability*. Today, there are a number of similar categories at researchers' disposal (for instance, informal or non-standard employment, flexibilisation), but they describe only the employment type. At the same time, some authors regard precarity *as subjective experience of instability, an ontological state as opposed to precariousness which is a structural characteristic of an individual's employment situation*. (117; emphasis added)

Gasiukova and Shkaratan "share the latter view and believe that the precarity phenomenon should not be restricted to employment relations … although [they] take into consideration that a job is the main source of income and life prospects for the majority of people" (117).
In *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009), Judith Butler designates precarity as a "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and Death" (25). She observes that "such populations are at heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection" (25-26). She underscores the irony inherent in the fact that the population who are exposed to "arbitrary state violence" have "no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection" (26). But there is no reason why one should limit this precarity of the population within the confines of a nation state. Refugees whose precarity we shall discuss in this article may have to transcend the national border and face a foreign state or foreign population who may look upon the refugees with suspicion and hate.

In this article the term "precarity" will be employed to refer to an *ontological experience of the displaced*. It will of course include the economic plight of the displaced within the periphery of its connotations though this aspect is not the primary thrust of the article. The immediate experiential crisis that marks the refugee's displacement, the loss of source of income, urgency of saving his or her life, the search for shelter and food all these tell upon the refugee's mind. This indeed is a state of precarity. The reception of the refugees by the host/global community will be taken into consideration in this paper because it is an integral part of the "Self" (the host) as it is crucial to the "Other" (the refugee). Taken together, both the Self and the Other offer a comprehensive idea of the refugee crisis and foregrounds the need for humanitarianism. Butler's discourse of "precarity" which is intrinsically associated with Emmanuel Levinas's concept of the "Other" will be employed here, particularly Levinas's metaphorical use of the word "face" will be of much use. Levinas's "Other" not only suffers but also issues call to the "Self." In an earlier book titled *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) Butler's discussion pivots on Levinas's concept of the "face" which does not refer to just the face of an individual but to all his/her embodied gestures such as physical movement, the way s/he walks or stoops or jerks his/her shoulders. All these converge to convey the ontological state of the suffering individual. Butler explains:

> Here the term "face" operates as a catachresis: "face" describes the human back, the craning of the neck, the raising of the shoulder blades like "springs." And these bodily parts, in turn, are said to cry and to sob and to scream, as if they were a face or, rather, a face with a mouth, a throat, or indeed, just a mouth and throat from which vocalizations emerge that do not settle into words. The face is to be found in the back and the neck, but it is not quite a face. The sounds that come from or through the face are agonized, suffering. So we can see already that the "face" seems to consist in a series of displacements such that a face is figured as a back which, in turn, is figured as a scene of agonized vocalization. (*Precarious Life* 133)

Levinas argues that it is necessary for the Self to recognise the face of the Other. The ethical act on the part of the Self consists in recognising, through a close scrutiny of the face of the Other, the "precarity" which is very much ontological. Self's duty does not end with just the recognition of the precarity of the Other, but also demands an appropriate response to address the sufferer's condition. Butler's concept of "precarity" as a lived experience, thus, hinges on Levinasian "address-response" communication process and harps on the role of appropriate action. She observes:

> That situation is one in which we are addressed, in which the Other directs language towards us. That language communicates the precariousness of life that establishes the ongoing tension of a non-violent ethics. The situation of discourse is not the same as what is said or, indeed, what is sayable. For Levinas, the situation of discourse consists in the fact that *language arrives as an address we do not will, and by which we are, in an original sense, captured, if not, in Levinas's terms, held hostage*. (*Precarious Life* 139; emphasis added)

This "arrival" of the language on the Self, who is seized of the matter and urged to act, is important for Levinas. Butler takes up the point and applies this to the issue of precarity in the contemporary contexts. Her discourse is thus very much ethical in tone and tenor as it emphasises the role of "responsibility." She quotes Levinas's observation that "the face is the extreme precariousness of the other," the Self offers peace which signifies a sense of "awakeness to the precariousness of the other" (*Precarious Life* 134)."The approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility. … the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone" (Levinas qtd. in Butler, *Precarious Life* 131). Most interestingly, she argues that such an ethical approach will be useful in Humanities studies at the core of which lies the prime concern of humanisation of issues. Butler observes that Levinas "gives us a way of thinking about the relationship between representation and humanization, a relationship that is not as straightforward as we might like to think. If critical thinking has something to say about or to the present situation, it may well be in the domain of representation where humanization and dehumanization occur ceaselessly" (*Precarious Life* 140).

"Face" of the Syrian Refugee: Media Images as Texts

The media is an important site for disseminating values through images. Some of the images have great affective value and are potentially explosive in effect. As they circulate in mass media and reach more and more people, they create powerful impact on the public moral and affect policy decisions of governments. Nigel Thrift rightly comments, "Waves of affect are transmitted and received, transmitted and received … as they cook up an affective storm" (243). This section will discuss a few visual images related to Syrian refugee migration.[2]

Nilüfer Demir, a Turkish photojournalist, took some snapshots of Alan Kurdi, a drowned Syrian child, on 2 September 2015. These were unforgettable images capable of arousing strong sympathy in the viewers. It came to light that a rubber boat was carrying the family of the boy along with some other Syrian refugees, all of whom were fleeing war-ravaged Syria. All the members of the family except the father Abdulla Kurdi died when the boat capsized on its way to the Greek island of Kos. The body of the three-year-old child swept on the beach of the Turkish tourist town called Bodrum.

One of the images (Fig.1) shows "a small child clad in a red t-shirt and blue pants," his lifeless body "lying on a beach, just where the water met the shore; face down, the body facing in the direction of the ocean" (Adler-Nissen, et al. 75). The sea towards which his face gestures connects the dead child to his war-ravaged country – it is the passage way that forms the trajectory of not only his journey but also those of million other refugees. The half-revealed face, mostly buried in sand, is a powerful reminder of the refugee child's precarity. The face of the prostrate child releases a strong appeal to the world for redressal of the issues related to his (and others') precarity and demands appropriate ethical response from the world communities. A refugee in a foreign shore is not generally a welcome figure and his or her arrival is normally greeted with suspicion and hostility. Critically interpreting the reaction of the host ("Self") in such a situation, Levinas speaks of a two-pronged response: at the sight of the "face" the Self instinctively wants to kill the Other, an unfamiliar figure who can hardly be trusted, but at the same time s/he ethically wills himself/herself to behave with responsibility and listen to the "address" issued by the Other. Indeed, millions of people all over the world responded to the photo with shame, anger, sadness and similar other emotions. The acute precarity of the child in the given context, however, aroused waves of pity and sympathy, and confirms the power of a visual image that displays the plight of an innocent child refugee.

The second picture (Fig. 2) shows an individual, in all probability a member of the team involved in the rescue operation, picking up the dead body of the child, an act and gesture that show the spontaneous humanitarian response of the person to the "language" of the distressed other. The very fact that the child is properly dressed in colour, wearing even a pair of shoes suggests that he should have been ready for life but for the course of political events over which he, his parents, or fellow Syrians had no control. It is a scene that reminds us of Matthew Arnold's words: "And we are here as on a darkling plain/Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, /Where ignorant armies clash by night." The moaning sea at the background with "[i]ts melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" and the melancholy face of the person provides an appropriate atmosphere to the tragedy. The official on duty in the professional attire, bowed down in respect and responsibility as seen in the picture is like a father/guardian figure deeply saddened to discharge the duty. The nuanced emotive details in the image enter into the consciousness of the viewers and affect them powerfully. With each circulation of the image in the media and with each comment appearing there the picture received surplus value. Although deaths and mishaps did happen during the traffic of Syrian refugees and children too had been victims to the same fate, the visuality of the journalist's published images sent shock waves across the world and affected the refugee policies of European countries.[3]

One reason for the depth of the public and official response to the image is the fact that the figure of the child constitutes its sole focus. The innocence of the child – innocence is a powerful motif here – and his vulnerability and unprotectedness to the rough winds of Nature and human politics immediately release a "fatherly" or "motherly" emotion and a sense of responsibility in the viewers. Adler-Nissen et al have effectively analysed this point in their article discussed in this essay. They assert that the image of the child interpellates a parent figure in us, a point that they explain by referring to a host of national leaders who invoked this guardian-like feeling (Adler-Nissen, et al.).

The images immediately went viral. Social media flared up with comments and images. They represented immediate gestures of rage, shame, sympathy and mourning. The effect was widespread:

> Newspaper editorials, commentary in print and online media, statements by NGOs and the UNHCR echoed the sentiment that this was a heart-breaking, shocking image requiring instant political action. … Political leaders shared their personal emotional reactions. UK Prime Minister David Cameron, for example, declared that "[a]nyone who saw those pictures overnight could not help but be moved and, *as a father*, I felt deeply moved by the sight of that young boy on a beach in Turkey." He added that "Britain is *a moral nation and we will fulfil our moral responsibilities*." (Adler-Nissen et al. 76; emphases added)

The Guardian editorial on 4 September 2015 rightly observed, "One photograph has turned something we all knew was happening, but somewhere little-known and far away, into a wrenching tragedy that demands immediate action" (qtd. in Adler-Nissen, et al. 82). All these testify to the effectiveness of visual images in generating strong emotive response of strong ethical dimension.

From literary point of view the most notable consequence of the Alan Kurdi's story is perhaps Khaled Hosseini's book *Sea Prayer* (2018). Originally written as "a virtual reality experience in collaboration with UNHCR, the *Guardian* and Google" in 2017 (https://www.unhcr.org/sea-prayer), this book by Hosseini, a Goodwill Envoy to the UNHCR, pays homage to Alan Kurdi and thousands of refugee families who were forced to flee homeland. In an interview, Hosseini observes, "As the drownings in the Mediterranean Sea sadly continue, I hope that *Sea Prayer* helps keep alive the memory of Alan Kurdi, and that it serves as reminder of the unfathomable desperation that forces families to risk all they have in search of hope and safety on another shore, across the waters" (https://www. unhcr. org/sea-prayer).

The book is written in a beautiful poetic language. The print text is accompanied, page after page, by serene, colourful and attractive illustrations by Dan Williams. As an inside flap of the book informs, "*Sea Prayer* was inspired by the story of Alan Kurdi." It further informs, "In the year after Alan's death 4,176 others died or went missing attempting similar journeys. This book is dedicated to the thousands of refugees who have perished at sea fleeing war and persecution" (https://www.unhcr.org/sea-prayer). Addressed to his child Marwan, now sleeping quietly, and waiting at the sea-shore for the smuggler's boat to arrive in the morning that will ferry them to a safe place across the sea, the speaker, the father of the child, prays to the sea for a safe passage because he knows that the passage arranged by non-state agents (in this case most probably non-state agents). Nostalgic for the place he is leaving behind, and looking forward to the future that is uncertain, he has the safety of the child uppermost in his mind. One notices how protective he is as the father of the child. In Hosseini's narrative the father figure conjures up the details of their life in the small village outside the Syrian town of Hom, of their displacement from the place and their journey towards the sea. As violence escalated and survival there became difficult, the father decided to leave the ancestral place which now smelt of fire and smoke. After the long walk they now find themselves among countless refugees, all waiting at the shore, "among the crying babies and the women worrying/ in tongues we don't speak. / Afghans and Somalis and Iraqis and Eritreans and Syrians. /All of us impatient for sunrise, all of us in dread of it. / All of us in search of home. / I have heard it said we are the uninvited. / We are the unwelcome" (n.pag).[4] The angst of the father is quite evident.

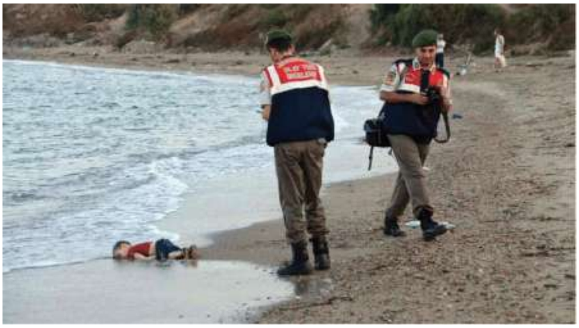

Fig.1: “Alan Kurdi, distant picture. Photo: Nilüfer Demir, DHA.”
Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Alan-Kurdi-distant-picture-Photo-Niluefer-Demir-DHA_fig4_340164615

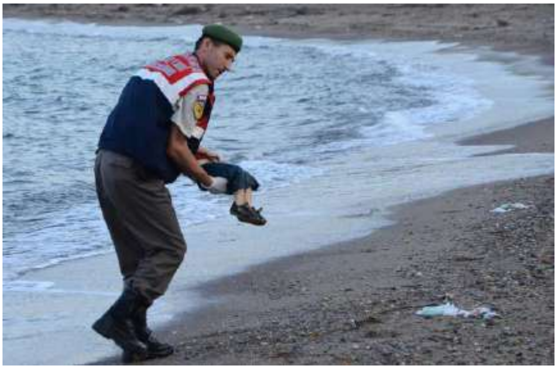

Fig. 2:“A Turkish paramilitary police officer carries the body of 2-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi, found washed ashore near the Turkish resort of Bodrum in September 2015. Nilufer Demir/AFP/Getty Images”
Source: https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/08/31/642952840/an-aunts-memoir-remembering-the-drowned-syrian-boy-on-the-beach

“Face” of the Afghan Refugee: Media Images as Texts

Three other images that this section will analyse are related to the recent migration of Afghan people during the last Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021[5]. Many of these unfortunate people were afraid that they might be persecuted or killed if they stayed back in the country, and therefore they had been trying to flee Afghanistan to seek asylum abroad. The crucial question at this point of time was how to get out of the country as the public transport system was in a mess. A few aircrafts were busy ferrying out important political leaders, diplomats and other resourceful persons. The common people were left helpless. Pictures of hordes of people streaming out of the country circulated in the mass media. Some images of people mobbing the aircrafts at Kabul airport to escae through air routes are also available. Such images became symbols of precarity of the mass and their collective “face” in the Levinasian sense communicated messages of help to the global leaders and individuals across the world. In this section we shall shift our attention from the sea-as-route to air-as-route for escape of refugees. At the same time, the space of focus of the images also changes, quite in contrast, from the alien shore (Turkey) to familiar ground of the native nation (Afghanistan). This seems to be an important factor as the (Western) photographer’s lens may stereotype the affected nation space in the Orient and foreground the quality of “spectacularity” in the images. Besides inhering an Orientalist impulse, media reports also tend to sensationalise events, particularly where the sense of “difference” is prominent. At the same time media representation through “mediation of suffering” can generate a “politics of pity” (Chouliaraki 2). In her book *Spectatorship of Suffering*, Lili Chouliaraki argues that “television uses image and language so as to render the spectacle of suffering not only comprehensible but also ethically acceptable for the spectator” (3). The media text can indeed foreground the difference between the spectator located in the safe drawing room and the sufferer in the maelstrom of chaos. “The division between safety and suffering captures a fundamental aspect of this asymmetry in the viewing relationships of television. This is the asymmetry of power between the comfort of spectators in their living rooms and the vulnerability of sufferers on the spectators’ television screens” (4). Nevertheless, she argues, from such viewing arises “how the spectator should relate to the sufferer and what we should do about the suffering” (3). According to her, “It is these ethical values, embedded in news discourse, that come to orientate the spectator’s attitude towards the distant sufferer” (3).

In the three images we will discuss the aircraft holds the central focus. One of the images (Fig. 3) shows us thousands of people at the Kabul airport running alongside a US army plane while it was still on the move on the runway after its landing. What strikes most in the picture is the huge size of the crowd at a place – an airport – which is usually kept under strict surveillance. The presence of the huge crowd comprising common citizens on the runway of the airport (usually accessible exclusively to the high government officials, well-to-do businessmen/women and people belonging to the higher social classes) amounts to nothing short of a sacrilege. This reflects the breakdown of law and order in the country and the plight of people on the run. In the given situation, aircraft is the surest, safest and quickest means of exit from the country that was burning. Interestingly, the “face” spoken of by Levinas does no longer belong to an individual (like Alan Kurdi we have discussed in the earlier section) here, it has assumed the character of a mass, a collectivity that conveys its vulnerability and asks the world to consider offering refuge to them. The second picture (Fig. 4) shows a visible section of the crowd, appearing partially relieved at being able to board the aircraft, resting dangerously near the door of the stationary aircraft. The scene anticipates an ominous possibility of accident when the aircraft will start moving and flying. The image also implies the presence outside the lens of a far larger crowd who could not make it to the inside of the aircraft. In fact, there are quite a few images available online which shows people who, unable to secure space within, climbed atop the aircraft. Such desperation underlines the inhospitable space that Afghanistan had turned into under the Taliban regime. Obviously, this perception comes from traumatic memory of the people who experienced/ witnessed the barbaric nature of administration during the earlier Taliban regime. The last image (Fig.5) relates to the aircraft again but this time the aircraft is not on the ground but is airborne, indicating that it has indeed left the Kabul airport and the journey has indeed begun. But the shocking fact is that one sees human bodies (circled in the picture) falling off from the airborne aircraft. It is obvious that the people who boarded the aircraft and stood or sat there unsafely or had climbed up at the top of the plane in desperation were the poor victims. These three pictures taken together broadly suggest two things: unlike in the pictures of Alan Kurdi, the focus here is not on the foreign “hospitable” shore which seemingly is capable of offering a safe refuge but on the Oriental space that is remote, brutal and primitive. Although the immediate reason of the flight is the violence, or perception of the violence in Afghanistan, the vision of a modern life in a contemporary nation-state in the West may lurk in the mind of the people appearing in the photographic representation. Although it is true that this aspect of search for modernity in the Western nations (represented here by the modern aircraft) is not directly present in the canvas, the possibility of such an interpretation is nevertheless strong. Critics tend to trace an Orientalist motif in similar representations. If the images, mostly taken and circulated by the Western media, are read in conjunction with Judith Butler’s interpretation of a television programme in the Unites States in which some Afghan women, now settled in the US, appear/sound happy and satisfied, their “face” betraying no sign of precarity, this interpretation seems quite acceptable. She asks, “Where is loss in that face? And where is the suffering over war? Indeed, the photographed face seemed to conceal or displace the face in the Levinasian sense, since we saw and heard through that face *no vocalization of grief or agony, no sense of the precariousness of life*" (*Precarious Life* 142; emphasis added). What Butler is really concerned about is whether "the vocalisation of grief or agony" or "precariousness of life" that is deeply imprinted on the bodies of the fleeing refugees would evaporate from their 'face' after their arrival in the West. In that case it will lead to the loss of a history that is being recycled in some form or other in some part of the global South or other every now and then.

There is another aspect that requires understanding. If the West is the cherished destination for the refugees, it is also worthy of investigation whether the refugees consider the West as the ultimate saviour, protector and guardian. This possibility gains in significance if we consider what the well-known critic Simon Gikandi discusses in an article. He recounts the story of two stowaways – two young Guinean boys – who hid themselves in a Sabena Airlines Airbus originating from Conakry, Guinea to Brussels, Belgium on 28 July 1999. Newspaper reports spoke of their dead bodies, frozen, found a few days later in the aircraft's rear right hand wheel bay. On the bodies was found a letter they wrote to the "members and officials of Europe," appealing for help and refuge from Europe: "Be mindful of us. There is no one else for us to turn to" (Bates). Gikandi argues that this phenomenon of young boys looking to Europe for help reflects an important aspect of globalisation:

> The boys were neither seeking cultural hybridity nor ontological difference. Their quest was for a modern life in the European sense of the word.; their risky journey from Africa was an attempt to escape both poverty and alterity; it was predicated on the belief that their salvation could only come from Europe which two generations earlier, black nationalists such as Jomo Kanyatta and Aimé Cesairé had declared to be the major threat to the prosperity and well-being of Africa. (630-31)

Understandably, the Afghan refugees gathering at the airports would want to leave their country, and if possible, go to the West. This time Pakistan, Afghanistan's neighbour, clearly discouraged the influx of Afghan refugees and the news of the resettlement of refugees in the West may have filtered in and motivated them to go West. Images of Afghan families being welcomed in the US were available in the internet. These images were floated for the purported purpose of sending messages to China and Russia who were more positive towards the Talibans. In fact, many of the Western countries, despite internal resistance, offered plans for rehabilitation of refugees. Germany, for example, announced that it would accept at least 10,000 Afghans. "[In the US] As many as 50,000 evacuees will arrive under so-called humanitarian parole, a stopgap program that gives them a year to apply for permanent visas. Other Afghans, including those that worked directly for the U.S. government, will be under separate immigration categories" (Sophia Cai). Although, such moves were partly influenced by the West's demand for more labour force, the gestures may confirm the perception of the West as a kind and generous parent figure whose magnanimity for the "huddled masses" is proverbial.

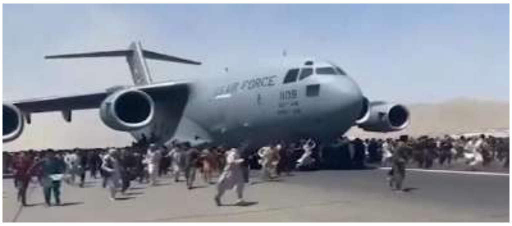

Fig.3: Crowd running alongside a US Air Force plane while it was still in movement after its arrival at the Kabul airport.
Source: https://abc30.com/afghanistan-taliban-news-kabul/10955634/

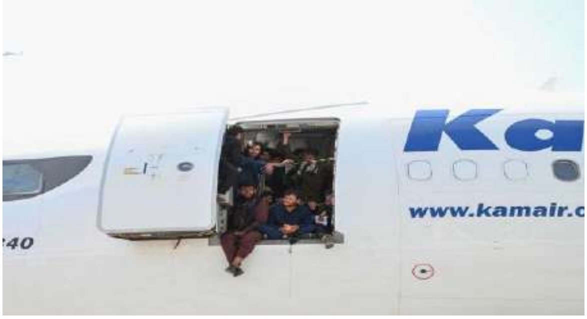

Fig. 4: Those who could enter are sitting dangerously on the door of the aircraft.
Source: https://www.npr.org/2021/08/16/1028090002/afghanistan-airport-evacuation-taliban

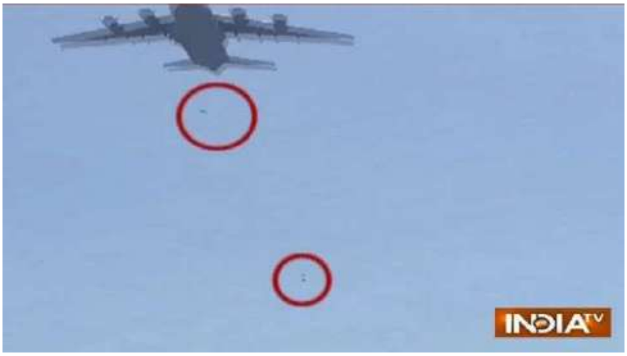

Fig. 5: Bodies falling off from the flight in the air.
Source: https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/world/afghanistan-shocking-video-shows-people-falling-off-from-plane-mid-air-kabul-airport-us-troops-latest-updates-726876

Conclusion:

Images of precarity related to the Global South, specially produced and circulated by the Western media, are invested with deep significance. While on the one hand deep humanitarian values are embedded in them which immediately appeal to the global leaders and common people, the images may nourish a nuanced sense of superiority of the West in terms of civilisational and moral values. It is because of this split between the urge for a humanitarian response, a sense of superiority and the need for reappraisal of socio-economic impact on the nation that force the West to shift their position later. Adler-Nissen, et al. have critically established how the West reverted their refugee policy later in respect of the Syrian refugees. Although the face of the three-year-old triggered an initial humanitarian response towards the refugees, some European nations later started taking sterner position in this respect. There might be politics in the state policies regarding the acceptance of the refugees in some Western nations. Nevertheless, the need for taking positive steps is paramount. It is not for nothing that the UN Refugee Commission was established to tackle the humanitarian crisis of refugees. UINHCR Goodwill Ambassador Khaled Hosseini rightly asserts:

> We all have an individual duty to let our friends, our families, our communities, our governments know we support refugees, that we want to see the expansion of safe, legal pathways for those in need of international protection, and when, if they should reach our own doorstep in search of safety and sanctuary that we welcome

> them. We can show solidarity #WithRefugees in so many different ways. Please take action today. (https://www.unhcr.org/sea-prayer.html)

Hosseini himself decided to "donate author proceeds from this book [*Sea Prayer*] to the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and The Khaled Hosseini Foundation to help fund lifesaving relief efforts to help refugees around the globe." This is in a way a very positive response to the call of the "face" of the precarious "other."

Notes:

1. Muggah and Abdenur define forced migration as "a broad category that refers to movements of refugees and IDPs [Internally Displaced Person]— both those displaced by conflict in their own country of origin and those displaced by natural or environmental disasters, famine, or development projects. The concept thus encompasses demographic movements such as flight, evacuation, displacement and resettlement" (2, n3). They refer to the opinion of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which defines a forced migrant as one who has to leave to "escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood." (Muggah and Abdenur2, n3).
2. The Syrian refugee crisis has its beginning in March 15, 2011. A series of strong popular protests triggered government clamp down on mass protest sites. The government violence ultimately led to a Civil War in the country. USA for UNCHR (the UN Refugee agency) reports (dated March 14, 2023), "After over a decade of conflict, Syria remains the world's largest refugee crisis. Since 2011, more than 14 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety. More than 6.8 million Syrians remain internally displaced in their own country where 70 percent of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance and 90 percent of the population live below the poverty line. Approximately 5.5 million Syrian refugees live in the five countries neighboring Syria—Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Germany is the largest non-neighboring host country with more than 850,000 Syrian refugees." (https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/ Accessed 6 Aug, 2023).
3. For a discussion of details of the policy changes by the European governments, see the article "Images, Emotions, and International Politics: The Death of Alan Kurdi" written by Rebecca Adler-Nissen, Katrine Emilie Anderson and Lane Hansen.
4. Interestingly, the book *Sea Prayer* does not have any page numbers.
5. Afghanistan has been experiencing violence and instability for about four decades It started in 1979 when the Russians invaded the country. The Russian control over the country ended when the Talibans came to power with the help of the US and allied forces. Talibans ruled most of Afghanistan from 1996 until October 2001. Then they were forced out of power by the US and its allied forces in late 2001. After the US forces left the country in 2021, Taliban forces again took over. All these developments triggered a huge refugee crisis. "Afghanistan has a multigenerational refugee problem, dating from 1979 and then continuing with multiple wars and conflicts since. There are three million refugees from Afghanistan living in Pakistan and Iran, three or four million people who are displaced in Afghanistan inside their own country, and then we all saw the tens of thousands of desperate people at the airport seeking to get asylum in the United States or Europe." (https://www.rand.org/multimedia/video/2021/10/13/Afghanistans-refugee-crisis-forty-years-in-the-making.html).

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Fig.1: "Alan Kurdi, distant picture. Photo: Nilüfer Demir, DHA." Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Alan-Kurdi-distant-picture-Photo-Niluefer-Demir-DHA_fig4_340164615)

Fig. 2: "A Turkish paramilitary police officer carries the body of 2-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi, found washed ashore near the Turkish resort of Bodrum in September 2015. Nilufer Demir/AFP/Getty Images" (Source: https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/08/31/642952840/an-aunts-memoir-remembering-the-drowned-syrian-boy-on-the-beach)

Fig.3: Crowd running alongside a US Air Force plane while it was still in movement after its arrival at the Kabul airport. Source: https://abc30.com/afghanistan-taliban-news-kabul/10955634/

Fig. 4: Those who could enter are sitting dangerously on the door of the aircraft.Source: https://www.npr.org/2021/08/16/1028090002/afghanistan-airport-evacuation-taliban

Fig. 5: Bodies falling off from the flight in the air. Source: https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/world/afghanistan-shocking-video-shows-people-falling-off-from-plane-mid-air-kabul-airport-us-troops-latest-updates-726876

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Mali, Dhuli, Malukha by Bira Kishore Parhi: An Autobiography with a Difference

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Madhumita Nayak

Abstract: This paper looks into the autobiography *Mali, Dhuli, Malukha* by Bira Kishore Parhi, an eminent writer from Odisha narrowing down its scope to the inimitable poetic style and story-telling technique filled in its pages. The craft of Parhi is characteristically a verse mode fused into the factual, narrative domains of prose. Like many life writings of teachers that principally border on the profession and the time, Parhi too delves deep into his vocation while touching upon India's independence from the British, the Gandhian concepts of self-reliance, Satyagraha and non-violence, Nehruvian socialist leanings and then building a school premise and curriculum in the model of the Satyabadi group of Odisha. His distinct method has been eradication of caste barriers and social integration, communal harmony and *swachhata* for which the school becomes a better site than even the social matrix. The children who carry forward his values thus extend it to the community at large. Being an over sensitive and selfless individual, his writings that record the multifarious aspects of the young post independent nation and the state carry a rare intensity towards compassion, integrity and equality at all stages that constitute the motto of any welfare state. The paper aims at looking at the uniqueness of its narrative vis-à-vis the genre of autobiography spilling over to its base that is poetry. It also provides a small section in translation in English by one of its authors.

Key words: Bira Kishore Parhi, autobiography, Odia literature

The Author:

Bira Kishore Parhi is a writer, social reformer from Odisha with an illustrious career in teaching inspired by the ideals of Utkalamani Gopabandhu Das's Satyabadi Bana Vidyalaya. An unassuming personality, Parhi possessed tremendous will power with his undaunted mission of social reform through his writings. His literary output was not separated from his act of nation building in the form of student capital. The school for him was an extension of Mahatma Gandhi's vision of self-reliance, non-violence and cleanliness. He started a hand written magazine *Gaanbhuin* (1950-2010) that featured his inimitable columns on agriculture, education, women empowerment, creative writing and political views. One of the leading figures in children's literature of Odisha, Parhi has been honoured with the Odisha Sahitya Akademy award in 2003 apart from plenty of other recognitions from respectable literary societies. Recently his portrait was unveiled at Sri Ram Chandra Bhawan, Cuttack by the initiatives of Utkala Sahitya Samaj.

Introduction:

Self and identity have always been the dominant area of speculation and inquiry in our life. Books, journals, research papers and even newspaper articles while investing their energy in diverse areas, often get caught in self-expression and exploration. Experiments are conducted to find out predictable patterns other than the existing philosophical, theological and sociological views. Hence, the question of self and identity acquire an interdisciplinary position. We have witnessed a substantial growth in life writings; starting from autobiography, biography, memoirs, auto fiction and many other literary forms that depict life. Suddenly I am reminded of a particular line from Rita Dove's poem "Dawn Revisited":

If you don't look back,
The future never happens.

What is this obsession with life? Why are critics, writers and readers eager to verify and propound the general principles of life? Perhaps accumulating the retrospective choices and assess the same provide a space for an exchange of dialogues in order to understand the hard ways of survival. The greatest challenge is to come to terms with an individual's identity. There is this vast canvas where the contemporary critical and conceptual climate tends to paint and decipher. This derivative condition has expedited random social, political and literary events due to various psychological pressures in the domains of reading and writing.

The genre of life writing dates back to the letters of Cicero and confessions of Augustine. Western literature focused on the description of life which is incidental. With the passage of time the incidental was replaced by a rhetorical setting which had faint resemblance of real life and suggested a strong proximity to what constitutes truth and identity. The porous nature of autobiography ends up drawing a boundary between truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, self and self-deception. The boundary is historically, politically, economically and socially influenced and further limits the actual representation of life. Whether the representation of “I” in autobiography should be objective or subjective is a different matter. It is context driven where culture and environment play an important role. The Indo-centric approach is therefore subjective and is often accused of lacking realistic portrayal.

As we ponder over subjectivity, the autobiography gives a complex picture. The modern disillusionment of this unity and subjectivity has a created a rift in understanding the unified self. One example from Utkalamani’s *Bandi ra Atma katha* can resolve this:

Mishu mora deha E desha mati re
Desha basi chali jaantu pithire
(Let me get buried in my soil
While my fellowmen and women walk over it)

Certain writing with a certain goal cannot be guilty of sentimentality or self-proclamation. The above lines are prophetic and inspiring to generations while tirelessly devoting oneself to the service of people. Here, the writer’s intention and practice go hand in hand. The same self- effacement can be seen in Bhima Bhoi, another poet-reformer of Odisha:

Mo Jeevana pachhe narke padithau
Jagata uddhara heu
(Let the world redeem itself at the cost of my life being in hell)

A similar voice is heard in many writers subsequently who got influenced by their forerunners and took to writing in order to serve as they profess. “Back in my postgraduate days I accidentally found a book in our seminar library. It was hard bound and had a familiar yet mysterious look; the appearance was modest and certainly unblemished” (Nayak). The autobiography was posthumously published in 2016. The title of the autobiography, *Mali Dhuli Malukha* itself is thought provoking and poetic. It expresses something essential related to the nature of human life and existence. The work rises to its status by the depth of historical, social and cultural mapping done without ever trying hard. The author, Bira Kishore Parhi is known for diverse writings in the form of poetry, non-fictional prose, drama and columns spanning all areas of human activity in the village in his periodical *Gaanbhuin* that ran for more than fifty years (1951-2010). His writings not only connect one with the “soil” which is the quintessence of any literature, but is immensely therapeutic. “Through those crisp and pristine pages, I slowly found a means to realize our roots and an anchor to hold on to before I was set to look for this self-made, generous, knowledgeable yet humble human being” (Nayak). He is not only passionate, creative and versatile but an honest, disciplined and sensitive teacher of his times. What makes this autobiography different is its presentation in the form of select chapter titles that are unprecedented and never the less structured in its own tone of familiarity. A context that catches up its beauty soon after he flows in an effortless ease gets blended with a sensitivity rarely matched. Here is a subjectivity that doesn't betray facts nor is obsessive unless we scrutinize how there has been little gap between what was practiced from that which figured the pages. Other than the historical, social and cultural aspects the autobiography acts as a key book to deal with serious and sensitive issues of education in a state like Odisha that had witnessed a distressing period of language agitation culminating in what we deserved. The book reflects on various education policies of post independent India like the use of vernacular language in official, formal sectors. It is worthwhile to see how the vision of certain reforms in the curriculum and educational matrix of India presented in the book find relevant space in the new education policies of subsequent years.

Critical Paradigms:

In an International Conference organized by Utkal University that focused on South Asian writings a paper on Parhi's writings took centre stage. We quote here an excerpt from the presentation:

> Parhi's artistic gifts comprised of a wide range of platforms other than poetry. He was an intellectual, a skilled writer, a singer and a dramatist. Being an aficionado of music, he set his poems to tune and they were sung by children all around the village as daily prayers and affirmations. His plays dealt with matters of social importance and were successfully staged by him. Alike his poetry, his plays and essays that also find mention in his autobiography strike a harmonious chord between social significance and literary expertise. At the age of 23, he started a periodical called *Gaan Bhuin* (*Village Soil*) which went on to become the most important legacy of the village and presented his ideas on miscellaneous issues. The periodical was his singular effort, written and edited by himself. He brought home to people creative pieces and articles on progressive ideas like emancipation of women, the status of education, political situation etc. and shared knowledge on practical matters like agriculture. His autobiography entitled *Mali Dhuli Malukha* (*Dirt, Dust and Broken Rice*) was published posthumously in 2016 where he narrates at length the story of a life oscillating between the intricacies of human ties and the larger entanglements of the society which he had taken upon himself to reform. (Mohapatra and Parhi)

Parhi often used to sing his self-composed poems on special occasions to commemorate his periodical, *Gaan Bhuin* under the village banyan tree. This autobiography seems to negotiate between the role of a poet-singer on the brink of a river gathering people for a casteless society with that of an educationist-reformer who would make the school a site of ethnic-religious integration, aiming what Gandhi, Vinoba, Gopabandhu and the Satyabadi *Sakhas*, Nabakrushna Chowdhury among the others visualized for the nation post-independence. Parhi's craft is that of poetry that soothed the mass, enriched the prose genre which touched upon common human sensibility. A poem that defines his prose; autobiography as a discursive practice of self-world recognition in the poetic medium irrespective of division of genres would bring clarity in his enterprise as a writer, reformer and teacher:

Aau Kete Deri
Daina Naaka aau Kanduri Malika
Gurubari Jena puni Sana, Bana, Sapani Paiida
Musha Maa, Tara Nani, Aaintha Bhaauja
Emaane Sakaalu gale
Eibaate bauraani Paata
Taaichung ruaa haba, kei tanka majuri miliba
Dina sara Nuna Chaa
Raati ki muthie bhata peta re padiba

Ushumu bhaataku dekhi jiva tike lala re budiba.

Jaada ta Padichchi bhari paada guda bejae phatichchi
Teka kiarire thare baji gale jivana jaauchchi
Jivana jaauchchi kaahin, dahaganja habaku rahichchi
Saturi tankia shasta chira, siaan siliki shaadhi re
Diha munda adha adha dhaanki ei bhuasuni mane
Naiin naiin tali roi anta aau salakhi hauni.

Minipe galeni dura gahiraku athaba chchaiku
Geru mati gundidani khosanire mari
Kadua karibe jami, morama taadibe
Ghare jete rahigale Musha, Dusha, Neta Pila maane
Nangala, Phungula diha, Naii bandhe khara paunchhanti
Pakhala, Toraani, nuna kichchi kichchi khai pii dei
Julu juli aakhi teki chchahin thibe sanjabela jaayen
Chandikhola paahada ra aarapate suruja budile
Bapa bou maane aasi chaa pii bhata baseibe
Ketebele bhata haba, ketebele kantha para haba
Chuli niian nibhi gale chchinda hensa deha ku dhaankiba (B.K.Parhi, 1978).

(How Long?)
Daina Naaka and *Kanduri Malika*
Gurubari Jena and *Sana, Bana, Sapani Paiida*
Mushamaa, Tara Nani, Aaintha Bhaauja
They all set off this way to *Baurani* field,
To reap Taichung rice and get a few bucks
In the evening, wet tongue would meet warm rice
The whole sweaty day would have passed with salty red tea by then.

The cold is biting. The scarred feet gape
Life goes on, death like, but not dying
These young women draped in worn out cheap sarees
Bending over while sowing
Have perennially been bent down
The males have gone far to work in the quarry
Chewing tobacco the whole day,
Warding off their last drop of lethargy.

And there at home, the Mushas, Dushas, Netas
Bared and naked, sun bathing on the river bank
After relishing some salty, watery rice and chilly
Will have waited till evening with eyes bulging
When would the sun set on the other side of Chandikhole hill
When would the parents come and lit fire
When would warm rice smell into the nostrils
When would thin saree stitched bed be spread
When would the last glow of fire wood be put out
And torn straw made drapery envelope their stripped bodies?
How long?) (Translated by Asima Ranjan Parhi)

The poem above came as a land mark achievement to Parhi's bold, assertive and idealistic stance influenced by the *Sarvodaya* (in the line of *Bhudan*) movement. Names and real-life picture from his village got painted without compromising artistic considerations. The other self-composed song that used to be a part of his crusade for harmony in society is placed here:

Maagha Makara Melara Asara
Magha makara mela ra asara
Asa mishiba mo sathi dosara
Jete abhimana raga rosa dosha ethara ta heba pasora
Kie kala gora dhani gariba
Sabu bheda ra bichara sariba
Gadhiba gotie nua paribara gotie jati e desha ra
Jete khala kheta sabu gaan ra
Jaha shaga bhata achchi maa ra
Gadhiba sabhien gotie parusha khelai lahadi hasa ra
Jeta deula, idiga, kaajia
Mala, Tilaka, Trishula, Taazia
Nashiba bibada Toshiba dunia dharibani kaha dosha ra
Jete dhuli lota hinimania
Dukhi Saria, Bhagia, Sania
Aaunsi aniba kole aaujai puhai rajani Pusha ra
Aame Pua jhia Maa Kola re
Aama dina bitu mana mela re
Dina dukhi dian puja karu karu sari jau dina masa ra
Aama gaan bhuin bara mula re
Kola koli pain heba thula re
Deba haribola, hulahuli dhwani shesa heba bhoka shosa ra
Maagha Makara mela ra asara (B.K. Parhi's *Gaan Bhuin* mouth piece song, 1978).

(**Maagha Makara Evening's Gathering**)
On the brink of 'Makara' in the 'Maagha' evening
Let us come together my friends
This time all our old feuds will bury themselves in past
It will end the differences between the white and black, rich and poor
We shall brave into our new country with one race, one caste
We shall fill all fields and banks of our village
We shall dine together from one plate, whatever food is there
Our togetherness will spread the wave of smiles.
We shall decorate our temples, mosques and churches
Shall pride equally in garlands, trishuls and Taazias
And destroy fights among each other
We shall embrace the hungry and homeless, the uncared and untouched
Sarias, Bhagias and Sanias into our lap
The cold Pusha evening shall be over.
We are the children of Maa kola
Let our days pass in love and unity
We shall live this life of days and months
Worshipping the poor and pathetic.

Under the big Banyan at *Gaan Bhuin*,
We shall gather and embrace

In our *haribols* and *hulahulis*
We shall end poverty all around
Maagha Makara Melara Asara). (Translated by Asim Ranjan Parhi)

His autobiography captures these episodes as its ingredients of life/lived writing in its true sense. Community songs have always played a major role in making the cultural identity and promoting the good values and character of an individual. Many schools in India see community song as an important part of school academia. They encourage mutual understanding and enhance the diverse capabilities of the language. Parhi had grasped the fundamentals behind such songs and hence composed many such songs for children. Every song is unique and distinct in its way. He was indeed one of the most unassuming yet bright figures in the intellectual history of school education in this state whose effort can be considered as a great initiative undertaken to benefit a small part of rural Odisha.

Following the ideal footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi and Gopabandhu Das, the author thought school education to be the bedrock of an integrity that holds the moral, spiritual and social being intact. Here is what a researcher writes on his autobiography:

> Coming to Bira Kishore Parhi's autobiography, the chalk (Khadi) to which his grandfather was so obstinately attached to now belongs to the writer. It is now in the writer's possession. It is not just a piece of usable matter. It is memory. His grandfather survives through this small object. The absent presences. The very sight of the chalk evokes a range of possible images – the grandfather's calculations, the details of domestic transactions, family expenditure, and the nitty-gritty of production and expenses of the annual harvest of the field. In Parhi's narrative that commonplace equipment. Khadi receives meaning that is beyond the equipmental value of the equipment. It exists in the world but reveals the earth. The chalk brings to the readers' knowledge a range of activities the object is associated with. In his narrative the chalk is not a mere object. It evolves into art – from ordinary to suggestive. It shows what it really is. As equipment it clings to its specific usability. It functions as it is made to. But in Parhi's narrative it turns out to be something different revealing the unexpected range of its associations. The familiar appears different. The nondescript becomes attractive. The literal becomes literary. The insignificant signifies. And the object becomes art. That is the power of his narrative. (Panda 48)

Bira Kishore's autobiography affirms this genre by expressing the societal ideas of his time with his vision to reform it from the premise of the school both by extending its geographic space and personal sacrifice. Such writings could risk criticism from monopolized literary-critical circles as sentimental. Anyone who has poetry in soul would be sentimental and the one devoid of the poetic is the one devoid of empathy for people, life and environment. We have witnessed the fall outs of Eliotian criticism of poetry and curiously discovered how nineteenth century British poetry was not simply subjective as its critics found it to be. It is extremely disappointing to notice that research in Humanities lack a really strong assessment method. The film *Dead Poet Society* is a bright example to show how serious and vital works of literature have been criticized for their affective fallacy whereas it is not to be missed that such writers move the readers and persuade to act, sacrifice or serve. An art born out of the wounds of societal darkness or anguish due to people's plight cannot be trivial unless its craft is far short of the other artistic merits. The pre-established frameworks of modern artistic exercises and their promotion, awards and anxiety of getting those awards have seriously damaged the fate of good literature and its hungry recipients. Whether it is a lack of consensus on the nature of literature or literary research or making a profitable, saleable writings of all sorts is something worth debating today.

Parhi's writings are far from that of the radical activists who are at one side disillusioned by the toxic culture which has become both glamorized and pretentious and on the other take refuse in the same colonial, capitalist forms of patronage in order to survive in western academia. His works are a service to mankind. The life he lived and the writings that emerged out of it vouch for what we search and find in every classic art; compassion, empathy and a smell of the real rather than abstractions.

Translation:

Mali, Dhuli, Malukha can be translated as Dust, Dirt, unused grain. The intention is to look at its author's position in society to be mere dust, dirt and unrequited grain. An autobiography that stands out by its chapters like *Khadi chhuan* (Initiation to study), *kuan kuan apekhyare* (Waiting for a birth), *Seba O Samasya ra dochhaki re* (Standing perplexed at the threshold of service and trouble), demonstrates a magic match of real life language with delicate human emotion. It is handled with the same ease and poise throughout the three hundred and fifty odd pages as the reader is made to introspect without being aware of it due to a very familiar and native feel of language. Here is an excerpt from an ongoing translation of the same autobiography:

> Kotapur, a small village in the district of Cuttack is three koshas to the east of Dharmasala police station on the Jagannath Road. The slender Kimbhiria flows in the northern direction. The tributary of Brahmani has made its course out of Dharmasala touching Saudia-Barapada converging into the affluent of Birupa, Genguti. Its course glides further towards Kalamati-Indupur. Along the river runs the dyke, in the base of which lies the silt. The bamboo grove spreads itself over the silt-laden land. Jamun, Palm, Chakunda, Sahada, Chaste, Kewda, Kaner, and Peacock flowers make the village picturesque. This river, its bank, the field, trees, fruits, and flowers were the intimate pals of my childhood days. The bond that I shared with them can never be washed away from my memory.
>
> In the month of falguna, nageswar flowers bloom on the other side of the river bank. It feels as if the trees of the entire nandan forest have descended into the enclosure of Banka Sahi that belongs to the old Zamidar, Radhashyam Narendra. The newly thriving mango baulassend out invitations to the kids. Zamindar's ancestral tutelar and much-worshipped god Gopaljiu's temple is at the nearby village of Raipada. At one end of the village stands the mango orchard that witnesses the festival of Dolamelana every year. The extravagant palanquin of the lord has sixteen bamboo staff. Lord Radhagobinda makes his entry to the melana ground with a grand procession. The barber marches along holding a fire torch. A sweet melody of telingibajatakes over the atmosphere. The magical chants of kirtanmandali and the head smeared with abhiradate back to the days of my childhood. The holi back then was not about artificial colours and water guns. We would pluck nageswara flowers from the nearby garden and run towards the melana field. The thirteenth day of the lunar fortnight marks the presence of a silvery embellished moon in the sky. The moon resembles the queen flower. The silver shimmery moon! The melana goes on till late at night. Although the melana is quite small yet our joys know no bounds. Even to this date, the picture is so clear in my mind. The flashbacks dance quite vividly taking me back to that silvery night, melana, gathering of pals and munching on chana fry, puffed rice, and fried paddy sweetened by jaggery syrup, everything only for 1 paisa. (Nayak, ongoing PhD thesis)

Conclusion:

Who is a good writer after all? A writer who through his actions and works tries to imbue a sort of faith by introducing a unifying cause and broader prospective or the one who only uses words for abstractions, utilitarian ends, market value with complicit, calculative ends? It is sad that many a time our academic champions count books by Booker nominations or their ideological leanings to suit to the international recognizing agencies. At the receiving ends, the students and scholars carry the burden of such preferences that neither delight nor instruct falsifying the time-tested notion of Horace. Julia Cameron in her *The Right to Write: An Introduction and Invitation into the Writing Life* aptly says that "as a culture, we want cash on the barrel head. We want writing to earn dollars and sense so that it makes sense to us." We got a little time and courage to pursue literary innocence over such prescribed choice.

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Tuneful Weeping: Bridal Crying Songs of Rural Western Odisha

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Abstract: Bridal crying or ritual bridal lamentation once an integral part of the ritual sending off of brides is now a forgotten tradition, but an insightful study enables us to see how this oral tradition was also a site of construction and reproduction of gender identity and resistance. Traditionally, resistance is linked to political activity, conceived in terms of violence or aggressive oppositional gestures and institutional changes and thereby makes us overlook the ways in which women as human agents work to change the conditions of their lives wherever they operate. Though it will be an exaggeration to say that women's culture, women's oral traditions and folk songs, serve mainly as a medium of protest, yet expanded understanding of women's culture will certainly help us to discover how through multifarious ways women may resist or negate the authority of dominating practices and values.

Key words: Oral traditions, tuneful weeping, patriarchy, patrilocal, resistance

This paper makes an attempt to study the oral traditions of Western Odisha known as *kandana* or *bahuna* i.e., the bridal laments or ceremonial bridal departure songs of Western Odisha, which were once a significant part of the ritual sending-off of the bride, now a forgotten tradition, to examine how this fading tradition of woman's songs can be studied for the construction and reproduction of gender identity. It is worthwhile to mention here that in this fast-changing world of the twenty-first century, where live-in relationships, love marriages have become a reality, where most of the girls are highly educated and financially independent, where girls are no longer married off at a tender age, and distance is no longer a problem, thanks to the ever-growing communication systems, bridal crying has become a forgotten tradition. The bridal crying songs selected for discussion in this paper have been collected (by Dr. Rajendra Bhue) from the remote rural parts of western Odisha and the discussion is based on the available data.

Oral traditions provide a fascinating area of study for understanding of the social, cultural and religious beliefs of any given society. As McLaren opines, oral traditions are special forms of discourse and act as means of "transmission of knowledge systems, beliefs, and mythologies of the participants" (3). Noted anthropologist Ben-Amos is of the opinion that forms of oral tradition are not just analytical constructs, but are "distinct modes of communication" which exist in peoples' lore (xxxi). "Traditionally, knowledge, truth, and reality have been constructed as if men's experiences were normative, as if being human meant being male" (qtd. in Kousaleos 20). But with the rising feminist consciousness, women's experience and their expressions of this experience in all its various forms are being explored. Oral traditions of Indian women provide further an interesting area of study, contrary to the stereotypical presentation of woman as repressed, passive, "victims of male control and of an unchanging tradition, as unresisting objects in relation to a historical and uncontextualized images of the veiled woman, the obedient wife, and so forth" (Raheja and Gold 8). They represent women in a different perspective and "reflect upon the ways gender identities are constructed and negotiated in 'real life'" (Gold, *Outspoken Women* 104). Feminist folklorists in their quest to find out the reality of women's lives in various customs, cultures and contexts are, thus, engaged in exploring areas and genres which were previously ignored by their male counterparts and thereby, developing new theoretical perspectives and methods that extend the scope and applications of folklore studies.

World over there are many communities where woman related events like that of puberty, wedding and childbirth are celebrated as auspicious occasions. In many communities such rites of passages ceremonies are celebrated with song and dance where woman individually or collectively sing and perform. Even female tuneful weeping and lament traditions on occasions like bridal departure and death are prevalent among the people of different communities like that of the Araucanian women's laments in Chile, mourning songs by Irish women, tuneful weeping at bridal departure in China, ritual wailing by untouchable women in India, *bidai sangit* or bridal departure songs in North India, *kandana* and *bahuna* in Odisha and many more. These lamentations world over are mainly performed by women, though there are occasional exceptions as in the case of the ritual wailing of Shavante Indians in Brazil, which is performed by both men and women. In India, these ceremonial bridal departure songs script not only the sorrowful mood of women folk, but put up a "limited resistance' or at the very least "offer alternative understandings of key cultural values" (McLaren 2-3). Gloria G. Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold argue that women's songs are examples of "ironic and subversive commentaries" on patriarchal kinship roles and that the songs contain "alternative representations" of marriage and kinship (13-18). Margaret T. Egnor, while investigating into the women's oral traditions of Indian "crying songs" performed by low-caste women, discovers that they voice women's grievances and complaints. She even notes that crying songs project a grievance to a person of higher status than the performer and concludes that these songs "protest not only the personal suffering of the singer, but the rules of hierarchy themselves" (334). Laxmi G. Tiwary in his 1988 study mentions about "gloomy folk wedding songs" in Indian villages where marriage results in painful separation from the natal family and friends and living with strangers. The ceremonial bridal crying or lamentations convey the personal grievances of the bride (qtd. in Nasir and Fatimah 27). Fei-Wen Liu also records the same view in her research work as she analyses the lament tradition of women of Jiangyong County. She observes, "women as 'the weak of society' use 'the weapon of the weak' to empower themselves as individuals, to socialize themselves into groups, and to *de-silence* themselves" (1). Anthropologist Fred Blake too argues that the "bridal lament was a form of '*cathartic expression*' within a context that tolerated or even approved of this form of expression" (17). And what is to be noted is that the bride usually personalizes her experience through "specific references to events, places, and persons, and through the manipulation of formal elements and the musical, textual, and emotive domains" (Tolbert 186). For Elizabeth Johnson, women's songs and laments were "women's only legitimate means of vocal expression in public contexts" and that "laments offered a vehicle for individual self-expression through which a woman could make public her private grievances" (qtd. in Maclaren 11).

Marriage is a sacrosanct and one of the most significant social events for the Hindu family in India as it ensures continuation of the lineage. But every caste, every region has its local variations. Referring to Dumont (1970), Edward O. Henry remarks, "Much of Indian *social behaviour* can be explained with a "hierarchical principle" which is manifest only in the ranking of caste according to belief of purity and pollution, about their traditional occupation and ritual ranking of clans within the caste but also encompasses marriage and kinship as well" (Henry 61). The complex intersections of caste, class, religious and regional differences shape the experience of gender differently in any society. For example, within Indian society, upper caste women especially Brahmin, Kayastha and Kshatriya have been subject to much more rigidly defined and controlled norms in order to preserve the "traditions" and "purity" of their caste-status whereas lower caste women usually experience relatively fewer restrictions and enjoy more sexual autonomy. But it was during the colonial rule, when the state consolidated the dominant patriarchal ideology through laws regarding marriage, inheritance, and property, these lower caste women also began to feel the weight of these sanctions.

The institution of marriage in Hindu family as such is guided by certain traditions and customs. For example, marriage must be endogamous to the caste and exogamous to the clan, groom must be elder to the bride and the groom's family ideally should be wealthier, etc. In Western Odisha, too, similar social behaviour pattern can be seen. In case of higher castes marriages are strictly arranged by the elders of both the families, whereas in case of lower castes, in addition to arranged marriages, the practice of consensual marriage between an adult male and a female known as "*ghichakania,*" "*paesamudi,*" "*lamenmaeji,*" or "*udhliajiba*" is prevalent. Women of lower castes, thus, enjoy restricted freedom in selecting their life partners.

Traditional wedding ceremony involves a lot of activities and rituals like *kaniadekha (*selection of the bride), horoscope matching, engagement, turmeric ceremony, marriage and finally, bridal departure, though some practices may vary according to the values and traditions of each family and region. Significant part of the traditional marriage function takes place in the bride's place that culminates in *kanyadan* (gifting away the daughter) and then the *bidai* (ritual sending off of the bride to the groom's house) takes place. Marriages in Western Odisha, like most other places in India are patrilocal; after marriage the bride has to move to the marital home and assimilate into her conjugal home. This transition is seen as a rite of passage for the young woman as she prepares to transform herself from a daughter into a daughter-in-law. Raheja and Gold note that "the idiom of marriage as *kanyadan* (the gift of a virgin)," itself entails the notion of "complete dissimilation of the bride from her family of birth and her complete assimilation to that of her husband" (18). Veena Talwar Oldenburg notes, "Virilocality, this common feature of north Indian Hindu society, created for women and men vastly different destinies and vastly different experiences . . . isolating married women even further, robbing them of the company of siblings, friends, confidantes, and partisans" (187). Leaving behind comforts of the natal home, the bride would move into a strange place where she would encounter newrelations: father-in-law and mother-in-law (*sasur* and *saas*); husband's older brother and his wife (*jeth* and *jethani*); husband's younger brother (*debara*), and husband's sister and her husband (*nanand* and *nanandei*). The differences between woman's experiences within the two homes being drastic, this transition from the parental home to that of the husband's family is almost always believed tobe painful and frightening. The physical and psychological effects of this separation of being sent into a strange environment finds vocal expression in bride's tuneful weeping or laments.

The bride while crying expresses her agony, anxiety, apprehensions and displeasure in a rhythmical manner and in response her mother and women folk of her immediatefamily members, extended family members and friends too cry voicing their agony at the separation of their loving daughter. But this paper focuses only on the songs of the bride to discover how these songs can be expression not only of the whole gamut of emotions relating painful separation, but of resistance to the patriarchal culture of the society. Couched in the local language, these songs implicitly offer a powerful critique of patrilocal marriage. Anne McLaren has rightly observed, "The lament offers her a 'license' to speak freely denied her at other times and allows the bride to express her natural sorrow at leaving her natal home, to demonstrate filial piety to her parents, and to exhibit her vocal talents and wit. The mother has the opportunity to 'instruct' her daughter, using the coded language of the lament and in this way to carry out her motherly obligations" (102). Keeping in view the above theoretical postulations and observations, a number of such tuneful weeping or bridal lamentations of Western Odisha has been taken up for illustrations. In the following song, the bride is expressing her sorrow at being married off in a distant land where she has no known relatives. Further, being married into a family who are economically higher invokes a sense of fear, exclusion and isolation; how willshe be treated there? She sings:

Mountain's cliff, river's shadow
You married me off in a strange land
Cemented well are there in that strange land
How would I spend my days there, tell me!
Oh, my mother!
(*Parbatar mud, nadir chai*
Achinharaijedelubatai
Achinharaije pucca rachuan
Kenta chalmi kaha go maa.)

Reference to mountain cliffs and reflection of the river symbolically refers to distant and almost non-existent or impossible things and contains the emotions associated with woman's structural exclusion from her natal home, when the bride imagines what it will be like to live amongst complete strangers. She even apprehends that she might be ill-treated in her marital home as the groom's family is wealthier and having a cemented well. In the following song the bride expresses her agony, saddened at the imminent loss of family and friends:

You arranged my marriage at an early age
allured by the wealth of the groom
Should have been allowed to stay here
At natal home enjoying!
Playing with my childhood friends, Oh my mother!
(*Randha bat sune khidiki tati ma go*
thila ghara boli maila tati
au kete dina jaithaeta
hansi kheli mana paerchha heta ma go)

In a similar song, a bride expresses her agony and angst at being married off in a poor family:

You threw me into hell, the kingdom of Yama,
Oh, my mother!
I will have to bath in cold water
And eat thick rice-water
Deprivation will make my body cold!
(*Chatu fiki delu ma chatalaku, Maa go!*
Mate fikidelu Jama puraku, Maago!
Jamapurapanihebakakara Maa go!
Mada khai heba diha kakara, Maa go!)

In the following song too, the bride is bemoaning at the poor status of the groom:

He has only one room without a courtyard,
Oh, my mother! No veranda,
where would I make my father and brother sit,
when they visit me
You carried me ten months in your womb, Oh my mother!
But threw me out of home at the tender age of sixteen, Oh my mother!
(*Sonpurar hatara gudakhu daba maa go*
duara nai tar bakhare dhaba
dhaba banechhe duara nai ma go
bapa vai gale basibe kahi
garia upure rupa gilasa ma go
garave dharilu dasata masa
sula barase kalu nirasa ma go)

Early marriage was in vogue in Western Odisha. In another song addressed to her father, a bride expresses her anguish at being married off so early, that too in a distant place and in a poor family:

Oh, my father!
I used to clean your plates every day, Oh my father!
Who will do the chores henceforth,
The used utensils from the morning
will remain unattended till the evening
And then only you'll be reminded of me
I was your loving daughter oh my father!
No doubt mother lovesher son the most
But on whose advice, you marriedme off

In a distance place
I will have to live in that unknown place (Sambalpur)
I don't even know how to manage. Oh, my father!
Please don't ever forget me
And visit me at your leisure
Couldn't keep me one more year?
Should have kept me two years more, oh my father!
And arranged my marriage in a grand way.
(*Sonpurar saharar rukha baitha bapago*
Niti puchhuthili bapa aintha ba go
Sakalar khuri padi raheba ba go
Bel budle ba guna gaeba ba go
Mui thili tumar gelhei jhia
Maar gelha ta tahari puo
Kar katha mani dauchha dure ba go
Mui ta rahemi samalapure
Ajana nagare rahemi jai ba go
Chali jani nahi chali ba pai
Manaru tumara vuli ni jiba
Bela hele jai dekhi asiba ba go
Sikare rakhili sikara fute
Rakhi na parila barasa gute bago
Au dui barasa rakhi thaeta
Teka pane jhia deithae ta ba go)

The girl addresses her relatives in turn and expresses similar emotions through tuneful weeping. As can be seen there is simplicity of structure and rhythm in these songs and the bride pours out her anguished feelings of separation and deprivation through these songs. A common sequence of relatives would often be: father and mother; grandfather and grandmother (*dada* and *nani*); father's elder brother and his wife (*badabapa* and *bada maa*); father's younger brother and his wife (*kaka* and *kaki*); father's sister and her husband (*nana/jhia* and *piusa*); mother's brother and his wife (*mamu* and *main*); brother and sister-in-law (*dada* and *bahu*) and so on. The repetition of the songs in the same rhythmic manner but names of the different relatives filling the same structural slots within the song is referred to as a "progressive chain repetition" (Abrahams and Foss 73). A few such songs have been analyzed for the sake of illustrations. In the following song she addresses her grandfather and grandmother:

I am going to a distant place, Oh my grandfather!
Please visit me!
Keep me in your memory, Oh my grandmother!
Forget my mistakes and forgive me
There I will be scolded for whatever I do
If I smile, they would say she laughs like a crazy
If I cry, they would laugh at me
If I stand, they would ridicule me and liken me to a pillar
If I sleep, they would liken me to a *dhenki* (traditional wooden pounding mechanism)
(*jauchhe mui ta duria desa aja go*
buli jauthiba mohari desa aja go
pasri ne dabu manu tohari aai go
vuli jibu dosa sabu mohair aai go.
Hansle kahebe danta dekhauchhe
Kandle kahebe nake kandhuchhe
Thia hele kahebe khuma te bali

Suile kahebe dhenki padichhe bali)

In the following song she addresses her paternal uncle and laments:
Oh, my uncle! Sending me off to a distant place!
Had I been your own daughter
would you not have felt pangs of separation?
A mere girl child for you, your brother's daughter!
How can you be so indifferent!
Hurriedly sending me off, Oh my uncle!
(*Dhenki sala bata duara bata kaka go*
Tor jhia hele to te chinta
Chhara tiri nari dada ra jhia kaka go
Dhu dhu bali pari batei dia)

Gloria Goodwin Raheja says, "crying when she's born, and crying when she goes away" (19). As a daughter she enjoys considerable freedom and love in her parental home, but she is unsure, rather apprehensive of her position in a strange environment. She imagines that there would be hell and heaven difference between her natal home and marital home. Such concerns are reflected in the following song addressed to her mother, maternal uncle, aunt and elder sister serially:

From today your daughter is dead for this family, Oh my mother!
Her palms will be stained cleaning
thickly blackened cooking-pots
Oh uncle, you neither gift me the granite slab to grind sandalwood
Nor the umbrella you promised
Oh aunt, you too forgot your darling niece
Oh brother, my in-laws are sure to criticize me for eating much
Even if I eat from a small bowl, they will accuse me of eating too much
Oh sister, even if I would be right, they would find fault with me
(*Handi majigalepadame kala maa go*
Ajitharu tor jhia mala maa go
Chandan pidhiaruchata demi kahithilu kaka go
Galheijhiarikepasaridelu, khudi go
Khuri re khailehandirekhailubalibe dada go
Bate jauthileubate gala balibenani go)

She addresses her sisters-in-law and pours out her agonized feelings, she even imagines that her kith and kin would miss her:

Oh, my sisters-in-law!
I was quarrelsome but
Off now I am to my in-laws
And would no more be there to quarrel with you
Both of you would live happily.
(*Tati kane achhe ghia karhei bahu go*
Mui thili tumar gali jujhei
Gali jujha katha gala ethara bahu go
Derani jethani chala ethara bahu go)

The bride also addresses her elder sister and brother-in-law and sings:

Oh, my brother-in-law!
You chose a wrong candidate
As my groom, your brother-in-law

I will be spending my days weeping,
recalling the sweet memories of the past, Oh my sister.
(*Tentuli patara tini kania venei go*
sadhu kari achha hinimania venei go
sabukatha vabi kandimi kete nani go
sanga sathi mane padibe kete nani go!)

The bridal crying songs voice not only the emotive issues of women's sense of displacement at being severed from their natal homes, they also regularly include bride's apprehensions about her treatment in her in-law's house and anxieties about being deprived of certain rights. Prior to 2005, she had no right over parental property but as if to compensate the loss she was given dowry. According to the customs she is given clothes, jewellery and household goods as dowry. Asifa Nasir and Aqeelam Fatimah rightly observe:

> Dowry may be a primary means of calculating *izzat (*prestige) where one can define and represent their position as `big' or small'. Besides giving dowry to their daughter, her parents also give many gifts in the form of clothes and jewellery to the groom relatives. The asymmetrical flow of gifts shows the lower social status of bride (girl) family and support patriarchy within the community. (Nasir and Fatimah 31)

It wouldn't be out of the context to mention that though 2005 Amendment to the existing Hindu Succession Act grants agirl child certain legal right overher parental property, the Hindu ideology of becoming an ideal sister and an ideal daughter prevents her to claim any share in the immovable paternal property but she expects proper bridal-gifts from them which will ensure her dignity in her conjugal home. She is well aware that her status at inlaw's house would be proportional to the dowry she brings. Similar observations are made by Smita Tiwary Jassal, "A key finding of recent research on this subject is that even among castes and classes where there is immovable property to be shared and where daughters' legal entitlements to equal shares in that property are clear, women are uniformly reluctant to claim their shares for fear of antagonizing their brothers" (153). Ursula Sharma also mentions, ".... that a sister who claimed her share of the land would seem greedy and might risk forfeiting her brother's goodwill" (351). Sharma further notes, "Many of the songs refer peripherally to her share of the natal home, in practice brides have little control over the way in which dowry is given and received" (342). So ritual bridal gifts at the time of marriage as well as on many other special occasions carry a lot of significance in a woman's life. In the following bridal song, the bride expresses her displeasure over the bridal gift she is given by her brother. She sings:

Oh, my brother!
You gave me only the *fasia* (an ornament for ear)
but not the stopper.
Should have given more gold
To make your sister happy, oh my brother!
The middle room of our house situated in the middle
Used to resonate with my voice
But hereafter silence will reign, oh my brother!
I am going to my father-in –law who will call you brother
(*Tel theki thin dua naina dada go*
Fasia dela ruanaina
Au dui masa lagaithata
Buhenatumarahetausata dada go
Majhirighararamajhikuthuri
Mor daka haka padeuthhuli dada go
Mor daka haka padiahela
Jama dakahakabadhiahela dada go.)

Leela Dube argues that the "contrasting fortunes of daughters and sons is a common theme in the wailings at the sendoff of a bride from her natal home and also in subsequent visits and departures of a married daughter" (93). Strikingly simple and straight forward these songs are, yet they provide legitimate space to the otherwise mute girl to question the structural inequalities. But as Smita Tiwary Jassal rightly observes, "These daughters are not interested in seriously challenging or unsettling the patriarchal order as much as asserting their awareness of its inherent injustices" (127). But nonetheless women articulate their deep-seated feelingsof exclusionfrom parental care and comfort and even the property in bridal lamentations**.** Further, in Hindu marriage ceremony maternal uncle plays very significant roles and is expected to bring bridal gifts. The following song shows the bride articulating her angst at the improper bridal gift brought by her maternal uncle:

Bargarh town is too far, oh my uncle!
Had I been your own niece!
You should havegiven me a gold earring!
Oh uncle, greedy as you are!
The task of bringing the ritual bridal gifts
Must have bothered you
since last so many days!
(*Bargada sahara bahuta dura mamu go*
Pithira vaniji nuhe tohara
Pithira vaniji hai thaeti mamu go
Kane kanafula pindhae thita
Thalire khaili ama anchara mamu go
Mamu main mora nathila ghara
Kahun paeba maula vara mamu go
Vaniji ku vara padiba bali
Atha dina hela rahili vali mamu go)

These songs basically present the bride's point of view about her displacement, lack of inheritance but there are also songs where the girl resents the look and fortune ofher prospective groom. In some songs she bewails at being married off without her active consent. In the following song a bride expresses her displeasure at the groom and the demands he has made:

The groom with long curly hair looks like a *hipi,* oh my sister-in law!
Still, he is demanding watch and bicycle
He doesn't even deserve it.
How would my father arrange?
A poor agricultural labour he is!
Oh, my sister-in-law!
(*Kunchikunchi bale hipidharichhe bahu go*
Ghadisaekalnuribasuchhe bahu go
Ghadi sine sajeghadialoka
Baa kahupaebahalialukabahugo.)

These bridal lamentations, thus, provide space to the girl to express many of her suppressed emotions, anxieties and displeasure which she couldn't voice otherwise under normal circumstances.

To conclude, it can be said that the study of the tradition of ritual/ceremonial bridal departure songs make us realize that we need to broaden our awareness of the multiple sites within which women express their sense of social reality. It also provides us an insight into the psychological conflicts inherent in the life of a girl child during the transition from one stage to another; transitions inher status from being a loving daughter at maternal home to being a married one and entering into new familial context. These transitions involve much more than the psychological readjustments, they involve social and economic and even political realignments.

Most of these songs present warm and affectionate images of the parental home and of relationships with other relatives, implying the absence of these features within the marital home. As Sangeeta Tyagi finds, "The image of a 'strange land' where the woman will find herself alone, surrounded by new relationships that are fundamentally different from and more conflictual than the ones she is leaving behind, is an extremely common one in most women's songs" (188). Some of these songs also present a counter narrative to the prevailing images of women as voiceless creatures whose ownership may be transferred from father to husband without her active consent. Many of these songs criticize the dominant ideologies of the patriarchal society, make direct/indirect references to the gender discrimination, question the differences between the inheritances of sons and daughters. In some of the lamentations the bride bemoans the lack of any independent financial base which may result in dependence on parents and brother for economic help in times of need and support in instances of widowhood, divorce, or abandonment.

Traditionally, we link resistance to political acts, conceive it in terms of violence or aggressive oppositional gestures and institutional changes and thereby overlook the ways in which women as human agents work to change the conditions of their lives wherever they operate. Though it will be an exaggeration to say that women's culture, oral traditions serve mainly as a medium of protest, yet expanded understanding of women's folk songs will certainly help us to discover how though multifarious ways women may resist or negate the authority of dominating practices and values.

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Indian English Writing: Shifting Paradigms

Chittaranjan Misra

Abstract: Indian English Writing has traversed past the long anti-colonial struggle of the last century. To understand its reconfigured paradigm, one needs to analyse the historical process of cultural changes. Indian English poets no longer follow the idolatry mould centred on nationalism or regionalism but write about cultural specificities. The genre of Indian English Novel has become more visible and celebrated compared to poetry. The global reception of Indian fiction especially popular fiction is indicative of the shifting paradigms of Indian Writing in English.

Key words: Indian English Writing, Representation, Identity, Cultural Nationalism, Nation

In V.S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* there is a story entitled "King Cophetua and the Beggar-maid" written as a boy's (Wiliie Chandran) class assignment. The story is modified and retold in way of adding to what happened after the King married the poor woman:

> But his queen's happiness didn't last. No one treated her like a real queen; everyone knew she was a beggar. She lost touch with her family. Sometimes they appeared outside the palace gates and called for her, but she was not allowed to go to them. She began to be openly insulted by the king's family and by people in the court. Cophetua seemed not to notice, and his queen was too ashamed to tell him. In time Cophetua and his queen had a son. There were many more insults in the court after that, and curses from the queen's beggar relations. The son, growing up, suffered for his mother's sake. He made a vow to get even with all of them all, and when he became a man, he carried out his vow: he killed Cophetua. Everybody was happy, the people in court, the beggars at the palace gates. (Naipaul 42-43)

The English knowing Indian of the early colonial encounter was like the son of the king who wanted to get even with a complex situation. Neither could he disown his past nor was he fully accepted by the English world. It is a struggle of the colonised between disowning and recovering his native identity. For Amit Chaudhuri this struggle for Indianness is "a paradigm around which a substantial part of 'modern' Indian literature and culture was constructed" (40). He refers to the case of Michael Madhusudan Dutt as emblematic of conflicts of disowning and recovery. Dutt's first act of disowning is his conversion to Christianity. Chaudhuri writes:

> Whether he converted in reaction to the Hinduism he, like many of his generation, had come to feel impatient with, or in his desire to become more completely 'English' (and further his career as an 'English' poet), or in defiance to his father, is not known. At any rate, he hardly seems to have led a conventional 'Christian' life. If Dutt disowned his father and his religion, his father in turn, disowned him, quite literally. The Oedipal conflict between father and son may not necessarily be the most productive way of looking at Indian culture, but he would certainly seem to play a part in shaping Dutt's life; it would appear modernity entered Bengali culture and poetry, via Dutt, not by slaying of the colonizer, but of the father. (Chaudhuri 40-41)

But later he turned to his mother tongue and wrote his epic poem *Meghanandbadha kavya* which can be seen as a process of recovery.

This kind of conflicting tendency is generated by colonial experience. In *After Amnesia*, G.N. Devy analyses, "One obvious tendency is to imitate the colonizers and to win their approval. But it may also give rise to nationalist feelings and create the tendency to resist the colonial influence" (4).

Devy has described this exploitative relationship by referring to Kalidasa's play *Abhijnanasakuntalam* introduced to the West through English translation of Sir William Jones in 1789:

> King Dusyanta, the hero of the play, meets Sakuntala while he is on a hunting expedition (*mrigaya*), and marries her secretly. This could be read as an archetypal representation of modern colonization, since it centres round an exploitative relationship. He returns to his kingdom, promising to send for her later – a promise he does not keep. When Sakuntala arrives in his court, on her own initiative, he fails to recognise her; and she fails to prove her identity, having lost the signet ring given to her by Dusyanta. Thus, Sakuntala is neither accepted by her husband, nor can she go back to her (foster) father. She has lost the sign of her identity (the ring), the cultural context that gave her significance (her father's hermitage), and the possibility of any relationship. (Kalidasa 27)

For Devy, this is an effective metaphor to describe the complexity of India's self-deception. But this stereotyped image of India has undergone radical transformation as Indian English Writing has traversed past the long anti-colonial struggle of the last century. To understand its reconfigured paradigm, one needs to analyse the historical process of cultural changes – from Macaulay's Minutes to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981. The publication of Rushdie has been treated as a triumphant moment for Indian English. From false representation of India by the white to postcolonial self-assertion by Indian writer in English spans over the dynamic process through which colonisation has been metamorphosed into globalisation. The fact that "Indian Writing in English" has gained control over representation and has freed itself from Eurocentrism (that wrote him) is crucial to understand its development.

Indian Writing in English has become a category and discipline thus restoring self-respect to the subjugated identity of the colonised Indian. Through articulating nationalist ideas and resisting colonialism, the Indian writer has been able to master the language of the masters of the past. Frantz Fanon, whose works have become influential in the fields of post-colonial studies, critical theory and Marxism, believes that the mastery of language (of the white/colonizer) for the sake of recognition *as white* reflects a dependency that subordinates the black's humanity.

The emulating phase of Indians, the mimicking of literary devices by poets and writers were succeeded by the next phase which is a discovery of the fact that the native can never become truly white. Fanon's ideas about the three phases through which cultural nationalism is framed is relevant to Indian situation too. Pramod K. Nayar sums this up briefly:

> A national culture is framed in three stages. In the first the native intellectual is under the influence of the colonizer's culture, and seeks to emulate and assimilate it by abandoning his own. The native thus tries to be as white as possible. In the second stage the native discovers that he can never become truly white or white enough for the colonial master to treat him as an equal. The native intellectual now returns to study his own culture and might even romanticize his traditions and past. Here Fanon suggests that there is no critical engagement with native cultures, just a celebratory tone. In the third stage, the native intellectual is truly anti-colonial. He joins the ranks of his people and battles colonial domination. This is accompanied by a careful analysis of his own culture. Such an analysis hopes to abandon those elements of native culture that seem dated or even oppressive so that a new future (after colonialism) is made possible. (Nayar 158)

In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon psychoanalyzes how the black's use of a colonizer's language is seen by the colonizer as predatory, and not transformative. But in

India the language of the colonizer was introduced for specific purposes specified by Macaulay. The introduction of English discipline was a project of rejecting native literary traditions in Sanskrit and installing English texts in their place to create a class of Indians who would be trained to serve the colonial administration. But the colonial administration had not anticipated that the colonial discourse meant to control and dominate would provide the people with the means of resistance.

In the making of a cultural nationalism the Indian intellectual has evolved through three stages. But the emergence of English as a global language and his dependence on World Wide Web have affected rapid sweeps in the selection of themes and modes of production of literature. Nationalist writings are no more at the centre stage. Post nationalist ideas are touted in the name of human rights, freedom and justice. Indian poetry in English is struggling with “derivative discourse” seeking recompense for cultural amnesia, while Indian novel in English is seeking international visibility through warring political affiliations and media manipulation.

English Poetry in India has come a long way through its transformations in matters of themes and style since the liberation of the country. While writing poetry or fiction in English today, writers harbour minimal guilt about choosing English as the medium. The case was not so for the Indian poet during the early phase of Indian English Poetry (IEP). Choosing a language other than one’s own for creative pursuit was viewed as symptomatic of subservience to the colonial past or as a matter of expedience. The inadequacy of a foreign tongue in articulating and expressing subtle nuances of native Indian culture was also a ground for looking at English language poetry with suspicion.

Indian poetry in English that has its genesis in the 19th century and dates back to Henry Derozio has matured through the warring forces of Indianization of English and Anglicisation of Indians to use English. The first half of the twentieth century has witnessed poetry of nationalist fervour through the writings of Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu. But the era of post-nationalist poetry started in mid-twentieth century with leading poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, P. Lal, Adil Jussawalla, A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel, Arvind Krishna Meherotra, Pritish Nandy, Keki N. Daruwalla, Shiv K. Kumar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar, Kamala Das, deemed as the forerunners of new poetry in the country. The *Harper Collins Book of English Poetry* edited by Sudip Sen is an important literary marker of contemporary poets born after 1950.The poets included in the anthology live in India and the broader Indian diasporas such as the United States and Canada, United Kingdom and Europe, Africa and Asia, Australia, and the Pacific. The editor himself, an English-language poet and a new generation voice, writes in the Foreword, “This diversity and multicultural representation allow the poets to have an internal dialogue between themselves and the varied topographical cultural spaces they come from or are influenced by. Therefore, the poems create an inherent syntactical and historical tension – one that ultimately celebrates the written word, imagination, artistry, intellect, and humanity” (Sen 23).

Indian English Poetry has come of age and its readership has crossed the boundaries of borders and become global. The genre too has been enriched by the creative output of the Indian diaspora.

In the early stage the poets could not free themselves from the import of English as a language of colonial masters. The colonial connotations associated with the language are history to the new generation who use it naturally as a medium of communication both at the local and the global levels. English has become a gateway to global avenues. The English language poet of India writing today is engaged in fusing aesthetics with political perspectives.

While talking about Indian English, fiction critics try to look at the tropes of representation and resistance and produce discourses on “India Writing Back” or “India Writing Anew.” But in case of poetry such examinations are bound to be unsettled because the very form of poetry generates multiple and ambivalent meanings as open-ended texts. From a historical perspective Indian English Poetry can be viewed as an on-going juxtaposition of conflicting ideas related to "cultural diversity" of the country and "cultural difference" as a globally accepted marker of identity.

According to Jayanta Mahapatra, there is not one India. There are many different India(s) – Odisha is one India. Bengal is another. Maharashtra, Kerala, Kashmir – all these are different India(s). For him, it is easier to relate yourself to a particular region than to talk about the whole of India as a construct.

The sense of location that the Indian English poets construct are not in consonance with idolatry centred on nationalism or regionalism based on bigotry. It is about cultural specificity refracted through poets' sensibility and power of fashioning imagery. But the novel is more visible and celebrated compared to poetry. Since the globalised world is marked by "privileging the narrative and discursive over poetic" and the notion of "nation as a form of narrative" has become popular, "novel" has gained ground as the dominant literary genre. Poetry as an index of "high culture" has been replaced by "novel" that takes popular culture seriously. The global reception of Indian fiction, especially popular fiction of writers like Upamanyu Chatterji, Anurag Mathur and Chetan Bhagat, is indicative of the shifting paradigms of Indian Writing in English.

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The Role of Voices in Diane Glancy's *Pushing the Bear*

Mousumi Patra

Abstract: The novel *Pushing the Bear* (1996) by Diane Glancy depicts the Trail of Tears in the United States through a plethora of voices. These voices give an insight into the horrific Trail that is one of the darkest chapters in the history of mankind. The voice of the people, who were forced to take this challenging path, is one of the most dominant aspects of the novel. The forcible participation of the people in the Trail and the eventual consequences that they faced can be expressed only in their own words. In the representation of their displacement from their homeland, the novelist has not depicted the Native Indians as a weak and muted class to draw the sympathetic and empathetic attention of the readers. Rather, despite confronting countless challenges during the expedition, they do not lose their identity and faith in future possibilities. They are torn into pieces, but their voice is not lost even inside their graves. Even the dead people have a voice that gives an emphatic message to mankind.

Key words: Trail of Tears, Cherokee Indians, Voices, Sense of Loss, Rootlessness.

Diane Glancy has represented the Cherokee people in the context of the Trail of Tears in the United States in her renowned historical novel *Pushing the Bear* (1996). The unjust and inhuman eviction of the Cherokee folks from their native land is an agonizing, man-made calamity which has been narrated by a good number of writers in fictional and non-fictional works. The novel *Pushing the Bear* does not simply fabricate the Trail of Tears, but also captures those intricacies which make the tragic episode look more real than the reality. It does not look like a concocted world, but a dystopian world with a few alterations. The novelist has let the Cherokee people narrate the authentic story of the traumatic journey in their own language. The words are infused with powerful emotions and speak of the irreparable damage caused to one class by another. There is no exaggeration and dramatization in the depiction of the pain and horror. Each voice is unique and distinguishable from the other and has a definite role to play in the novel. The novel, thus, gives the impression of a truthful account of the ignominious episode. The events and experiences shared by the people open the multiple aspects of the dreadful expedition. People are not only affected at the personal levels, but also collectively. The whole class bears the brunt of the historical decision not only during the ordeal, but for many more years thereafter.

The Cherokee voices weave the story together and describe how the terror and tribulations get intensified with each faltering step taken towards the destination. There are characters from different backgrounds with different sets of perspectives. Their ways of analyzing the harrowing situation are different. The missionaries and soldiers have also definite roles to play in giving information about the trail. The losses are far beyond what the official records mention, but attempts have been made in the novel to include maps and other historical documents to draw an accurate picture of the progress of the people and their whereabouts during the different phases of the trail. Map is a symbol of existence referred through landscapes, regions, locations, and territories. "Writers incorporate maps into their work as illustrations or metaphors, by turns embracing and troubling the territorial imperatives that maps represent" (Krotz 133). The contours of not just identities and communities but also geographical spaces and locations have been charted and re-charted by Canadian authors as they have long navigated the shared and disputed spaces of the map (Krotz 134). Through this geo-critical approach, the places are made explicit and thus it implies the interconnection of people with their place. Maps and literature have a curious, tangled relationship. The real and the imaginary merge together at the intersection of geography and literature. In order to explore the relationship between space, place, and literary culture to which they draw our attention, the landscapes, both imagined and actual, are documented in detail. They effectively convey the mutually constitutive character of literature and locations, among other things (Krotz 140).

In his historical work *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* (1988), John Ehle has discussed the titbits of the treatise and the horrific details of the trail. He has described how the Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorizes the President to negotiate the treaties of removal with the Native Americans or the Indian tribes living in the eastern parts of the Mississippi river. The motive behind the act is to remove the natives inhabiting the existing lands and territories and to drive them towards the barren and unsettled areas situated in the west. Initially, there is a call for a peaceful displacement in a humane way, but it turns out to be one of the most horrifying evacuations which still has the aftershocks and ramifications. The Indian Removal Act does not leave the people with any choice but to follow the protocols and embrace the tragic consequences. Four thousand Indians, including men, women, and children, came together in bad weather – the biggest gathering in Cherokee history – on foot, in wagons, and on horses (Ehle 281). The Cherokee natives had to struggle from September 1838 till February 1839 to reach the destination. It seems to be a never-ending expedition that neither allows the Native Americans to live a normal life nor does it let them die in peace. They have lost many of their family members and other near and dear ones during the disastrous trail. Thousands of Cherokee people of all age groups perish due to diseases, starvation, and severe weather conditions. Children have lost their parents and grand-parents and have turned into orphans. Many people have lost their parents and children. The terrible life-threatening challenges keep eliminating one life after another. Those who survive have gone through horrendous hardships and challenges. The official figures of deaths are misleading or rather "… a mystery, enhanced and complicated by decades" (Ehle 390). Ehle has mentioned it all:

> Four to five thousand Cherokees had traveled west earlier on their own. Some had gone by riverboat, others by land, and there had been suffering, fatigue and illness and even death. Over the years, the roads to the West had been made and worn by many feet, white, red, and black, booted, moccasined, and bare; the roads were burial grounds, particularly preying on the weak, the very old, the infants. (322)

All these historical details and mishaps form the background of the novel *Pushing the Bear.* The novelist's adherence to historical accuracy in the depiction of the Trail of Tears has played an immense role in making the novel an authentic piece of documentation. The pain of depriving such a vast group of people of their land and their root is unimaginable and the novelist has made great attempts to recreate it from the point of view of the victimized. Not only the Native Americans, but also the African American slaves have been a part of the trail. The awful condition of the African American slaves during the hazardous journey is indescribable (Ehle 360). In the novel *Abraham's Well* (2006) by Sharon Foster, the trail has been beheld through the lens of a slave girl Armentia. She does not have a choice, but to walk the trail with the Cherokee family which owns her. She must bear the indignities both as a slave and as part of the trail. *Pushing the Bear* also mentions about this aspect, but it focusses more on the state of the Cherokee people.

The novel chronologically records the progress of the trail in each month and the significant changes taking place in the day-to-day life of the people in different camps. With each passing day, the rate of the collapses at the physical as well as psychological levels keeps increasing. It seems to be an endless nightmarish journey which leads only to utter dismay and disappointment. Each voice contributes its part in narrating the boundless pain and the chilling genocide. There is not a single character in the novel whose role or whose voice can be termed as insignificant or irrelevant. The novelist could have employed a single voice for the narration, but it would not have been authentic enough to represent such a vast group of people (Andrews 645-658). The pangs are multiple, so are the voices. Moreover, the trail was covered by people from different backgrounds with different abilities and mindsets. In this regard, a single character could not have been the mouthpiece of a vast group of people. Each member of the tribe has a different story to tell and a different experience to share. The novelist has, thus, chosen the extended family of Maritole to include as many voices as possible. But there are other characters too who have minor roles to play, but their voices can be heard distinctly and loudly. There is the same force of intensity in those words – both spoken and unspoken.

Another historical novel which portrays the catastrophe and fortitude of Cherokee folks is *Mountain Windsong* (1992), authored by Robert J. Conley. In this novel, the background of the trail is narrated by a grand-father who wants to transmit a message to the next generation through his young grand-child so that the hardships and sacrifices made by the ancestors will not fade into oblivion and get obliterated. When the child wants to know why the people are brutally forced to leave their ancestral land and assets, his grand-father enumerates in a way that seems to be the voice of every Cherokee man. There is no sign of bitterness or hostility in the narrative. The powerful sentiments have found their way through the words:

> They thought a white man was better than an Indian. They thought we were savages. I am not too sure what that word means, that savage, but I guess it just means that we did not live the same way they did. They said savages steal and kill people. But they stole from us and they killed our people. So, I don't really know what they meant by that. But they said that Indians were savages and they did not want savage neighbors. But mostly, I think they just wanted all our land. I think that is why they wanted to kick us out. (Conley 10-11)

Diane Glancy follows the tradition of seeking the permission of the land and the ancestors before writing their story. There are eight chapters in the novel in total and each chapter is the name of the place where the people have halted or crossed. It starts with the chapter "North Carolina," the place from where the deportation sets forth and ends with the chapter "Indian Territory," the place where they finally have landed up. The first chapter gives glimpses of the intrusion of the white settlers with their soldiers into the Indian territory. Ehle observed that the Cherokee people had a dignity that transcended their meagre resources and even referred to themselves as the primary people: "They identify as 'copper' in hue and take pride in it; they used to call Europeans 'ugly Whites'. The centre of the earth was located in Cherokee territory. Everything else sprang from there" (Glancy 1-2).

But with the arrival of the European settlers, the course of history changes for the Native Americans. They start their task of banishing the natives from their own land even before they realize what really is happening to them. They do not get time to think or to embrace their land for the last time. They leave their unfinished work as it is and are allowed to carry only bare necessary belongings.

The second chapter "The Stockade" describes a place that is situated near the Rattlesnake Springs. It is a resting area for the Cherokee people, that smells like "urine and fear" (Glancy 31). The graves near that area tell the untold story of the other natives who have come to that place before them and have failed to survive due to adverse health conditions like fever and dysentery. The historical works authenticate these tragic cases. The work *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* has confirmed the same: "Diarrhoea and dysentery were gut-twisting in the camps" (Ehle 340). Both people and animals have succumbed to death. The characters share the experiences of their stay in the most unhygienic places.

The third chapter "Tennesse" is packed with heart-wrenching scenes that depict the plight of the shivering, underfed people. Maritole can sense the danger: "We are marching west toward darkness, toward death" (Glancy 57). Their life is in jeopardy and there is no way to escape. The strong sentiments uttered by the characters convey a sense of fear and helplessness. But there are still signs of hope in the prayers. Luthy feels the presence of her parents, the sources of her strength. The death of her mother has shattered her, but the strong faith in ancient practices has not completely vanished in the presence of horrifying trials and tribulations. Prayers are still chanted with a hope to heal sick people and to make things right (Glancy 62).

The fourth chapter "Kentucky" starts with a description of the hazardous journey in snow. There is a mention of the voice of the ancestors: "The cold is here as a helper; The snow is here as a helper… Ask it for help" (Glancy 123). They feel the presence of their forefathers. They are guided and protected by them. There is a strong feeling that they will see the "new land". In the face of distress, they can see the rays of hope. But they are not assured of happiness in the unseen, unknown land (Glancy 210). For them, the present seems to be dreadful and nightmarish. A White Traveler recounts how the local inhabitants bury fourteen or fifteen of the Indians at every stopping mile. The harsh weather conditions do not allow them to walk more than ten miles per day on an average. Maritole expresses her fear of the open places they are crossing during the trail because they are not familiar with such strange, flat lands with hills shaved off (Glancy 127). They belong to North Carolina where they are always surrounded by hills, trees, and mountains. That is left far behind and there is no hope of going back: "Everything was gone. Even the voice to catch birds" (Glancy 135). Knobowtee can sense this loss at every stage of the journey. He blames the government, but soon realizes that their own fellow tribesmen are also responsible as they are part of the scheme: "I must have spoken out loud as I crossed the river, because I heard my own voice. They rob us" (Glancy 143). But he does not allow his anger to overpower his "ability to take revenge": "My anger at the soldiers gave me strength" (Glancy 142). Knobowtee, Maritole and other Indians can survive because they have not lost control of the balance of mind despite all sorts of gut-wrenching circumstances which can break even the toughest of the tough. The legends and folk tales of faith and hope fuel their energy and keep them going (Ehle 144). They convert their weakness into strength.

The fifth chapter "Illionis" describes the arduous trail through the "steep hills and frozen cypress swamps". Knobowtee relates, "We kept thinking the trail would get easier but it only got harder" (Glancy 146). There is the fear of dying before touching the Indian Territory. Life is uncertain and they feel this at every step taken towards the Indian Territory, the west "where the sun disappeared" or "the black space" (Glancy 158). The giant Mississippi river with floating chunks of ice on it is a life-threatening experience for the people who are asked to cross it to enter Missouri.

Not only the climate and surroundings are dreadful, the journey of marital life is getting devastated for Knobowtee and Maritole. Maritole admits, "There's a split in our thinking" (Glancy 149). The "nothingness," the "hollowness" felt within, remind them of the things they have left far behind. Everyone is fighting at different levels. Some people are losing life due to external factors and some are losing themselves due to the indifference of their near ones.

The sixth chapter "Missouri" begins with the celebration of the new year by lighting the campfire. Maritole is mourning the death of her mother and her only child. Ehle has given shocking and disturbing details regarding the condition of infants and nursing mother. He has stated it in his work: "Many of the deaths were of infants whose nursing mothers were ill with intestinal diseases. The sick infants bawled until too weak to cry. One mother carried the corpse of her infant for two days, keeping it company" (Ehle 390). There cannot be anything more devastating than this! The only thought that comforts Maritole is that her child is not alone in the "afterworld" but is accompanied by her grandmother. When she is reminded of the loss of her place, she reacts, "I would always be cut in two. Part of me in North Carolina. Part of me in the new land" (Glancy 167). She loses the warm presence of

Sergeant Williams, one of the soldiers with whom she gets attached emotionally. There is a series of losses which she has forgotten to keep track of. The voices of all kinds are part of the trail: “There was a voice somewhere. With all the voices in the trail. Ancestors, Conjurers, People. Even the voices of the animals and the land” (Glancy 186).

The seventh chapter “Arkansas” is all about contrasts between the past and the present. Eventually, Maritole loses her father, the only source of strength and the only hope of her life, but there is no time to mourn. Human life has no value in the trail. The bitterness is quite justifiable: “We’re like the animals in the sky pushed off to find a new place” (Glancy 212). Maritole asks Tanner, “why do we survive when others die?” (Glancy 214). The ironical question is not only meant for Tanner, but also for those who have allowed the inhumanity to take place. There are such countless questions which do not have any answer. The novelist has not interfered with the voice of people by imposing her own voice. She has left scope for the people to speak for themselves and therefore the message to mankind is so impactful.

The last chapter has been named as “Indian Territory”. Fort Gibson (Oklahoma) is the destination which is called the Indian Territory. Knobowtee declares, “We were the last and largest group of Cherokee to be removed from the southeast into the new land. We’d make away into it with our voices” (Glancy 227). Luthy is confident that the new-born who arrives just before reaching the new territory will not feel the pain of losing the native place in North Carolina, which is a blessing. Everyone has a unique perspective on the new dominion.

Though both the novels *Mountain Windsong* and *Pushing the Bear* are tremendously charged with intense emotions, the narrators are not swayed away by their subjective thoughts. They have maintained an aesthetic distance in their respective works. The novels provide enough historical contexts that interspersed with the narratives which take the fictional works to another level. In *Mountain Windsong,* Conley has incorporated a third point of view which sounds to be often detached, ironical and adversarial at the same time. There are layers of contradictory elements which suggest that there can be different ways of interpreting the trail, its preceding events and consequences. Though there are several voices in *Pushing the Bear,* Maritole is the most widely heard among all. She plays the role of a daughter, sister, wife, mother, aunt, and neighbour all in one. She has been struggling for a sustainable conjugal life with her husband Knobowtee. But her efforts are going in vain. She has been striving for the unity of the family and her people, but her own life has a void inside and it is falling apart. She asks her father not to force her to stay with Knobowtee: “Don’t try to make me walk with him. He is not my husband. I feel it in my heart” (Glancy 210). This emptiness is about to be filled by Sergeant Williams, but destiny has other plans for them. Her fascination towards the soldier cannot reach the climax just the way her other dreams and desires remain unfulfilled forever. She cannot set herself free from her deep association with materialistic possessions, her nostalgia for her previous life and for her grandmother’s home. She is perplexed by a sense of rootlessness. The twists and turns in her life are caused not only by the external challenges of the trail, but also by the inner conflicts. The trail aggravates the predicaments and leads to irreversible losses and heartaches. Her plight is symbolic of the tribulations undergone by the Cherokee women in their marital life as well as in the trail. The single voice of Maritole, though the strongest of all, would not have drawn attention to all the problems in their life. Through other female characters, Glancy has depicted the different challenges faced by Cherokee women during their lifetime. But they are not portrayed as feeble or mute. Ehle has elaborated the rights and decision-making power of Cherokee women in his work: “A Cherokee woman had more rights and power than European women” (Ehle 3). Glancy has not presented the women with an extraordinary identity, but they have been portrayed the way they really are. Their voices are loud and clear throughout the novel to convey the inescapable issues they are having during the trail.

Maritole’s husband Knobowtee feels lost amid this chaos and unexpected dislocation. His reaction is suggestive of the anger, agony, and resentment of the Cherokee people against all who have caused the trail. He feels restless and helpless as he can do nothing in response to the injustice. They must pay a heavy price due to the decision made by a handful of men exercising their power over a large section of people. His narratives shed light on his outrage against those who are to be blamed for this loss. Just like his wife Maritole, Knobowtee also feels a sense of loss. He can no longer go back to his ancestral place and farm the land. He thinks that a man does not deserve to be called a man if he is denied to perform his masculine duties like farming and other tasks. He cannot take it when it becomes a matter of losing masculinity. He releases his frustration on his wife by imposing his ways on her. Due to his aggression, cold response and indifference, his wife does not have any choice but to seek solace in the company of another man. She neither denies it nor does she justify it. She does not want to get into the conflicts of right and wrong. She can see empathy and respect for her only in the eyes of Sergeant Williams. She does not have any hope from Knobowtee, but she has faith in a stranger who, she thinks, can find her even in the new territory. Thus, she holds the hand of another man willingly and makes her own choice which is not accepted by Knobowtee due to obvious reasons. Their marital life gets shattered and it becomes worse with each passing day of the trail. Knobowtee feels that he has been trapped in a vicious cycle where there is no way to escape. He starts neglecting his wife and spends most of his time with his family. This is how he vents out his resentment and it results in violence and separation from Maritole.

While the conjugal life of Knobowtee and Maritole is in jeopardy, Tanner and Lucy are having an ideal marital relationship. Maritole's brother Tanner is protecting and looking after his wife Luthy and the whole family during the period of distress and apprehension. He protests against Knobowtee's hostile behavior towards Maritole and has a fight with him. He is an ideal example of a protective brother, a caring husband, and a responsible father. His efforts in preserving the safety and welfare of his family signify how there are also responsible and sensible Cherokee men. Apart from saving his family, Tanner also gets involved with other Cherokee people who are infuriated by the government's actions which result in this crisis. There are permanent losses which time also may not heal. Tanner has maintained a balance between his responsibilities towards his family and his duties towards his clansmen. His wife Luthy is the mother of two children, namely Mark and Ephum. After losing her child, Maritole gets envious of Luthy who is having a fulfilling life with her children. She represents motherhood which is at stake during the arduous process of the removal. She also stands for the loss of power of women when they are deprived of their role in the matriarchal society. Luthy and Maritole are two major voices in contrast to each other and represent different female entities in the Cherokee society. Both are fighting their battle at different levels. While Maritole is struggling at the mental level, the weak, delirious Luthy is battling at the physical level to overcome her illness.

Maritole's father has a significant role to play in the novel. He longs for the old ways of life but at the same time he spreads positivity among his people regarding the future. His nameless existence is symbolic of the unpredictable future. He can foresee a bright future and motivates everyone in the family to maintain composure in the face of hardships. His voice is filled with faith and warmth. Glancy has not employed a limited set of voices to offer a restricted view of the trail. She has conveyed how the strength of the Cherokee people remains unshaken even in the absence of the basic amenities like food, shelter, and clothing. Their optimistic spirit has not been perturbed by the ordeal. Maritole's father motivates his people to fight against all odds. He consoles his daughter when she gets disappointed and takes the decision of walking alone without the support of her husband. His death is symbolic of the dark future awaiting in the new territory.

Most of the characters in the novel are Cherokee Indians, but the role of the missionaries and soldiers is also significant. Glancy has also selected characters who are real historical figures such as Reverend Bushyhead who has been ordained as a Baptist minister after he attends the Valley River Mission School of Reverend Evan Jones. His wife delivers a baby girl called Eliza when they are travelling the trail. Reverend Bushyhead preaches and fights for the protection of the Cherokee Indians. He tries to enlighten the people through his teachings. The novel mentions how the condition of the Cherokee Indians gets worse due to the unjust and cruel treatment of the soldiers who are hired to assist them during the trail. But there are soldiers with exceptions like Sergeant Williams who are empathetic towards the distressed people. He is described initially as the "man with blue eyes", but gradually he is known by his actual name Williams and more than that he soon becomes infamous due to his growing proximity with Maritole. He arranges food and clothes for her and tries to comfort her in all possible ways. His kind and warm gesture is irresistible for Maritole. He paints a picture of humanity in the face of the most distressful and hopeless circumstances by showing compassion not only to Maritole but also to all other distressed folks in the camp. The selfless service of soldiers like him may not be recorded and acknowledged officially but through his character, the novelist indicates that the trail is escorted not solely by pitiless soldiers, but also by those compassionate ones who have saved many lives. The questionable relationship between Maritole and Sergeant Williams does not last long and ultimately leads to his expulsion from his job. Knobowtee gets resentful when he comes to know about their relationship and his hatred for his wife knows no bounds.

The title of the novel *Pushing the Bear* suggests the importance of mythology and proverbs in the life of the Cherokee. In a similar tradition, the novel *Mountain Windsong* is also packed with stories and legends which mark the rich tradition of the Cherokee class. There are questions Conley has emphatically asked regarding the intertwining relationships of legend and history, myth- making and story-telling. The same kind of balance can be discerned in *Pushing the Bear.* There is an allusion to a bear in the numerous passages of the novel. The imagery of the bear has its origin in the bear story found in Cherokee mythology. This bear is a symbol of greed, hunger and self-centeredness rooted deeply in human nature. It shows its true colour during hard times. The people are trying to push themselves against this bear throughout the trail. Maritole has mentioned about it: "It was as if a bear sat on my chest all the way to camp. I felt air would not come into my lungs. It was a heavy grief I could not push away" (Glancy 15). In another passage, she describes, "I felt there was dark presence over us. The bear we pushed would not move away. Each day I felt his ragged fur. Sometimes I could smell his breath" (Glancy 80). The myth related to the bear has been summarized in one of the passages of the novel. The bear indicates how human priorities change with time and circumstances. Humans are compelled to choose their safety over the safety of the community. The challenges of the trail expose the true nature of human temperament. At the end Maritol overcomes her fear and faces the bear. She confesses in these words: "The bear had once been a person. But he was not conscious of the unconscious he was given. His darkness was greed and self-centeredness. It was part of myself, too. It was in all of us. It was part of the human being. Why else did we march? No one was free of the bear" (Glancy 183). Joseph Bruchac, who is best known for presenting in his works the multifaceted features of Native American lives and cultures has made profuse use of legends and folklores in his writings. In his novel *The Winter People* (2002), there is the mention of a similar kind of legend of an avaricious man who turns into a wildcat. The legend warns people not to go overboard with their greed (Bruchac 2).

The voices in *Pushing the Bear* are predominant not only to convey a strong message about the consecutive devastating incidents caused by the trail, but it also points out the failure of man as human. The pain in the voices signals the accumulated affliction and bitterness which will never fade with time: "Voice speaks for all who come and go. It travels through time. It's a woman with bloody feet. A child crying for its mother. Voice reaches into the animals and insects. Voice is in the trees of the woods" (Glancy 212). The native Indians must pay a heavy price to remain alive till the end of the journey. It does not end there; it is the beginning of new challenges in a new, strange place. Ultimately, they will survive but it is questionable whether it will be called living in the new territory or just having life. What will be the true nature of life in an unknown, unfamiliar world that is full of uncertainties? How justifiable is it to deprive a race of its soul? The questions they ask throughout the journey will remain unanswered forever because those are asked not only to the people in power but to the whole of mankind.

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Novel, Nation and Narration: A Retelling of the Rise and Fall of Hastinapur by Sharath Komarraju

Neena Gupta Vij

Abstract: This paper examines the rise of complex political structures from compact kinship systems. It looks at the diverse ways in which narratives from the *Mahabharata* have emphasised a historical period that records the rise of larger political systems. The stories of the *Mahabharata* have been reworked by Sharath Komarraju in his trilogy on Hastinapur, i.e. *The Winds of Hastinapur* (*WH*), *The Rise of Hastinapur* (*RH*) and *The Queens of Hastinapur* (*QH*). The paper argues that the novels help to highlight the rise of Hastinapur from a comparatively small political formation into a power to reckon with—the creation of the prototype for the Indian nation. While the novels stress on the delineation of character and plot, the central motif that emerges is that of the rise of Hastinapur as the most powerful kingdom of its time. It is heroic narrative that reconstructs myth and history for contemporary times.

Key words: Nation, Narration, Epic, Myth, History.

There has been a steady flow of revisionist writings in Indian popular fiction in recent times, based on the Indian classical myths, epics and legends. The characters of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* exercise a particular fascination on the literary imagination because of the complexity of their representation, and the ambiguity of narration. The *Mahabharata,* particularly is an epic that resumes its relevance in any era and over myriad issues. Sharath Komarraju's Hastinapur series, *The Winds of Hastinapur (WH), The Rise of Hastinapur (RH)* and *The Queens of Hastinapur (QH),* deals with the major events and characters of the *Mahabharata* and frames it within the metanarrative of nation- formation. There is a striking difference in the representation of the events in the novels and in the way the *Mahabharata* has assumed a cultural significance as the epic of a *Dharma-yudh,* a war of good and evil. In these rewritings, the story of Hastinapur unfolds, not as the story of a dynasty moving inexorably towards war, but as the heroic history of Devrata, the son of the Kuru king Shantanu and his divine consort, the river Ganga.

This paper examines the diverse ways in which narratives from the *Mahabharata* have been reworked by Sharath Komarraju and argues that the novels help to highlight the rise of Hastinapur from a comparatively small political formation into a power to reckon with—the creation of the prototype for the Indian nation. While the three novels stress on the delineation of character and plot, the central motif that emerges is that of the rise of Hastinapur as the most powerful kingdom of its time.

It is important to note that the Indian epics can be seen to reinforce the idea of the rise of kingdoms, a kind of ancient nation-building through expansion of territorial control over neighbouring rulers and areas. In this sense, the *Ramayana* represents Ayodhya, a land that can be historically and geographically associated with central and northern India. However, the paper proposes that the trilogy by Komarraju represents the *Mahabharata* as mainly the narrative of the evolution of social structures evolving from forest dweller (tribes) to town dweller and from city-state to kingdoms and from thence to *smarajyas* or empires.

Komarraju's trilogy enables one to understand the coming together of a number of neighbouring kingdoms, and their rulers under a bigger kingdom. This is emphasised by Pattnaik, who confirms that, "...centuries passed, as society grew in size and complexity, as economic and political realities shifted, as tribes and clans gave way to villages with multiple communities, which gave rise to kingdoms, and later empires…" (20). These novels are able to reconstruct, "the tradition of a later society remembering and reconstructing what it believes to be the earlier one—where the reconstruction becomes the perceived past" (Thapar 215).

The paper takes up two ideas of the nation, one as territorial, the other as a community. It takes the epic as the narrative of nation-making in the sense of expansion of territory, rise from tribes to imperial nations and the creation of a national imaginary, considering, the *Mahabharata*, as the "itihas" of Hastinapur's expansion from clan to empire. It is historically known that ancient civilizations controlled huge tracts of land and resources such as the Sumerian civilization which brought out the heroic epic, *Gilgamesh*, ancient Greece, the *Iliad*, ancient Rome, the *Aeniad.* The epics represent a heroic age of exploration and conquest, which is understood as the Age of Mythology, a pre-historic period. The mythological dimensions of the epic sometimes detract attention from their historicity. These ancient nations, Egypt, Greece, China, Rome have evolved from ancient nations to modern nation-states, so their past and present co-exist. Here, the past "nation" survives as a community, and the present as a state. It is the novel as a form that belongs to the present, the modern nation, and has in itself been considered as the narrative of a nation by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities.* The term nation is used in the modern sense as a nation-state which is marked by internationally recognised boundaries as well as a group of people having certain things in common. In his book "Nationalism," historian Elie Kedourie explores the concept of nationalism and provides a definition of a nation as a collective entity. This definition emphasizes the importance of shared heritage, culture, language, and territorial association in defining a nation. Similarly, Margaret Moore emphasizes that "the term "nation" refers to a group of people who identify themselves as belonging to a particular nation group, who are usually ensconced on a particular historical territory, and who have a sense of affinity to people sharing that territory" (Moore 906).

Putting the nation-state in a historical perspective, Clifford Geertz does not concede the absoluteness of the nation-state, calling the "separate splashes of colour in atlases," an "illusion" keeping in view the fluid identities of modern nation-states from the past to the present (229). Moreover, the word nation is also used in the sense of a cultural entity, implying a common past, not related to territorial control. This is the sense in which Rabindra Nath Tagore calls India a nation, based on a cultural nationalism. Thereon, the third sense of the word nation is related to a group of people who bear certain commonalities, such as place of birth, ethnicity, territory, language, culture or region. The terms, Arab nation and Queer nation are used in this sense. Besides, the term "natio/nationes" has been used to mark a group of people who happen to stand out as a group when in another country (Zernatto and Mistretta 351-366). In Komarraju's three narratives the nation in the ancient sense of the term, and as the modern concept, come together as the author reconstructs the story of the *Mahabharata*, an epic, as the formation of the nation as territorial control, through his understanding of the nation as an imagined community of people, beyond territory in contemporary times.[1]

The Trilogy draws attention to the fact that the *Mahabharata* is woven around one event, the Jaya, or the Bharata, the war that is immortalised in the epic. "Through the ages this tale will be retold by many—courtiers, poets, saints, peasant-folk—and it will change with each recital, for no man relates a story exactly as he hears it" (Komarraju *WH*3). Thus speaks Ganga, the omniscient narrator of Komarraju's first book in the Hastinapur series, *The Winds of Hastinapur.* Ganga is no ordinary narrator, she is the Lady of the River, the Great River, who is immortal, not because she has conquered death but because she represents continuity, as she possesses "the knowledge of all the Ladies that have come before [her]." She adds, "all the memories. You carry them as if they were yours" (Komarraju *WH*5, 26).

The hero of the "nation" of "Bharata" is the celestial-born Devavrata. In the *Mahabharata*, the nation-making of the Kurus is done through the crown prince, Devavrata, who plans and manoeuvres to conquer the smaller kingdoms, negotiates the support of surrounding chieftains or neutralises the strength of rising powers, strong neighbours or threat from strong alliances. While the narrative of the *Mahabharata,* the epic, meanders around the issues of marriage, religion and statecraft, and the all-encompassing debate over *Dharma*, Devavrata's Hastinapur is developing its military and economic might through his conquests which culminate in Indraprastha's ambition to become an empire or *smrajya* under Yudhishter after the *Ashvamedhyagya,* which is a religious ritual involving the sacrifice of a horse, and will confirm the status of Yudhishter as a High King, who will be receiving tributes from other smaller states.

The exploits of Devavrata, the son of King Shantanu and the heavenly river, Ganga make the series a study of his heroic character and draw attention to the fact that the epic chronicles not the war of good and evil only, but underlines the ambition and capability of Hastinapur to bring a larger area under its control. It is the slow and steady empire that Hastinapur becomes under the leadership of Devarata as the colossus, Gangaputra Bhishma, which is an important aspect of the epic—the making of "great Bharat." Komarraju shifts the attention from the war between the Kauravas and Pandavas, and towards the acquisition of land, the annexation of and alliances with the existing city states, the careful orchestration of the resources and wealth of the Indian subcontinent for Hastinapur, through a series of calculated wars and peace negotiations by Bhishma, while he is the Regent of Hastinapur.

This empire-making by Bhishma is often overlooked in critical appraisals of the epic and the focus is shifted to the events leading to the "great war." The war is seen as the major event towards which the plot progresses and the whole voluminous work is seen as a prelude to the war, while the war itself is presented as the main action. The war is described in great detail, recording the accomplishments, spectacular feats and achievements of the warriors, in detail, from Day One to Day Eighteen. In addition, the epic *parvas* (chapters) are reflective, contemplative, digressive and offer numerous perspectives on life and society, marriage and child rearing, kinship structures, war, military, political and religious training of the young Kshatriyas or Brahmins, and convey the interaction between sages and kings, kings and kings, and the men and women. Nevertheless, it needs also to be understood as the narrative of a nation created by the last of the mythic heroes, Bhishma.

The novels concentrate on Devavrata or the heroic Bhishma, who, as the crown prince of Hastinapur and then as the celibate regent, is quietly pursuing his ambition to make Hastinapur the strongest kingdom of the Northern Country. Secondly, they bring into focus the Ganga valley civilization, through the narrative voice of Ganga. The Indian sub-continent, from the Hindukush and the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal is united through the Ganga, flowing as a river from the Heavens to the banks of Hastinapur. In the first part of the Trilogy, Kommaraju describes the spatiality of the Great Ganga from her originary spring as she rushes down the Himalayas as a young yet not so torrential spring, called Jahnavi till she meets the Bhagirathi (at Bhairon ghati in present day Uttarakhand) becoming Ganga in the plains. Her story, which is also the story of India from ancient times to the present, gets intertwined with the history of north western Gandhar and with the central plains of India, once divided into kingdoms like Shurasena, Chedi, Kosala, Kekayi, Mathura, Magadha, and the eastern kingdoms, before she merges with the sea. Komarraju refers to the sixteen great kingdoms, which seem to be a reference to the Mahājanapadas or great kingdoms, which is a literal translation of the term, that feature in the novels.[2] These are the kingdoms of Kuru, Gandhara, Magadha, Panchala, Surasena, that existed in ancient India from the sixth to fourth centuries BCE, along with Kosala, Chedi, Kashi, Avanti (Singh 2008, 260-4). The Indian subcontinent has been divided into, the "Land of the Vedas," the "Field of the Kurus," the "Middle Country," the "land of the Aryans" and the "land of the Barbarians" by Manu, the Lawmaker, in *The Laws of Manu* (18-19).

The *Winds of Hastinapur* retells the story of Hastinapur from the perspective of the hero and becomes a tale of a heroic quest. The story is retold by an aging Ganga. The war is over; Ganga passes the bodies of Yuddhishtra, Arjuna, Vrikodara (Bhima), Draupadi, Nakul and Sahadev. Ganga's "hair is white and thin" and there are parts of the tale she doesn't "recollect well" (Kommaraju *WH*5, 6). She remembers where it all began, "with the visit of *Prabhasa*, the Elemental of Dawn" to the hut of the Lady of the River, the mother of the Ganga who is speaking. The visit is related to something that had happened before, that involved, "the theft of a cow and a curse" (Kommaraju *WH* 10). *Prabhasa* has been instrumental in stealing the magical cow Nandini from the Ashram of Sage *Vashishtha,* a prominent seer living on the edge of the great *Meru* mountain, the abode of the celestials. The celestials include Ganga, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra and his entourage and all heavenly elements who are represented as gods of their particular element, star or planet. Meru is also the home of maidens who do the bidding of the River Maiden *Ganga* and boys and men who grow up in Ashrams, raised by foster parents, teachers, sages and others to serve in any capacity that may be required of them on the mountain, or in the plains. The allegiance of these youths to the Mountain and its gods and Goddess *Bhagvati* is complete. *Meru* is also the mountain range from where the Ganga flows into the plains. The sacredness of the site and the waters is emphasized by the quality of purity, duty and simplicity of the dwellers of the mountain.

It is the duty of *Ganga,* when she was young and called *Jahnavi*, to obey her mother who is also the River Maiden, the Priestess of Goddess *Bhagavati*, and marry King Shantanu in order to beget the eight Elementals and set them free at birth to fulfil the curse inflicted by Sage *Vashishtha* and relieve them of their suffering.

Jahnavi dutifully follows her mother's instructions and immerses seven of these divine Elementals in the River *Ganga.* While Ganga is able to drown the seven cursed elementals, *Prabhasa* is the eighth elemental, the elemental of Dawn, who is the main culprit and consequently, his punishment is more severe. He is fated to live long and expiate his sin by remaining celibate throughout his life, because it was love for his wife that had led him into the transgression. It is for this reason that *Shantanu* breaks his promise to his wife and protests against her action when the eighth child is born. When *Shantanu* protests, *Ganga* or young *Jahnavi*, has no choice but to leave for *Meru*. However, the child is taken by *Ganga* as she goes back, to be brought up on *Meru*, first under her maternal care, and later in foster care as is the norm for boys in those days according to the novel. But she promises to send him back to Hastinapur once he is a grown youth.

In the novelistic unfolding of these events one can experience the effect of the fatal curse on *Prabhasa* who had executed the theft of Nandini, to be born on Earth as human and to suffer inexorably as a son, a man, and as a Patriarch. From these simple ingredients comes a tale of magnificence, the tale of a warrior, ascetic, learned one, whose many qualities allow his major mission on earth to be overlooked. What was he doing on Earth, why couldn't Ganga drown him like the other seven Celestial Elementals (*Vasus*), and why was he given the boon of *Icchamrityu* (the power to decide the time of his death) by his father?

The novel makes it a matter of contemporary relevance. At this particular juncture in the history of the mountain, the celestials fear that the smaller kingdoms on earth are becoming stronger and some, like Magadha, ruled by *Jarasandha*, may pose a threat to them and their way of life, especially as *Jarasandha* and *Kamsa*, the ruler of Mathura, were forging alliances. The birth of *Prabhasa* as *Devavrata* was an attempt to preserve peace on Earth. "Peace on earth is important to peace on Meru," Prabhasa confirms to Ganga (Komarraju *WH* 80). "The Great Kingdoms are all reaching an age of strength and prosperity. They will war with one another, and perhaps this boy's valour will unite them all," says Sage Vashishta. "Or perhaps his valour will only serve to break up the land", he adds ambiguously and portentously (Kommaraju *WH* 69). *Devavrata* was the means by which the Celestials wanted to control the earthmen, wanted to ensure peace on Earth, which would ensure peace on Meru.

However, the novel emphasises character as a force that can change the destined train of events. Komarraju delineates the suffering of *Jahnavi-Ganga* as a wife who has to leave her husband, and has promised to give up her son when he is eighteen and send him to his father. As a mother, she tries several tricks to keep her son with her and on *Meru,* both for her maternal satisfaction and also because she knows that life on earth is very difficult and earth men can be very selfish and scheming. She begins to feed him the water from the Crystal Lake that is the source of the long lives and prolonged youth of the celestials. For this very reason, it is forbidden to non-celestials. This very act is her undoing. *Devavrata*, a strapping youth with intelligence, perseverance and infinite curiosity, unravels the secret of the water of the Crystal Lake as a liquid other than water, and discovers that it is nothing less than a life force, taken from the mortal earthmen:

> The oldest Mystery of all, the Mystery concerning the water of the Crystal Lake… The water of the Lake is not water at all, …It is the life force of every living being on earth….Every time a person on Meru drinks of the Crystal Lake, he is drinking of someone else's life…
>
> …
>
> We drink to our lives and their deaths!" (Komarraju *WH* 135-137)

He feels the injustice of Earthmen suffering due to the selfishness of the celestials and decides to go back to earth to his father. His desire to unveil the "Mysteries" of Nature and use them to help celestials as well as earthmen work against him and *Ganga* as he swears to unite the divided kingdoms of the north, not for himself but against *Meru*.

The narrative deftly changes course and *Ganga* gives up her son to earth and the earthly river, *Yamuna* in a poetic renunciation. The second part of the *Winds of Hastinapur* deals with a girl named *Kali*, called "the dark one," because she is dark like the *Yamuna* across which she ferries people. She is a fisherman's daughter who appears like a dark shadow in *Devavrata's* life, when King *Shantanu* is attracted by her smell, and offers to take her with him to his palace. The conditions laid down by her father are unacceptable to him, but his son, entreated by *Ganga* to always ensure his father's happiness, accedes to the demands. The narrative thereafter shifts to the vow of Devavrata to renounce the throne, in favour of *Kali's* progeny and remain celibate to avoid any claims to the throne by his offspring.

In the second book, *The Rise of Hastinapur*, the vow gives him time to work on expanding and enriching Hastinapur, as he had planned on *Meru*. He unites Kosi through the marriage alliance with *Vichitravirya*; gains *Kunti* and Panchala similarly, though another generation later; persuades or coerces Mathura, Magadha, Surasena, Gandhar, Matsya to maintain a trade relationship without enmity or interference. He is shown, in the *Rise of Hastinapur* to have outwitted the young Queen of Gandhar and stolen gold from her mines through his traders. Finally, "He has with his own hands now put Hastinapur at the top of all Kingdoms of North Country (Komarraju *RH* 348).

The second novel is not a tale of battles, but of the subtle art of strategy and statecraft. Meru has sent the reborn Prabhasa to unite the earthly kingdoms in peace, but he is subverting the power of the celestials by strengthening Hastinapur. Ganga, has now taken her mother's place and become the River Maiden. She has to work against her son in order to safeguard the interests of the celestials. She thwarts him wherever possible. She sends her foster daughter *Jahnavi* with *Kubera*, to try and strengthen Mathura so that it can withstand Magadha. But *Kamsa* and *Jarasandha* prove to be very strong allies and the plan misfires. Kamsa's ambition has caused him to imprison his father Agrasen, sister *Devaki* and her husband, *Vasudev*. Similarly, in *The Rise of Hastinapur, Rishi Durvasa* does not only grant *Pritha*, the princess of *Kunti*, the boon of conception by incantation, but accompanies her to Mathura on the pretext of rescuing her brother *Vasudeva* and *Devaki,* imprisoned by Kamsa. He manages to seduce the passionate *Kunti* himself and is revealed to be none other than the sun god Surya.

The plot gets complicated when it is revealed that Surya, who as the god of fire, is also Agni, wants to get his hands on a "black stone" used by the Mathura dwellers as a source of energy, for tilling land without cattle and for running looms. They discover that the High

Priest of Mathura has unravelled the "mystery" of fire to harness it as a source of energy. Surya manages to take away the "book of mysteries" from the High Priest in exchange for the water of the life-giving Crystal Lake, as the Priest is seriously ill. This episode is rewritten with ingenuity to reveal the prowess of the Priestly class and to highlight the desire of the celestials to have access to and acquire and reserve all knowledge for themselves. The traditional *Surya-Pritha* relationship that results in the birth of *Karna* is retained. Also, *Surya* gives *Pritha* the incantation as well as the "five hairs wrapped in a cloth" that would help her acquire her sons as the Queen of Pandu, the king of Hastinapur, and the nephew of *Bhishma*. It can be seen how the seers were able to predict the future and prepare suitable individuals to play a part in shaping it.

By the end of Ganga's tale, in *The Rise of Hastinapur*, "Devavrata, [is] the undefeatable champion of the throne of Hastinapur" (Komarraju *RH* 5). Devavrata excels at everything from chariot driving, wielding sword, shooting arrows, understanding scriptures, politics, battle strategies, and earned accolades: "Bhishma the terrible. He is known to be the fiercest warrior in all of North country…and not a bad strategist" (Komarraju *RH* 348). Therefore, Meru has "to devise the fall of Hastinapur" (Komarraju *RH* 346). The Celestials send *Kubera* to Gandhar to make sure that *Gandhari* and *Shakuni* never forget or forgive the role of Hastinapur in their defeat, so as to weaken Bhishma.

Bhishma's filial devotion to *Shantanu* turns the tide against the great kingdom of Hastinapur created by him. His strength is transformed into fault lines that threaten his newly founded empire. His wise counsel is denied to Hastinapur when he concedes the right to rule to the children of *Satyavati* (as Kali is called as the Queen of Hastinapur). His proposal to the three daughters of Kosi leads to the tragic life and asceticism of the eldest, *Amba*. She had refused to marry *Vichitravirya* as she loved *Salva*. But he spurned her as she had been won by *Bhishma* in a fair duel. She vowed revenge as she was neither accepted by *Vichitravirya,* nor by an oath-bound *Bhishma*. Similarly, outwitted and defeated by *Bhishma, Gandhari* turns to *Kubera* (who has been deputed by *Ganga* and *Vishnu* to strengthen *Gandhari's* divine vision) for counsel against *Bhishma*. While *Pritha* has no personal enmity with *Bhishma*, she is caught in the game of producing the heir to the throne of Hastinapur, before *Gandhari* or *Madari* to ensure her own power and status. So, *Ganga* is right to predict that "*Devavrata's* destruction would come from that one place men scarcely care to look: from within. He would be destroyed—as all powerful men eventually are—by the consequences of their actions, by the ache they cause through their choices" (Komarraju *RH* 5).

Thus, it takes the might of *Meru*, the ire of men and the hate of his own kins-women to bring the noble and heroic Bhishma to his death bed of arrows. "All of this to get at one man?" asks *Kuber*. *Ganga,* as always, answers in riddles, "It is never about one man or woman,…There are always bigger tales than yours or mine" (Komarraju *RH* 353).

The "bigger tale" is the evolution of Hastinapur from a city state to a Great Kingdom which is the life work of *Bhishma*. But the heroic saga of the last hero in the Age of Heroes was to end with him. A further twist in the tale occurs when Komarraju narrates how Hastinapur, a buttress against the greed and arrogance of the celestials, was made the pivot of political manoeuvres that erupted in the women's quarters. In *The Queens of Hastinapur*, tales of *Satyavati, Jahnavi, Pritha, Devaki, Amba and Gandhari* converge, and the rise of Hastinapur occurs at the cost of the ruin of *Devavrata*. While Amba and Gandhari plot the fall of Hastinapur, ironically, the title of the book is *The Rise of Hastinapur.* The focus of the epic as well as the novels by Komarraju, is the violence that has gone into making this territorial nation, foreshadowing the knowledge of the Great War that would undo the Herculean efforts of *Devavrata*.

If, as the paper argues, the *Mahabharata* is a tale of not only the war, but of the rise and fall of Hastinapur, it is the series by Komarraju that has helped to focus on the nation-building aspect of the epic. In his essay, "What is a Nation?" Ernest Renan confirms the act of nation-building as violent, "… historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial" (Renan 12). Nevertheless, if "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" as Benedict Anderson says in his "Introduction" to *Imagined Communities,* the ancient and modern ideas come together in the idea of India.

This paper concludes that the culture portrayed in the *Mahabharata* is not that of modern India as it stands today politically. This culture evolved around the Ganga and the Yamuna, from their rise in the Himalayas to their merger with the sea. Certain other areas, like the valley of the Sindhu river and the Sarasvati are also included through Gandhar. This is primarily the north, the north west and central plains of India. Hastinapur did not extend from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, and the culture of ancient India was not a homogenous mass culture, but one, it was diverse, and second, this diversity was both across time and space, i.e. geographically variant and historically moving towards complex structures (if by history we mean across passage of time) and third, this made it heterogenous, not homogenous.

This heterogeneity across boundaries is clearly seen in the attempt at unification and homogeneity that is attempted by the kingdom of Hastinapur. The narrative of the epic draws attention to the existence of very small political units, with different forms of governance. "As for the 'nation,' it is both historically determined and general. As a term, it refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous—the 'natio'—a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging" (Brennan 45). The epic builds an imagined community as nation, for Anderson, and the novel, the modern. In these recast tales, the epic and the novel come together—the ancient idea of the nation as territory has evolved into nation as a group of people who form a community, as territorial boundaries have shifted with time, and the modern one is the idea of a nation as a bounded category.

In conceptualising the two ideas of the nation, India makes for a special case. She stood at the cross-roads of history when the British colonized it. Victorian England, and ancient and medieval India coincided for the first time. Therefore, India which had witnessed the "spectrum of continuity and discontinuity" of Indian culture which was based on territory, also witnessed the rise of a modern nation, which was based on national consciousness. This spectrum of continuity and discontinuity of Indian culture can be understood as "myth" and notion of modern nation as "national consciousness" respectively.

The idea of a nation beyond boundaries in a cultural imaginary is the third idea of the nation beyond borders. That is why the *Mahabharata* is important today. It also speaks of the continuity and discontinuity of culture, the evolution of social and political forms, culminating in the Great War that finished the older clan and kinship systems and brought a newer order of kingship, where the notion of a disinterested dharma as duty would guide action, replacing the earlier system where the rules laid by elders or ancestors were sacrosanct.

Another noteworthy fact that emerges relates to the novel as an art form. The subjectivity of the novel form obviates the objective style of the epic. Ganga, as a mother and wife, Devavrata, as a son and brother, emerge in *The Winds of Hastinapur*, as "feeling" man and woman, though they are not so humanised in the epics. However, he is more objective and unfeeling in *The Rise of Hastinapur*. This is in keeping with the dehumanisation he undergoes as a man on a conquering mission, displaying an ego-centric masculinity. However, his tenderness and attention towards *Chitragada and Vichitravirya*, and *Dhritrashtra and Pandu*, his nephews and grandsons, keep him human and feminised, thus balancing his masculine and feminine aspects. The sense of an unavoidable fate that is sought to be conveyed in the epic is mutated into characters with more control over their actions, decisions and therefore, with more agency. The novel as a genre of the rational mitigates the sense of timelessness into a sense of place, and permanence through continuity. And through the heroic saga of *Bhishma,* both the ancient and the modern, the territorial and the cultural nation come together.

Notes:

1. Regarding the term nation, In *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha quotes Benedict Anderson's assertion that, "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time." (Bhabha ii). Ernest Renan considers the modern concept of nation as "something fairly new in history," and "Antiquity [as] unfamiliar" with this concept of nation (Renan 9). In favour of the idea of nation is the observation of Hugh Seton-Watson, that though no "scientific definition" of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists" (qtd. in Bhabha ii). In her book *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe* 900–1300, Susan Reynolds argues that many European medieval kingdoms were nations in the modern sense except that political participation in nationalism was available only to a limited prosperous and literate class. Similarly, while the political formations in ancient India were smaller, yet the ambitious conquest of territory, setting up of trade, and building a powerful centre are nation-building activities.
2. Mahajanapada is the name given to republic city states in ancient India from the sixth to fourth centuries CE. The term "*Janapada*" literally means the foothold of a tribe. In Pāṇini's "Ashtadhyayi", Janapada stands for country.Some ancient Buddhist texts make frequent reference to sixteen great kingdoms and republics between Gandhara in the northwest to Anga in the east, extending beyond the Vindhyachal mountains to the south. This is the basic area covered in the *Mahabharata,* which leaves out several regions that are now a part of India.

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Myths and Subversion in Children's Books: Reading Select Works of Devdutt Pattanaik

Raj Gaurav Verma

> [You have to choose. You have to decide.
> Not deciding is not a solution.
> If you choose neither]
> "Then you will be Mitti ka Madho…Or Gobar ki Gani."
> (Pattanaik, *Kama vs Yama* 36)

Abstract: This paper argues that not only fairy tales, but also myths are subversive in nature and the recent genres of mythological fiction and graphic/mythological picture books are able to exploit this aspect of myths through their innovative narrative. Writers of these genres exploit the subversive potential of myths and the great epics and this has gained momentum in the last two decades. Resorting to myths, legends and history might reinstate cultural values, but it also brings into question the linearity, singularity, and the authority of the "grand text." There is re-invention of myths and fresh interpretation to suit the times of present generation. Therefore, values and worldliness, insight and adherence, virtuosity and practicality, sensitivity and intellect, traditional frame and modern understanding are not only juxtaposed, but also brought into terms with one another. Devdatt Pattanaik is one of the leading exponents in this group who has retold epics for children and invented modern mythology, allusions and allegories to discuss the issues of identity, gender, inequality, balance in life, decision-making and spiritual conflicts. Pattanaik's *A Secret River*, *Kama-v/s-Yama* and *The Girl Who Chose* and *The Boys Who Fought* raise questions on the limited human perceptions and narrow understanding of the world. Sometimes questioning the wrongs, other times asserting new values and judgments, he attempts to submit to or subvert the established cultural myths provoking the readers for a revival, to give a second thought and to think how the normative or mythic reality merely occurs as a social construct.

Key words: Myths, mythological fiction, children's fiction, epics, fairytales, art of subversion

Many writers in India have created picture books, novellas, short stories and novels for children based on mythology. Some of the works in this category are Samhita Arni's *The Mahabharatha: A Child's View* (2012) and *Sita's Ramayana* (2012), Sanjay Patel's *Ganesha's Sweet Tooth* (2012), Arshia Sattar's *Adventures with Hanuman* (2013), Anita Raina Thapan's *Shiva Loves to Dance* (2014), *Hurray for Diwali* (2015) and *Little Hanuman* (2015), Roopa Pai's *The Gita for Children* (2015), *Ramayana for Children* (2016), and *Garuda and the Serpents: Stories of Friends and Foes from Hindu Mythology* (2018), Sudha Gupta's *Panchatantra for Children* (2017), *Mahabharata for Children* (2017), *Ramayana for Children* (2017) and *Bhagavad Gita for Children* (2017). These writers have tried to retell, re-invent, and re-visit familiar and known myths from the postmodern perspective.

Pattanaik has published various books for children about mythical tales, Indian epics and Hindu deities. He has interpreted them in the modern context producing works like *Shiva: An Introduction* (1997), *Vishnu: An Introduction* (1999), *Devi, The Mother-Goddess: An Introduction* (2000), *The Goddess in India: The Five Faces of the Eternal Feminine* (2000), *Hanuman: An Introduction* (2001) and *Lakshmi, The Goddess of Wealth and Fortune: An Introduction* (2003). Epics are re-casted in *Hanuman's Ramayan* (2010), *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* (2010), *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013), *My*

Gita (2015), and *Shiva to Shankara: Giving Form to the Formless* (2017). He has created graphic epics: *The Girl Who Chose* (2016), based on the *Ramayana*, and *The Boys Who Fought* (2017), based on the *Mahabharata*. Pattanaik's journalistic articles, too, hint at their unconventional handling of social issues and themes challenging the stereotypes and popular beliefs as in "Krishna as a Girl," "Who Is a Hindu?: Gods and Judges," "Breaking the Binary," "Saraswati: Once She Was a River," "Acknowledging Islam's Diversity," "Spa-Wala Buddha," "Misreading Geeta as Motivation," "Othering the Asuras," "How Brahmins Helped Create Temple-States and Kingdoms in South India and Southeast Asia", and many others.

Devdutt Pattanaik has carved out a unique niche for himself in Indian Literatures in English, for he is a creative writer, cultural critic, theorist, mythographer and mythologist. Pattanaik has a very different take on myths, epics and legends. As a writer, he is sensitive about all the aspects of the story; as a critic, he shuns the age-old blind adherence to scriptures; as a moralist, he develops the postmodern ethic, which is based on plurality and multiculturalism; as a cultural theorist, he is able to revise the obsolete understanding of the culture. He raises questions on caste, class, gender and queer perspectives found in Indian mythology. He distinguishes between mythological fiction and mythology. According to him, the genre of mythological fiction has been explored by writers but mythology is less explored and remains confined to academic circles.

O'Sullivan and Immel write that children's literature creates "the discourse of national belonging" and informs the audience "about their place in the world, in some cases by impressing upon them who they are not" (8). Pattanaik emphasizes expanding the minds "to look at the person beyond institutions" and "to see meanings beyond words. Rather than seeing unity in diversity, it is time we see the diversity in the unity" (Pattanaik, "Acknowledging Diversity in Islam"). Therefore, a singular focus will defeat the very purpose of our education, wisdom and knowledge. In another article, "For the Children," Pattanaik reveals the critical perceptions that may be developed in children. He unfolds his purpose and vision for writing for children, asserting that different people will look at the world differently. Edmund Husserl establishes in his understanding of phenomenology that the focus is not on the external world but how that world appears to a human subject which is subjected to vary from individual to individual. Pattanaik believes that children must be made to realize that there is no singular understanding of the world. A cat looks at water differently from a fish. A horse looks at grass differently from a lion. Likewise, the human experience transforms how different people look at the world. With such an understanding, children must be made to realize that every person thinks their view is the only and correct view. But it is not so. We must allow others to have their views as well. That is love. And others must allow us to have our views. That is love too ("For the Children"). When asked about how a child can connect mythology and religion with the day-to-day experience of the modern world, Pattanaik connects the war in Afghanistan with events in *The Ramayana*. If Ravan's abduction of Sita is condemned, the attack of terrorists on the World Trade Centre is not justified. But as the children grow up, the thinking may become more complex: "Why do we assume that the Americans are Ram? Maybe the terrorists see themselves as Ram; maybe the attack was the burning of Lanka." In such discourses, which otherwise seem simple and linear, "the Argumentative Indian is born" who keeps in mind many points of view before making a decision ("For the Children").

Cedric Cullingford observes that "even modern popular books are a kind of myth-making, giving expression unselfconsciously to a shared assumption about the world" (3). According to Levi-Strauss, myths are innately present in human beings. Human beings live in myths unconsciously, which finds its expression in language passing on collective meanings. Pattanaik is known for his skills of mixing myths with fiction and reality, his works intersect the Bakhtinian distinction between epic and novel, and in doing so, they also transcend the narrow generic divisions.[1] In the case of writing for children, the myths tend to acquire a fairy-tale effect. Often the writers try to create an element of fantasy, wonder and the uncanny. If epics and myths are the ancient additions, then fairy tales are the medieval ones; if the epics are absolute, then fairy tales propose a transformation. Jack Zipes, in his famous book *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, talks about the subversive potential of fairy tales: "The fairy tales… are not ageless, universal, and beautiful in and of themselves, and they are not the best therapy in the world of children. They are historical prescriptions, internalized, potent, [and] explosive" (11). In this way, mythological fictions acquire a conforming tendency arising out of mythical status and a subversive tendency arising out of content (fairy tale/fantasy element) and form (as the novel is subversive). Pattanaik's books offer the varying and dialogic aspects of epics and myths. He addresses these myths by mixing them with the experiences of contemporary life and childhood curiosity.

Pattanaik's *Kama vs Yama* (2011) begins with the anonymity that deities have suffered. He writes: "You would not recognize him if you saw him. But perhaps you would not see him at all" (*KY* 1). He refers to Kama, who was cursed to lose his "body and become invisible" (*KY* 1). The book introduces the readers to a young girl named Jayshree, who is hard working and studious. She did not like to go outside for playing, instead she focussed on her studies. But one day she did exactly the opposite of it and she came across Kama. As Lewis Carroll's Alice questions, what's the use of books without pictures (Carroll 25); as Rushdie's Haroun questions, what's the use of stories that aren't even true (*Haroun* 20); Kama too decentres Jayshree by asking, "What is the use of homework that you so love to do?" (Pattanaik, *KY* 10). Jayshree starts enjoying Kama's company and then she encounters Yama. Pattanaik juxtaposes Kama, who makes people forget everything, against Yama, who reminds people of everything. A situation comes when Jayshree is asked to choose between Kama and Yama.

> "Choose my way—do what you are supposed to do. Do your duties!" said Yama.
> "Choose my way—do what you feel like. Have fun!" said Kama.
> (Pattanaik, *KM* 40-41)

It is an interesting story in which several other mini-stories: like stories about Shekhchilli and Parvati, are told by Yama, and Kama tells a tale about Gangu Teli. The book asks us to decide, and this is very important. When Jayshree says, "I don't want to be Shekhcilli and I don't want to be Gangu Teli. I don't want to be either" (*KY* 36). Kama and Yama reply, "Then you will be Mitti ka Madho…or Gobar ki Gani" (*KY* 36), implying that children like them have no intelligence, cognitive ability and decision-making power. Jayshree innocently questioned, "Can I choose both of you?" (*KY* 46). She says "I want to be like Raja Bhoj, who balanced Kama and Yama" (*KY* 49). Thus, the book concludes with an important lesson for children: they must make their own choices, and sometimes the option is not between the binary. It is through the binary, balancing them.

The title *Saraswati's Secret River* (2011) is a pun, meaning: A river that belongs to Saraswati, and that Saraswati is a secret river. It is a satire on the modern education system. Mrs Sivakami, the principal of Madame Mira High School, encounters Goddess Saraswati wandering in the corridors of her school. The book is filled with humorous incidences when the school's principal is reduced to a student's stature before the Goddess, who is oblivious to many things. Saraswati says, "Since you have never heard of River Saraswati or seen it flowing in your school, you clearly would not notice if it was dying, now would you?" (Pattanaik, *SSR* 9). Goddess Saraswati puts Sivakami on the back of Hansa, her goose and takes her for a ride. Sivakami sees a river flowing with lotuses blooming and students studying under trees, learning their subjects in the lap of nature. Then Hansa questions Sivakami about her school teaching and indicates the loopholes: the students get bookish knowledge, they cannot correlate it with the real world, they lack curiosity, and students feel trapped in the school education system. Sivakami is shown the parrot-headed students, and she sees the scene changing, lotuses withering, the river shrinking in size, and the teachers and the student's heads getting replaced by parrots (*SSR* 30). Saraswati makes Sivakami realize there is no difference between parrots and students who can repeat words without understanding them. Hansa then "told the never-before-told story of the river that once flowed on earth." When the schools on either side of the River Saraswati lost the importance of curiosity and learning, the white lotuses began to droop and shrink and "withered away and became extinct" because they could not find curious students, and the river started to shrink in size and disappeared from the earth (*SSR* 31-32). Curious students can only rely on teachers for knowledge for a while. They must discover and experience things for themselves, as "Saraswati will never chase you; you have to chase Saraswati" (*SSR* 41). Pattanaik concludes that Saraswati does not flow outside anymore; it flows now inside the mind, so when a student is curious to learn, they can access knowledge (*SSR* 46).

In *The Girl Who Chose* (2016), Pattanaik writes in the introduction, "in the din of Ravana's cruelty and Rama's valour," the story of Sita is often overlooked (Pattanaik, *GWC* 2). He entitles this version of Ramayana as *The Girl Who Chose,* making Sita the protagonist and a central figure whose "choices" decided the trajectory of the actions and events in the epic narrative. He reveals that "Ravana does not care for other people's choices, while Rama never makes a choice...But Sita--she makes five choices...That is why, he says, Valmiki sometimes refers to the Ramayana as the Sita Charitam, the story of Sita" (Pattanaik, *GWC* 3). His craft reveals thorough research in his story-telling. Along with the story's development, Pattanaik describes and differentiates between various versions of the *Ramayana*. For *The Girl Who Chose,* he refers to *Valmiki's Ramayana* in Sanskrit, *Jain Ramayana* in Prakrit, *Kamban's Ramayana* in Tamil, Balaram Das' *Odia Ramayana*, Tulsi Das' *Ram-charit-manas*, Raghunath Mahanta's *Assamese Ramayana*, Priyadas' *Bhakti Ras Bodhini* in Hindi, *Adbhuta Ramayana*, folk versions of Ramayana known as *Ram-Katha*, Rama Panikar's *Ramayana* and Ramanujam Ezuthachan's *Adhyatma Ramayana* in Malayalam, and other Telugu, Kannada, Marathi retellings of the *Ramayana*, and in his book *Culture*, he mentions the lesser known Gujrati *Girdhar Ramayana* (205).

Pattanaik surprisingly shifts the "point of illumination" in the story. In a conventional understanding, as a reader, we presume that Sita's choice to marry Ram would be the first choice. But Pattanaik puts it differently for Sita: "I did not choose my husband; my father and Shiva's bow chose Ram for me. Sometimes in life we don't get to choose. But that's not always a bad thing" (*GWC* 16). The book is divided according to five choices made by her. When Ram is sentenced to *vanvas* (exile), Sita accompanies him. When Ram asks Sita to stay behind, she makes her first choice stating, "You are bound by rules, but not I. I am free to choose. I choose to follow you" (*GWC* 23). Her second choice was "to feed the hungry over her safety, would she do it" (*GWC* 43). Therefore, when Ravana comes disguised as a hermit, "Her act of goodness has a bad consequence" (*GWC* 43). Sita made her third choice when captured by Ravana and held captive in Lanka; she refused to go back with Hanuman. She says, "But I want my husband to cross the sea, come to Lanka, kill Ravana and rescue me himself, thus restoring the reputation of his family" (*GWC* 63). She made her fourth choice when Ram defeated Ravana and said to her, "I have saved my family's reputation. Now, Sita, you are free to go wherever you wish." She decided, "I want to go back with you" (*GWC* 80). This was followed by her *agnipariksha*. Sita makes her fifth choice when she brings up her sons Luv and Kush in the forest, and Ram encounters them. Ram asked Sita to return with him, but she refused: "I cannot come back to a city where reputation matters more than love. I will stay in the forest" (Pattanaik, *GWC* 99).

The most significant part of the book is the conclusion. Pattanaik writes that animals live by instinct: "The strong use strength, and the weak use intelligence to survive" (*GWC* 103). On the other hand, human beings are free to make their choices. He writes: "Human society is about choices and rules. Rules are meant to help others. When rules do not help people, we have the choice to challenge and change them" (*GWC* 106). Sita is unlike Ravana, who does not care for rules, or like Ram, who is obsessed with rules. She makes her choices. But she follows the rules when they help people and breaks them when they harm people. Therefore, she breaks the rule "that wives must stay in the house while husbands go to the forest, or the rule that says reputation is more important than truth, or the rule that wives must obey their husbands without question" (*GWC* 109). It is not so that life goes easy with all her decisions. All her choices suggest a tougher path and a hard struggle. Her choice is sane, sorted, humane and ethical. It is guided neither by her ego nor by social prestige. Her conscience drives her choice. She is able to strike a balance between the extreme selfishness of Ravana and the socially conscious/ socio-morality of Ram. In discarding both the extremes, she challenges the ease, comfort and luxury that could have easily come to her by her alternate choices.

Sita's decisions indicate that she has moved beyond a social parameter and gathered an inner strength to say "no." Her choices defy the conventional stereotyping of trying to make people happy around oneself, "appeasing" them.[2] Sita chooses the other way around. She chooses; she pays the price. She stands by her decisions. But she relies on her wisdom to make her choice. She is wronged, punished and ostracized, but she is not stupid, she is not silly, she is not wood, and most of all, she is not afraid. She decides, and she fights. Her fight is not like that between Kali and the rakshasa; her fight is between her identity and her position in society; her fight is for her place in her culture (which so far remained "monocultural," i.e. dominated by one mindset/ one faction/ one set of rules).

The book is not an answer; the book is a quest. Gossip is a story; fiction is a story; a report is a story; strategic intentions are stories; parables are stories; and mythological narratives are stories (Pattanaik, *Culture* 1-6). However, a story is different from a narration. As Pattanaik says: "The same story sounds different when the storyteller is different" (Pattanaik, *Culture* 6). Therefore, a story can only be narrated by a narrator, speaker, and/or author. In another article, "When Shiva Told a Story", Pattanaik questions the idea of truth. He connects the principles of rationality, science and history with the imagination. He says that "storytellers construct the world for us", and we cannot imagine "life without stories." Without stories, there will be "no hero or villain, no comedy or tragedy, no adventure, no heaven or hell, perhaps not even God" (Pattanaik, "When Shiva told a Story"). Pattanaik hints at an essential aspect of story-telling and the role of the narrator. The narrator acquires great significance because the narrator shifts the focus to the otherwise established norm or character. He accentuates acquiring not only the cultural but also a critical, pluralistic, empathetic and global understanding, and most of all, establishing a balance between these aspects. His objectives in his essays and essential writings are clearly visible, whereby he tries to address the "cultural lag" in Indian society and across the world. It is apparent that there are simple books for children or books based on moral lessons. But there has to be something in-between that can satiate the curiosity of a young mind. He tries to build a bridge between the traditional and the modern, cultural and global, and universal and individual. He states that we cannot have quick solutions to complex problems: "One has to go in stages. A simplistic answer initially, then more complex ones. There is no one standard answer. There are many answers, each suiting one's age, temperament, and emotional and intellectual maturity. This is Hindu pluralism (Pattanaik, "For the children").

Another aspect that children's literature makes very clear—be it Pattanaik's *The Boys Who Fought* and *The Girl Who Chose*—is the divide between the powerful and the weak. As an ethical and moral universe governed by justice, however imaginary or unreal it may appear, children's literature projects an inclination for righteousness. Kerry Mallan points out, "Children's literature is often considered important for developing (among other things) children's ethical and empathic understandings of society and its people" (105). This sense of righteousness has changed in contemporary times. The reading experience renders an introspection for one to realize which side of the divide one exists. The adult/child binary is precisely representative of the power/powerless binary. Therefore, children's literature makes the reader question which side of the divide an individual is. One has to subvert if one is on the weaker side (submissive), as seen in *The Girl Who Chose*. If one is on the side of power, one has to be generous and "take care of the meek", as seen in *The Boys Who Fought* (*BWF*

107).[3] But at the same time, Pattanaik's works warn against the side-effect of "narrative empathy" because a book fails to make concrete changes in society.[3]

The traditional method of interpretation of epic was a hegemonic identification with the powerful and the negation/ othering/ demonization of the powerless. Contemporary narratives move from Ram/Ravana binary suggestive of good/evil to powerful/powerless binary. The simple question is, with whom would you like yourself to be identified: With powerful or powerless? The characters with power are strong, and almost unparalleled. While characters who lack power are shown weak, accompanied by few friends who are as miserable as them. Pattanaik clearly points out this divide between powerful/powerless (male/female, rich/poor, caste/dalit, urban/rural, educated/uneducated, majority/minority, adult/child, young/old). Therefore, it can be said that it is not the person who looks terrible (which is to say looks wretched) that is Ravana; it is the person who does wrong is evil, howsoever, good-looking or well-established that person is. Thus, Children's Literature shows how a body imbued with power fails to look at itself, whereas others can see how it looks garbed in that sense of power.

Secondly, the difference is in syntagmatic cultures existing parallel to one another and in chronotypal cultures existing paradigmatically (Vij). Therefore, our understanding of myths, culture and ethics also gets transformed:

> For the believer, myth is real; it is sacred. This allows the myth to be communicated across generations and geography without distortion. Myth, however, is not static. Just as it informs history and geography, it is informed by history and geography. This is why beliefs and customs change over time. Myth once said people are unequal. Myth now says all people are equal. (Pattanaik, "There Is No Escape from Myth").

It is almost with this realization that one's reading experience in children's literature culminates in a decision-making process trying to identify the divide and party to which one conforms and the subsequent role one takes in society.

Notes:

1. Bakhtin differentiates between a novel and an epic. He states that an epic symbolizes 1) a national epic past, the "absolute past;" 2) National tradition; 3) An absolute epic distance that separates the epic world from contemporary reality (Bakhtin 13). On the other hand, the novel is "ever questing". It is grounded in contemporary culture. He says in the novel, there is a "zone of direct contact" built by personal experience, free creative imagination and inconclusive present-day reality (Bakhtin 39). This is also something that Ian Watt talks about the rise of the novel that emerged as a mouthpiece for the middle class in which writers satirized the society of its vices.
2. The word appeasement holds a weird sort of significance. Having read England's Policy of Appeasement during the 1930s, which the historians believed resulted if not in origin than in the growth of Nazism. The Second World War was the result of this policy of appeasement. No wonder how society and culture train the individual to follow this policy of appeasement right from parents, family, schools, marriage, workplace, and society. An individual is taught to appease and not to unappease.
3. M. C. Harrison explains that "narrative empathy" can "serve as an escape from the real-life ethical demands, allowing readers to congratulate themselves for feeling with fictional characters while simultaneously doing nothing for people in need" (259).

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Chinua Achebe's Alternative Narrative Paradigm: "Re-Storying" Africa through *Arrow of God*

Tyagraj Thakur

Abstract: Chinua Achebe in his narrative plan of "re-storying" Africa beyond its western definition tells the African story from a native perspective to 'contest' the derogatory and pejorative notions as well as misinterpretations and misrepresentations of Africa. Moreover, he creates an image of Africa by exploiting the indigenous resources and presenting them in the language of the colonizer in a way that it would not make another English novel on Africa; rather it would allow the African experience to shine through English. This two-fold task of contesting the western notions and creating the image of Africa through indigenous resources constitutes the basis of an alternative narrative paradigm in African literature. This paper examines Achebe's *Arrow of God* with a view to exploring his alternative narrative paradigm.

Key words: Re-storying, Alternative Narrative, African Identity

Chinua Achebe, eminent writer, and the founding father of African Literature in English, has been venerated for redefining African literature and culture through his novels and essays. His debut novel and magnum opus *Things Fall Apart*, published in 1958, has offered an alternative vision of Africa from the literary margins. For the first time in the history of African literature, a literary text could meet a twofold task of challenging the western notions of Africa and of projecting a new image of Africa. Since then, Achebe has been in the centre of intellectual and academic discussions. The novel presented, for the first time and from a native perspective, the plight of Africa under British colonization, thus integrating the socio-cultural history of Africa with the tragedy of Okonkwo - the protagonist of the novel. This story of the Igbo community in the colonial Africa underscores, at the same time, the rapacity of the western mission of civilization and the resistance of the Igbo people. It documents the deteriorating values in the African soil at the backdrop of a disintegrating community caused by the so-called mission of civilization by the west.

Apart from the colonial impact, there had been certain aspects of African life that fueled the deterioration of values like *Ubuntu* - the community life, casting away the social order in pursuit of individual goals. Achebe in his interview with U. R. Ananthamurthy discusses the existing contradictions in the pre-colonial Africa which the British imperial power exploited. Achebe in this interaction believes that, had there been some amount of care taken to address these contradictions through constructive criticism from within, the African society would have gained a social reordering and would also have avoided the communal disorientation and disintegration that the land suffered.

Things Fall Apart foregrounds the native culture while revisiting the past through its stories, myths, and proverbs. Achebe's mission to tell the story from a native perspective, to challenge the derogatory and pejorative notions as well as misinterpretations and misrepresentations of Africa, to contest the marginalized status of Africa as a Third World Nation and to create a space for the African voice not as Subalterns, but as equals are a few parameters that constitute an alternative narrative paradigm in African literature. This alternative narrative paradigm exploits the indigenous resources and projects them in the language of the colonizer in a way that it would not make another English novel on Africa; rather it would allow the African experience to shine through English. Achebe's fascination for the "scraps and pieces of information that he could gather about his ancestors," as mentioned by Maya Jaggi (10) developed into a desire to write his story as a resounding counter to the western notion of Africa as a land of savages. Achebe believes that the twofold task of contesting the derogatory western notions of Africa and creating an identity of Africa as an independent nation can be achieved through an indigenous African literary renaissance. He also believes that the African writer must project Africa on the global platform by bringing the issues of identity of a nation. In his last book titled *There Was a Country* (2012), Achebe suggests the role of an African writer. He states that an indigenous "African literary renaissance was overdue" (Achebe 52) and hence one of the major objectives of the writers was to challenge the stereotypes, myths, and the image of Africa and Africans by recasting them through stories–prose, poetry, essays, and books for children.

Achebe refines this idea of recasting through indigenous stories into a much more resonant term, "re-storying." In his essay entitled "Today, The Balance of Stories," he confronts the persistence of colonial views on Africa and believes that Africa needs stories told by Africans, and for such a project to begin, the native writers must look within the experiences of African cultural richness, engage these experiences in the socio-political discourse of Africa and reclaim the image of Africa. This literary endeavour of "decolonization," thus, reinstates the image of Africa as a land of culture and values, one that is necessarily different from the west, and tries to rescue African culture from being gobbled up by the European narrative. It is an attempt to rescue because the European narrative, especially as in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), projects Africa through a prejudiced viewpoint and dubs it a place of savages. Achebe in his *An Image of Africa* (1988) raises the issue of racism in Conrad's celebrated novel and charges him with dehumanization. Moreover, he regards the unquestioning western readers equally responsible for this prejudice. He finds the book "offensive and deplorable" as in Achebe's words, it "parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places," and narrates "a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question" (Achebe 16). As opposed to Conrad, Achebe in his novels portrays the Igbo people and their culture as a sophisticated and complex society predating the arrival of the Europeans. Noting that he is the first to address the issue of racism in Conrad's venerated and canonical text, Achebe says it is an indication of how willingly and blindly the western reader has accepted an imaginary and harmful depiction of a people. The question that Achebe asks to consider is this: "whether a novel, which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art". Thus, he begins the project of reclamation and restoration through "re-storying" while revisiting the stories, folklores, proverbs and giving a new lease of life by anchoring them in the literate modes of representation. This alternative narrative of stories in the *heathen* presented in the literate mode offers an insider's perspective on Africa.

Reception of Alternative Narrative:

Writing back to the imperial centre marks the beginning of postcolonial literature. Political activists as well as writers in colonized countries such as India and Africa have made resistance to colonialism a central issue in their writings. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) articulates an unremitting postcolonial vision of Africa. Similarly, in India, early twentieth century novelists like Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao have offered a narrative of colonial subjugation and postcolonial awakening. But these attempts, though extremely successful and registered as milestones in the pages of literary history, did not hypothesize about a native, pre-colonial past that was culturally richer and morally stronger than the colonizers. Texts of colonial resistance with literary and intellectual merit from the African soil before Achebe were few and far between. In the early twentieth century a few such attempts had been made by African literary figures, but these were confined to the vernacular medium and hence didnot have a global appeal. Thus, the literature of the early twentieth century Africa was without much impact. In this context Gikandi argues that it was Achebe who made the world read African literature with an impact and *Things Fall Apart* became a point of reference to verify the authenticity of the African-ness in other writings from Africa. Many writers before Achebe such as Amos Tutuola, Rene Maran, Paul Hazaume, and Sol Plaatje had laid down the foundation of the African tradition in literature, but none had the impact that Achebe left behind. In Gikandi's words, "none of these writers had the effect that Achebe had on the establishment and reconfiguration of an African literary tradition; none of them were able to enter and interrupt the institutions of exegesis and education the same way he did; none were able to establish the terms by which African literature was produced, circulated, and interpreted" (5).

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* with its merit of rendering the native perspective in the English language could easily write back to the empire. Certainly, it was subjected to critical indictments from the so-called "centre" for its form and language and was relegated to the literary margin because it did not meet the expectations of the western literary canon. It was a time when the European literature and academia were deliberating on the Post War hangover and trauma. India's independence in 1947 had already started a shift in the canon. This shift had already seeped into the agenda of postcolonial literature especially from the margin. Moreover, the West had started to explore possibilities of literary merits in the non-canon, not only because of the liberal attitude, but also because of the western literary agenda to comprehend and overpower the non-European episteme. The African narrative in this context received a momentum after Achebe's endeavour. His aim was to retell the native story, revisit the cultural history and rescue the race from the western derogatory narrative as well as the Orientalist misconception, but the narrative medium was English. This initiative to write from the middle, between history and modernity, gave a break to African literature. It was a mode of narrative which valorised attributes of pre-colonial African life. The hyperbolic portrayal of weird gods, eccentric practices, irrational beliefs, and ignorance in the western narrative on Africa had already created the grounds for the image of Africa as a place of darkness and savages. But Achebe interlaced these insignificant attributes with the lives lived in Africa, in proximity with nature. This system of life had its individual merit and more cohesive and collaborative social structure than what the west had been believing in for years. This narrative effort of rebuilding the identity of Africa by revisiting local resources buried in the pages of history created a new image of Africa. This was the driving force behind an alternative narrative paradigm.

This pattern of alternative narrative endeavoured to blend the issues of African life lived in a colonial setting with the literature of the time. African literature thus took off from the status of telling stories to that of enquiring about the issues of cultural disorientation, hegemony of language, social disintegration, identity crisis, tradition in the wake of modernity, political instability, and dehumanization through these stories. It questioned the western notions as well as the native irrationalities and advocated for a new nation through postcolonial hybridity. The stories having their roots in the cultural history of Africa addressed both Africa's native identity and its status as a Third World Nation. The stories of common African life gained a new perspective in Achebe's narrative whereby these stories engaged the native life with the socio-political changes in the colonial milieu. Moreover, these stories from local resources paved the way for a national consciousness. Achebe in his interview with Maya Jaggi puts forth his views on the strength of such a national story in the following words:

> [...] it is only the story that outlives the sound of war drums and the exploits of the brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. (14)

Telling the native story- the true story of Africa, became inevitable for Achebe because he could not buy the clichéd story in school textbooks; that "white people were surrounded by savages but managed to come out on top." Subsequently, reading Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (first published in 1939), he realized that the book "was not talking about a vague place called Africa but about southern Nigeria" and observing it closely he found that the story was not true and it was quite possible that the other stories were not true either. To address this concern Achebe in *Home and Exile* (2001) states metaphorically, "Until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter" (73). Thus, his postcolonial mission of writing back to the empire set the agenda for offering another perspective on Africa that would tell the story of Africa from inside Africa and finally bring in the balance of stories. In Achebe's words:

> Of all the things I remember, that was the clearest: I must not make this story look nicer than it was. I went out of my way to gather all the negative things, to describe them as I think they were - good and bad - and ordinary human beings as neither demons nor angels. I dare anybody to say these people are not human. (Jaggi 11)

Similarly, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her epoch-making speech entitled "The Danger of a Single Story" underscores how believing in one story without paying attention to other perspectives of the same story can harm our belief systems. One story can dehumanize a race, destroy a country and the other perspective can reinstate a culture, recreate the destroyed land. Thus, it is essential to refrain oneself from this danger of a single story, and hence, it becomes imperative on one's part to subscribe to multiple stories. This narrative revolution to enquire into the truth behind stories while retelling the stories in the light of new perspectives and native insights brought a turning point to the history of postcolonial literary rendition and stimulated the alternative paradigm.

Achebe's mission of "re-storying" is premised on certain issues that have played significant roles in the shaping of Africa. The pentad of novels by him such as *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God, A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* record and address these issues while situating literature in the socio-political discourse of the time. The five novels map the development of the African society ranging from its pre-colonial past in *Things Fall Apart,* followed by disintegrating social values and the cultural decay in *Arrow of God,* through socio-political instability in *No Longer at Ease* and the emergence of a post-independence corrupt society in *A Man of the People* to the final breakdown of the government and the eruption of the Biafra civil unrest in *Anthills of the Savannah.* In her introduction to "The African Trilogy," Adichie observes that Achebe's texts are a neatly thought-out plan to bring in three generations together which create a full and beautifully nuanced arc, a human chronicle of the cultural and political changes that brought about what is now seen as the modern African state. These texts taken together constitute a thread where the African consciousness takes birth in the midst of socio-cultural changes while confronting the colonial subjugation, grows with challenges of political instabilities, negotiates between the cultural past and modernity, and shapes the African nation. By weaving such issues into his narrative Achebe tries to address the question of African identity in the forum of world literature and seeks to educate his readers with a native story which is quite different from the western narrative. He asserts that the African past with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. Thus, Achebe makes a postcolonial enquiry into issues like dehumanization, subaltern identity and hybridity, through his alternative patterns of narrative and seeks political independence as well as equality of status on the global platform.

Revisiting *Arrow of God*:

Arrow of God, published in 1964, has not achieved the celebrated status of *Things Fall Apart,* but it offers an insightful account of African life in the postcolonial context. Considered a sequel to *Things Fall Apart,* this novel is a poignant delineation of how a community disintegrated under the impact of missionary interventions. A novel of disintegration, it is the tale of the troubled African values. Set in the context of waning faiths in Ulu – the native god as well as in the Chief Priest, this novel portrays the emerging individualism and consumerism with the arrival and missionary spirit of Christianity. The exposure to an alternative way of life and the aspiration for improved economic status fostered by the new religion called for conversion to the new religion. However, the reluctance in the old generation in embracing the new set of rituals while abdicating native ones and the aspiration in the young generation to earn the 'white man's money' allowed the colonizers to take advantage of the situation and spread the missionary agenda that led to a rift between the two generations. The Western rational approach met the needs of the natives while it weakened the native values. The desire for individual pursuits made religion a matter of convenience rather than conviction. In such a troubled state the natives adapted themselves with the changing socio-political dynamics.

The beauty of Achebe's narrative in *Arrow of God* is that his concluding chapter reaffirms Ezeulu's initial reflections on the identity of being the chief priest of Ulu. Ezeulu's apprehensions of the danger posed by the changing socio-cultural milieu give us an idea of Achebe's plan to revisit the history to reinvent the native past:

> It was true he named the day for the feast of Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know soon enough who the real owner was. No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival- no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So, it could not be done. He would not dare. (3)

Achebe's narrative here hints at how the status of an individual with a certain social dignity has registered a sharp fall, precipitating in the individual's identity crisis. Such a story of a withering community does not only offer a note on the history of a race, but also evokes a nationalist renaissance by weaving the story into a cultural history.

Achebe's desire to bring a renaissance in Africa is shown in his attempt to blend folkloric base of African life with its rich fund of proverbs and folklores represented in the literate mode of the novel. These proverbs and folklores from the pages of history connect the story with contemporary socio-political dialogue. The sentence from *Things Fall Apart,* "among the Ibos proverbs are the palm wine with which words are eaten" asserts the significant role of language rooted in the native culture of the African society (6). Thus, throughout the novel Achebe takes recourse to proverbs and folklores in order to import the cultural history into the narrative. *Arrow of God* is, in this context, a befitting example. The inclusion of proverbs and folklores in this novel motivates the nationalist agenda by aggravating the buried values in the stories. The fact that a simple deliberation could be immensely proverbial and educative in the Igbo land can be seen in the following:

> At that time, when lizards were still in ones and twos, the whole people assembled and chose me to carry their new deity. I said to them:
> "Who am I to carry this on my bare head? A man who knows that his anus is small does not swallow an udala seed."
> They said to me:
> "Fear not. The man who sends a child to catch a shrew will also give him water to wash his hand." .....
> I said to him: "Is it you Eke?"
> He replied: "It is I, Eke, the One that makes a strong man bite the earth with his teeth."
> .....
> I said to him: "Is it you Oye across my path?"
> He said: It is I, Oye, the One that began cooking before Another and so has more broken pots."
> .....

> I said: "Is it you Afo?"
> He said: "It is I. Afo, the great river that cannot be salted"
> I replied: "I am Ezeulu, the hunchback more terrible than a leper"
> Afo shrugged and said: "Pass, your own is worse than mine." (73)

These proverbs may not stir most of the natives of today, because of the distancing that has occurred over time, but these proverbs preserve the memory of the natives. These proverbs retell a story and let the natives think whether to follow modernity and become rootless or to restore the cultural history along a middle path involving fusion, mixing and crossover. Achebe suggests this middle space where the Western model of economic and scientific progression can be achieved while being actively rooted in the African values.

This pursuit of hybridity has been a necessary call of the hour because this is what reconciles postcolonial objectives of contesting the western notions and creating an image of Africa. Hybridity seems fascinating because of a few factors, predominantly the Western education, the white man's money, and Christianity- the white man's religion. In the passage of time, even the older generation has realised the possibilities of better life through education which the natives had never been exposed to. It is in fact the ability to comprehend the modern system of knowledge through reading and writing that has made the white man so powerful, more powerful than Ezeulu – one of the wisest men from the Igboland and the arrow in god's bow. Ezeulu, while being taken by the messenger from the guardroom to the office, realizes the advantages of being a white man. The first thought that came to him on seeing the white man writing with his left hand was to "wonder whether any black man could ever achieve the same mastery over book as to write with his left hand (174)." This ability to master the book and write in the left hand, reckons Ezeulu, is probably the secret of success which he feels he lacks, making him see the future of the next generation in the fold of education. Over his interaction with Oduche – one of his sons whom he had sent to the Church to learn what the white man knew while being his eyes there, Ezeulu emphasizes, "a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time," knowing that the days to come were going to be difficult for those who could not embrace the change. In his words:

> When I was in Okperi I saw a young white man who was able to write his book with the left hand. From his actions I could see that he had very little sense. But he had power; he could shout in my face; he could do what he liked. Why? Because he could write with his left hand. That is why I called you. I want you to learn and master this man's knowledge so much that if you are suddenly woken up from sleep and asked what it is you will reply. (191)

But this education, being a part of the white man's religion, had certain aspects that challenged the native value system. Western episteme having its genealogy in a so-called rational society did not conform to certain belief-systems of the Igboland. Thus, the natives had to rethink on their value systems in order to embrace western education. Achebe in fact acts as a critical insider with respect to native superstitions and projects the evident loopholes of the native culture, especially those which have not been questioned in the name of a tradition. He in fact analyses and defies the age-old superstitious practices that do not stand the test of scientific and logical propositions as well as the requirements of a modern yet culturally rooted life. In the event of catching the python Oduche finds himself judged a sinner as the snake in the Igbo community is considered a symbol of sacred spirit whereas his learning from the Church puts it simply as a poisonous reptile. Thus, he opens the box built by Moses and locks the snake inside with a relief. In Oduche's words, "the python would die for lack of air, and he would be responsible for its death without being guilty of killing it, which seemed to him a very happy compromise" (51). However, on the uses of modern knowledge that did not affect religious sentiments the acceptance of modernity was rather a liberating experience for the natives. Ezeulu's lack of belief in the use of gun powder to frighten the spirits away and his faith in herbs (medicine) show him as being inclined towards a reason based social order. The new religion has drawn its fair share of flak in the Igboland, but at the same time the new religion has been successful by showing a different and modern lifestyle.

This dilemma over whether to uphold what the people had been believing in for generations or to "dance the prevalent dance" left the community in the crossroads of tradition and modernity, finally leading to the opening up of a hybrid space. This space got an additional impetus by the white man's money. When the old generation had already been introduced to the power of knowledge the young Africa was being induced to the power of the white man's money. A shift from cultural root for the old orthodox tended to be a difficult compromise, but the young Africa took it as an opportunity for material possibilities in life. Embracing the trend seemed to be a wise decision as it could offer a sense of possibility. This stand of the colonized subject's deep wish to see oneself in the colonizer's position confirms the postcolonial aspiration of role-reversal. The colonizer certainly played the master's role initially, but in turn it offered the colonized African youth to find oneself a life of individual prosperity and an escape from the generations of slavery in the name of culture and community. This postcolonial role-reversal in the context of *Arrow of God* has been suggested during Ezeulu's interaction with Nwodika's son in the guardroom. In reply to Ezeulu's question, Nwodika's son comes out with the postcolonial aspiration for an alternative lifestyle:

> … a man of sense does not go on hunting little bush rodents when his age mates are after big games. He told me to leave dancing and join in the race for the white man's money. I was all eyes. Ekemezie called me Nwabueze and I said yes it was my name. He said the race for the white man's money would not wait till tomorrow or till we were ready to join; if the rat could not run fast enough it must make way for the tortoise. (170-171)

The quest for an alternative lifestyle did not just act as an implicit revolt against the tradition; rather the tradition seeped into the alternative pattern. When the ambitious Africa was chasing a better way of life imagining itself in the colonizer's position, the traditional Africa was not far off in a similar pursuit. In fact, the tradition started to acknowledge the white man's affluence and infused it into traditional practices. Thus, they could neither cut-off themselves from the cultural roots nor could they learn the modern way, but were caught in between. Achebe's narrative negotiates between these issues of tradition and modernity. In the episode of an extravagant sacrifice Achebe suggests such a hybrid order where the tradition starts to open itself to modernity:

> Instead of usual white chick they were two fully grown-up cocks. The other objects were normal; young and yellowish palm fronds cut from the summit of the tree, a clay bowl with two lobes of kola nut inside it and a piece of white chalk. But the two white men only saw these objects later what caught their eyes immediately on reaching the sacrifice was the English florin. (Achebe 162)

The revolt of tradition against modernity began with the negation of new religion and the white man, but at the same time the natives believed in the power of modernity to bring economic independence and prosperity. On the other hand, distancing from the cultural roots and values began with the distrust in the ability of tradition to meet the economic implications of the time. Achebe's narrative renders an imperative reflection on the deteriorating faith in the tradition in the following excerpt:

> "Let me tell you one thing. A priest like Ezeulu leads a god to ruin himself. It has happened before."
>
> "Or perhaps a god like Ulu leads a priest to ruin himself." (215)

This waning faith in tradition received added impetus from the so-called mission of 'civilizing' the native where the missionaries took advantage of the loopholes of the tradition, particularly the superstitions prevalent in the African community and created a space for Christianity. In the sarcasm of Ezeulu, the Church bell said "leave your yam, leave your cocoyam and come to Church" (44). Here the colonized subject was caught between the two extremes of economic possibilities. Arun Mohanty in his essay on *Things Fall Apart* argues that Christianity with its colonial and imperial interests unsettled the tribal habitat and led to its disintegration and dislocation. It examines how the church has been an agent of division in the convention and faith followed by the collapse of a native culture. However, unlike Okonkwo's violent confrontation in *Things Fall Apart*, the natives in *Arrow of God* tried to deterritorialise the differences, rather integrated these extremes towards a symbiotic compromise.

Indigenous images in creating the image of Africa:

Eminent scholar and critic of postcolonial studies Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak in her acclaimed article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" articulates the subjectivity of the West in determining the knowledge of "the Other" as a commodity. Spivak finds that unless the colonial discourse is integrated into the study of the so-called Subaltern it would always suffice the Western requirements of knowledge and the knowledge in the "heathen" will always remain unexplored, thereby the Subaltern cannot speak. The West has labelled the tag of "third world" on the countries which were subjects of colonization. This tag, while creating a derogatory image of certain blocs of the world such as Africa, alienates the peoples concerned from the political and economic dialogues of the world. Distinguished critic Fredric Jameson takes the term "third world" as an apt expression and uses it "in an essentially descriptive sense" (Jameson 67).

However, in order to enable the so-called "other" to articulate its knowledge and to create an image of Africa above the tag of Third World, Achebe retells the African history from the insider's perspective. His retelling involves a genuine insider's perspective when he juxtaposes Africa with its perceived image in the western notion. He takes up the western form of "novel" as a means to cultural representation. In the literary interactions, literatures from "the other" are labelled "third world" because despite taking-up a western form these literatures do not subscribe to the idea of a Eurocentric canon. Notable literary scholar Chidi Amuta analyses Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the light of preliterate socio-economic situation of Africa and shows how the aesthetic potential in the then Africa was doomed to public scorn, open condemnation, and alienation whereas manual labour and physical prowess were considered to be signs of a successful and productive man. He studies *Arrow of God* as a text which demystifies the man-god relation that works as a binding agent in African culture. Amuta discards the western interpretation of Africa and provides a picture of cultural nationalism while juxtaposing the aforesaid novels of Achebe. Similarly, Chinweizu et al undo the established definition of the novel and analyze the definitions of the terms "civilization" and "man in society" as West-driven which do not go with that of the African ways of life. They negate the colonization of knowledge by western ideas and the capricious interpretations of African culture – a culture which is self-sustained. Thus, in their endeavour to decolonize African literature from the western perspective they take into consideration *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* as authentic voices that define the native better than the west.

In the project of "re-storying" narrative imagery plays a significant role as it offers an analogy of events of life in relation to a distant parallel in the native life. Devising imagery certainly helps in understanding a point of view with better clarity and totality; it also brings beauty to the rendition. However, in case of Achebe's rendition imagery seems not merely an artistic device of rendition; rather it acts as a powerful tool to evoke the desired goal of "contest and create." Images are repeated throughout the narrative with an intention to visualize the past, revisit history with utmost intensity and sensitize the reader to draw a parallel in the contemporary socio-political structure. Frequently used images like kolanut, yam and palm-wine are attributed not just as food; rather each of these is associated with certain cultural cue. It is quite evident from Achebe's narratives that these three images have been instrumental to connect the reader with the African-ness. These images have their roots in the cultural history of Africa and using these Achebe finds a common ground to unite the small pockets and tribes of Africa and subsequently devises these to embark upon the project of nation formation. *Yam* has been projected as the national crop of Africa on which the economy and livelihood depends. Similarly, kolanut has been used as a cultural hallmark. Moreover, palm-wine is the life-giving agent of African society. The food imagery is a vehicle for revisiting history. At the juncture of degrading value-systems, socio-cultural disintegration, political instability and rapid increase in the capitalist economy, Achebe uses these images as devices to unite the natives in a common thread of history and memory. Moreover, he uses these images with an aim to create the image of Africa as an independent nation, a nation that has stepped into the mainstream current of economic development with its roots intact in history.

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The Absurd Man in Colonial India: A Critique of Existential Alienation in Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*

Ankita Panda

Abstract: Colonial India was a period of immense socio-political upheaval marked by the imposition of foreign rule and the clash of cultures. In this context, the concept of the absurd man, as discussed by existentialist philosophers, gains relevance in understanding the existential predicament faced by individuals in colonial India. The paper delves into the notion of the absurd man in colonial India, exploring the alienation, existential angst, and search for meaning experienced by individuals trapped in the contradictions and absurdities of colonial rule. It illuminates the intricate complexities surrounding the question of identity, the quest for meaning, and the incessant search for authenticity within a society grappling with disruption and oppressive colonial forces. Within this frame of reference, Ahmed Ali's novel *Twilight in Delhi* (2010) offers a poignant exploration of the societal dynamics and cultural values prevalent in the waning years of Delhi's Mughal era and elucidates how the protagonist Mir Nihal embodies the essence of the absurd man, grappling with the disintegration of cherished traditional values, disillusionment with the promises of modernity, and an overwhelming sense of existential crisis resulting from cultural and personal alienation. Throughout the novel, Mir Nihal and other characters are confronted with the paradoxical demand of assimilating into a system that devalued their cultural heritage, rendering their very existence futile. Undertaking a rigorous critique of Ali's depiction of the absurd man in colonial India will help to gain insights into the complexities of the human condition and the enduring spirit of resilience in the face of oppressive systems.

Key words: The absurd man, Colonialism, Existentialism, Alienation, Identity, Ahmed Ali

"[I]n one sense, if I were asked for a definition of myself, I would say that I am one who waits; I investigate my surroundings, I interpret everything in terms of what I discover, I become sensitive" (Frantz Fanon 91).

When Fanon penned these lines in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1953), he proffers an introspective insight that serves a pivotal point for understanding the intricate dimensions of existential alienation. In this one statement he elicits a definition of the self ("if I were asked"), the eternal vigilance that he himself brings to bear on that enterprise ("I am one who waits" / "I become sensitive"), and above all, the degree to which all that he discovers depends ultimately on a fervent interpretation of his surroundings, material, historical, and cultural. Drawing upon Frantz Fanon's insights, one can understand the impact of colonialism on the psyche of the colonized. Fanon, an influential theorist on the effects of colonialism, describes the process of alienation inflicted upon the colonized subject, who is caught between their native culture and the dominant colonial power. This experience is palpable in Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (2010), as characters navigate the tension between their Indian heritage and the imposed British norms. Ahmed Ali is a Pakistani writer, translator, and diplomat. He was born in Delhi (British India) in 1910 and later migrated to Pakistan after the partition of 1947. He is well known for his novels, poetry, and translations of classic works of literature. His writings often portrayed the social and political issues of his time, exploring themes of identity, cultural conflict, and the human experience.

The colonial era in India was a time of profound dislocation and existential turmoil, as the Indian subcontinent grappled with the forces of imperial domination and cultural upheaval. In the midst of this intricate tapestry of historical events and social transformations, Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (2010) emerges as a poignant critique of the absurdity and alienation experienced by individuals in colonial India. As Albert Camus once observed, “The absurd is born out of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (Camus). In Ali’s magnum opus, he explores the multifaceted dimensions of an absurd man, trapped in the intricate web of colonialism, tradition, and modernity, presenting a scathing analysis of the disintegration of identity and the search for meaning in an alienating environment.

Twilight in Delhi (2010) provides insightful reflections on the human condition, the struggle for meaning, and the impact of external forces on individual lives. In this context, the concept of absurdity can be seen as relevant to the experiences of colonized communities. The absurd, as Albert Camus defines in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (2000), is the fundamental tension between the human search for meaning and the indifference and irrationality of the universe. Camus believed that humans are constantly seeking meaning and purpose in life, but ultimately face the absurdity of existence, where they are confronted with the realization that life has no inherent meaning or purpose. So, once we realize the absurdity of human experience then to live with this understanding Camus envelops the concept of the absurd man which originated from his existential philosophy, particularly in his influential book *The Myth of Sisyphus* (2000) and his novel *The Stranger* (1973).

Camus uses the mythical character Sisyphus, who is condemned to an eternal cycle of pushing a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down, as a symbolic representation of the human condition. Despite the seemingly futile nature of Sisyphus's task, Camus argues that we should envision him as content, as he defies the absurdity of his existence through his perseverance and acceptance. Sisyphus's struggle serves as a reflection of the universal human experience, “No purpose, no reason, just meaningless repetition” (Camus). According to Camus, if Sisyphus, like the absurd man, embraces his ceaseless struggle and acknowledges that this is how he will spend eternity, without any hope for improvement or preference, he will no longer view it as a form of punishment. If Sisyphus desires something greater, his eternal struggle becomes devastating. However, if Sisyphus relinquishes expectations and accepts the absurd, one can imagine him finding happiness in his situation. Similarly, by accepting the absurdity of our own lives, embracing the constant conflicts and struggles, we too can discover happiness within the absurd.

To delve deeper, there are three aspects that define the absurd man. Firstly, most people attempt to escape the truth of absurdity through suicide or philosophical suicide. However, the absurd man rebels against these instincts. He acknowledges and embraces the inherent absurdity of life, accepting that the world lacks inherent purpose or meaning, yet he still possesses an inherent desire to seek it out. The absurd individual is conscious of the conflict, recognizes the contradiction, and chooses to coexist with it. Secondly, the absurd person embraces his freedom. He understands that he is not bound by fate or a predetermined destiny, and he does not strive to create a predefined role for his self. Instead, he lives in the present moment, experiencing each moment as it comes. In the realm of existentialism, the concept of absurdity is closely intertwined with the notion of freedom and personal responsibility. Despite the absurd nature of the world, individuals are viewed as having the freedom to make choices and take responsibility for their own existence. It is through this freedom that they can discover meaning and purpose, even within a seemingly meaningless and irrational universe. This calls for individuals to confront the tension, make choices, and find significance in their subjective experiences and actions, even in the absence of any inherent or objective purpose. The final aspect is that the absurd person approaches the world in an amoral manner, although they live a life filled with passion. They seek to fill their existence with great moments, embracing passion and pleasure. They live according to their own desires, prioritizing the present moment without concerning themselves with the future.

While Albert Camus did not specifically address the figure of the absurd man in the context of colonialism and his concept of the absurd is more concerned with the human condition in general and the existential struggle to find meaning in an inherently irrational and chaotic world. However, it is worth noting that Albert Camus had a complex relationship with colonialism due to his Algerian heritage. Camus was born in French Algeria in 1913, during the time when Algeria was under French colonial rule. Growing up as a pied-noir, a term used to describe French settlers in Algeria, he experienced the privileges and benefits of the colonial system, which provided education and opportunities that, were often denied to the indigenous Algerian population. Moreover, Camus was deeply aware of the injustices and contradictions of colonialism. He witnessed the harsh treatment and oppression faced by the indigenous Algerians, who were subjected to discrimination, dispossession of land, and a denial of their rights. These experiences instilled in Camus a sense of empathy and an acute awareness of the ethical dilemmas posed by colonial domination. His philosophical ideas can provide a lens through which one can analyze and interpret the existential struggles and sense of absurdity experienced by individuals and communities under colonial rule. Colonialism and the experiences of the colonized could be seen as exemplifying aspects of the absurd.

When examining the figure of the absurd man in the colonial context, one can explore how the existential philosophy and themes of absurdity intersect with the dynamics of colonialism and its impact on individuals and societies. Colonialism, with its imposition of foreign systems, values, and structures, often disrupted and undermined the existing cultural, social, and political frameworks of colonized societies. This disruption and dislocation can be seen as an absurd condition, where the colonized people find themselves thrust into a situation where their traditional values and ways of life are deemed inferior or inconsequential. Understanding the complexities of colonialism and its impact on culture is essential for acknowledging the lasting effects on the absurd colonial man. Based on this, Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (2010) is a powerful and thought-provoking novel that explores the complex dynamics of colonial India through the lens of existential alienation. Set in the early 20th century India, the novel delves into the lives of a Muslim family in Delhi, during the decline of the Mughal Empire and the rise of British colonial rule. The story follows the life of Mir Nihal, an elderly nobleman who finds himself adrift in a society that no longer adheres to the principles and customs that once provided him with a sense of meaning and purpose. Mir Nihal, the protagonist of the novel, embodies the archetype of the absurd man, a concept rooted in existential philosophy, whose struggles reflect the existential alienation faced by individuals in a rapidly transforming society. When one of the characters, Asghar from the novel expresses that "There are sorrows and miseries which grip you in their claws, and there seems no escape from them. We struggle, but we cannot get out of the net which fate has caste about us" (Ali 31), he aptly conveys the absurd struggle of the individual.

The figure of the absurd man emerged as a response to the contradictory and alienating conditions imposed by colonial rule. There are various factors that contributed to the emergence of the absurd man in the colonial context. Colonialism brought together diverse cultures, often resulting in a clash between the colonizers and the colonized. The clash led to a cultural disruption resulting in a loss of identity and pride in indigenous tradition. The process of cultural disintegration, marked by the imposition of Western values remains a significant aspect of the colonial legacy. The colonizers typically aimed to assert their superiority and promote their own culture and values, considering them as more civilized or advanced than those of the indigenous populations. *Twilight in Delhi* (2010) illustrates the clash between traditional Indian values and the forces of modernity. The protagonist's struggle to reconcile his religious and cultural traditions with the allure of Western education and progress epitomizes this conflict. Mir Nihal's sons, Asghar and Bahadur, represent the younger generation that readily embraces Westernization, further exacerbating the existential alienation experienced by Mir Nihal. The tension between tradition and modernity serves as a metaphor for the existential dilemmas faced by individuals grappling with the disorienting effects of colonialism.

One of the key mechanisms through which cultural disintegration occurred was the suppression of indigenous languages, traditions, and knowledge systems. Colonizers frequently imposed their own languages as the dominant medium of communication and education, marginalizing or even outlawing native languages. This linguistic dominance played a significant role in eroding cultural identities, as language is a crucial aspect of cultural expression and transmission. Mir Nihal laments the loss of Persian as the language of literature and courtly culture, replaced by English as the language of progress and administration. He experiences alienation from his own native languages. Initially, their indigenous languages were marginalized and excluded from participating in important aspects of colonial administration, economics, and education. This exclusionary policy continues even in the postcolonial era. Furthermore, they are indoctrinated with the notion that only the language of the dominant center, namely English, possesses the capacity to comprehend and articulate the intricate nuances of their present experience, characterized by both colonialism and modernity. We see that Mir is deeply attached to the traditions, customs, and values of the old Delhi culture and he is distressed by the erosion of the traditional way of life brought about by British rule.

The rejection or destruction of indigenous culture was not the only mode colonialism adopted in its cultural quest. The colonizers attempt to establish an identity with the colonized through the appropriation of the indigenous cultural practices but it was only a mode of seeking legitimacy. Native traditions were often denigrated, marginalized and indigenous populations were encouraged or coerced into adopting the customs and practices of the colonizers. This cultural assimilation further deepened rather than minimize the cultural differences between the colonizer and the colonized leading the colonial man to face the absurdity of assimilation. He faces the paradox of attempting to conform to the colonizers' expectations while also trying to retain a sense of his own cultural identity. The absurd man appears as individuals struggle with the absurdity of trying to reconcile their own cultural identities with the foreign values and expectations imposed upon them. This tension between conformity and authenticity gave rise to a profound sense of existential absurdity. The absurd man is often caught between two conflicting identities: the indigenous cultural identity and the imposed colonial identity. The absurdity arises from the dissonance between the colonized person's authentic self and the expectations placed upon them by the colonizers. This identity crisis contributed to feelings of alienation, fragmentation, and a sense of rootlessness.

In the novel, Asghar, the son of Mir Nihal, who represents the younger generation, embraces the changes brought by British. He adopts Western clothing, education and lifestyle, leading to a feeling of estrangement from his traditional roots. On the other hand, Mir Nihal also deals with a similar feeling of estrangement towards Delhi in the crucial scene where he is dragged to Coronation Durbar by his sons, the elderly man sits on the steps of the Jama Masjid and contemplates Delhi's past, present and future as the King's procession passes. Instead of being interpolated as a happy and content British subject like many other observers, he is filled with shame and disgust as he witnesses the British usurping Indian practices to legitimize their rule and the docile acceptance of this appropriation by the "native rajahs and nawabs". This inheres in the essential difficulties that are faced by the individual in producing a coherent account of self in relation either to other individuals or to a community.

The loss of cultural heritage, knowledge systems, and traditional practices has often resulted in a sense of cultural dislocation and a struggle to reclaim or reconstruct cultural identities. As Edward Shills has pointed out, they developed a cultural provinciality and tried to order their lives on the strength of the received cultural values and practices. Such a situation is perhaps the worst pathology of colonial domination, as it deprives the subjects, the right to their own culture without actually providing full access to the other. It is a cultural tragedy from which the colonial subject could emancipate them only through transgression. But then the ideology of domination is so strong that a large number of them ended up in unmitigated despair.

Another important aspect to concentrate on is that colonialism was characterized by an inherent power imbalance, with the colonizers holding superior political, economic, and social power over the colonized. The absurd man found himself trapped in a system where his agency and self-determination were curtailed, leading to a sense of powerlessness and existential angst. Colonialism created a power dynamic that left the colonized population feeling marginalized, disempowered, and oppressed. The loss of political and economic autonomy, coupled with the denial of basic rights and freedoms, contributed to a deep sense of despair. Colonizers often extracted natural resources, established plantations, or implemented other exploitative economic systems that disrupted traditional modes of subsistence and economic practices. In Ahmed Ali's novel the arrival of the Britishers marks a significant turning point in the narrative, resulting in the disempowerment of the Mughals. They are relegated to a subordinate position in their own land. The novel captures the profound impact of colonialism on the Mughal empire. They are stripped of their former glory and are reduced to figures of nostalgia, clinging onto remnants of their once-dominant position. The colonized individuals faced a relentless struggle against a system that undermined their dignity, suppressed their aspirations, and limited their opportunities. Existential angst emerged as individuals confronted the existential questions of meaning, purpose, and identity in the face of colonial domination. The rupture caused by the collision of indigenous traditions and values with the dominant colonial culture led to a crisis of identity and a profound sense of alienation. Individuals were forced to question their place in society and the authenticity of their cultural identities. Mir Nihal, for instance, experiences a deep sense of despair as he witnesses the decline of the Mughal way of life and the erosion of his cultural heritage. The loss of meaning and purpose in his life is perceptible as he struggles with the absurdity and futility of his existence. This is also evident in the younger generation, like Mir Nihal's son Asghar, who feel torn between embracing Westernization and observing the cultural authenticity. This internal struggle reflects the profound existential angst experienced by individuals who navigate the contradictory forces and expectations of colonialism. The despair and existential angst in colonial India were not limited to individuals but extended to the collective consciousness of communities.

Mir Nihal's existential condition results in being the victim of an alienating world and still staying as a central and indispensable part of it. Albert Camus rightly remarked, "For the absurd man, it is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing. Everything begins with lucid indifference" (Camus). Alienation emerges as a consequence of the comprehensive process of colonizing the society and mind, manifesting itself across linguistic, cultural, historical, and existential dimensions. It typically denotes a state of solitude or detachment, wherein an individual feels dissociation from one or a group. It entails a negative disposition characterized by feelings of discontent and cynical beliefs towards a particular social environment. When employing a subjective definition, alienation is perceived as an experiential reality for the individual, independent of external judgments. As a concept in the realm of social science, alienation necessitates the conceptualization of individuals as complex personalities, rather than simply adhering to a set of universal human ideals or basic needs. Each person, shaped by their cumulative life experiences, acquires motives, values, self-perceptions, and other distinct attributes that form their personality. Within every social context, individuals are confronted with a range of obligations they must fulfill, as well as the responses they receive from others. These interactions are influenced by their social roles and their position within reward, authority, and status structures. The extent to which an individual finds fulfillment and develops a sense of belonging in a given situation hinges upon the compatibility between their unique needs, values, and self-image with the demands of that context. Alienation arises as disillusionment arises from society, originating from discordance between an individual's characteristics and the prevailing structural conditions they encounter within that environment.

Although alienation has been widely depicted as a fundamental characteristic of modern life, it encompasses distinct manifestations. The first type is rooted in Marxism, where alienation refers to a sense of estrangement from one's labor and the rewards it brings. According to the Marxist perspective, individuals feel disconnected from the results of their own work. The second form of alienation is existentialist in nature and was developed by European philosophers and writers such as Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, Heidegger, and others during the 19th and 20th centuries. This philosophical understanding of alienation places human existence at the core of all human experiences. It revolves around the idea that individuals are estranged from their own authentic selves. A line from Camus' novel *The Stranger* (1973) captures the essence of existentialist alienation: "He doesn't easily attach or identify with other people" (Camus 14). This highlights the profound detachment from the world, society, its norms, values, and perspectives that underpins existentialist alienation. The existentialist approach emerges as a reaction in favor of individualism, subjectivity, introspection, and emotional experience. It is not a philosophy of things, but a philosophy of the human condition. The core tenet of existentialism is that "Existence precedes essence," emphasizing the primacy of existence over predefined notions of human essence. The existentialists argue that alienation is primarily an internal phenomenon, representing the individual's estrangement from their own self.

In the colonial context, the process of alienation begins as soon as an individual assumes the role and marginalized position of a "colonial subject." This designation of a "colonial subject" goes beyond being a mere political identity imposed by imperial powers onto their subjects; instead, it entails a complex and gradual psychological transformation leading to the adoption of new subjectivities. The contours of these subjectivities are shaped in the external, imperial, and estranged world of the Other. The colonial subjects feel compelled to aspire towards this subjectivity, which becomes a dominant cognitive framework for perceiving the external world and determining their preferences and relationships between their inner and outer realities. They find themselves constantly commanded, directed, and influenced by the Other that resides persistently within them. Consequently, the colonial subject experiences a sense of alienation from their local, genuine, and authentic self. The protagonist, Mir Nihal wrestles with his own conscience, torn between adhering to societal expectations or his own belief.

The notion of the "colonial subject" is compelled to remain confined within the constructed "present" dictated by the colonizers. The colonial masters employ tactics to convince their subjects that their "political past" was characterized by despotism, and their "cultural past" was steeped in decadence. In contrast, they assert that the current era is saturated with enlightenment, reform, progress, development, the introduction of new educational systems, and the establishment of constitutional institutions. These assertions are facilitated by the implementation of extensive reform agendas, which aim to reshape the public sphere of the colonies and rewrite the history of the colonial territories. It is evident in the novel when we see the characters oscillating between the past and the present. The concept of the "colonial subject" is compelled to exist within the confines of the constructed "present" that is imposed by the colonizers. The colonial masters employ various strategies to persuade their subjects that their "political past" was marked by despotic rule, while their "cultural past" was immersed in decadence. Conversely, they promote the idea that the current era is characterized by enlightenment, reform, progress, development, the introduction of new educational systems, and the establishment of constitutional institutions.

This leads to the absurd man experiencing nostalgia for the past rooted in the recognition of the fleeting and ephemeral nature of human existence. As the absurd man confronts the inherent meaninglessness and irrationality of the world, he may experience a longing or nostalgia for a time when life seemed more coherent, purposeful, or meaningful. Nostalgia, in this context, can arise from a sense of loss or a desire to return to a perceived state of greater clarity, purpose, or belonging. The absurd man may yearn for a past that he perceives as having a stronger sense of meaning or coherence, before he fully recognized the absurdity of existence. Mir Nihal's nostalgic longing for the bygone era is emphasized as new institutions, technologies and social norms associated with British rule take root.

Though, Mir Nihal's character assumes tragic dimensions due to his illness and his inability to take action, he cannot be compared to figures like Lear or Hamlet; at best, he resembles Prufrock, who is incapable of being a hero and experiences a sense of monotony. Just as Eliot's Prufrock laments that he has "measured out his life in coffee spoons," these coffee spoons also symbolize the mundane rituals and trappings of bourgeois life that contribute to his growing feeling of inauthenticity and alienation. Despite his longing to "push the moment to its crisis," Mir Nihal acknowledges the inevitable compromise that comes with his complete assimilation with the society around him reflecting the existential conundrum.

Ahmed Ali's novel serves as both a critique and a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of existential alienation. By delving into the complexities of the absurd man's experience within the colonial context, it prompts us to reflect on the profound questions of identity, meaning, and agency that arise in such circumstances. Ali vividly portrays Mir Nihal's journey which mirrors the broader societal disempowerment and estrangement brought about by colonialism, as the arrival of the Britishers triggers a process of marginalization and loss of selfhood. Ultimately, Twilight in Delhi stands as a powerful literary work that invites us to confront and challenge the existential alienation imposed by colonialism, urging us to reclaim our authentic selves and strive for a more inclusive and equitable world.

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Scorching Wind: Historicity and Post-Partition Crisis of Muslim Existence in M. S. Sathyu's *Garm Hawa*

Arijit Mukherjee

Abstract: The film *Garm Hawa* (1974) directed by M. S. Sathyu, written by Kaifi Azmi and Shama Zaidi with Balraj Sahni in the lead role, was released in 1974. It tells the story of the Mirzas of Agra, a respectable and prosperous, business and political family. The film, based on an unpublished short story by noted Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai, adroitly captures the existential crisis of Muslim community in post-partition India. The film simultaneously captures the everyday social realities and problems of the Muslims. The paper attempts to analyse the film as a text with the aim of bringing out the complex dynamics of socio-cultural-political and economic conditions in post-partition India and the challenges to India's largest minority community, which threatens their existence with Hindu fundamentalist forces.

Key words: Partition, *Garm Hawa*, Indian Muslims, Memory, Violence

> "The land was divided/The hearts were shattered/Storms rage in every heart/It was the same there and here/Funeral pyre in every home/The flames mount higher//Every town was deserted/There and here/No one paid heed to Gita,/Nor anyone listened to Quran,/Faith was distressed/There and here." (My Trans. 00:02:26-00:02:56)

The film *Garm Hawa* (1974), directed by M. S. Sathyu, starring Balraj Sahni in the lead role, was released in 1974. Written by Kaifi Azmi and Shama Zaidi, the film begins with Salim Mirza seeing his elder sister off at the railway station as she departs for Karachi, where her husband has already settled. The film beings with an event of uprooting of a family, as the situation for Muslims in India have become precarious post-partition and assassination of Gandhi. Many Muslims thought that they have no future in India. They felt unsafe, marginalized, hated, and believed they will not be able to integrate into the mainstream of the new India. This India is no longer the land where they were co-citizens; they have suddenly become the enemy community. This newly formed nation-state is going to become a dominion of the Hindus. These fears were exacerbated by the political situation of the country, where the Muslim League had lost its stronghold, and the Hindu-dominated Indian National Congress had taken hold of the rein of state affairs. The Muslim felt compelled to dilute his religious identity in order to blend in and survive. He had to measure the consequences before taking any step. Thus, the solution is to go and settle in the nation which has been formed for the Muslims, by the Muslims. So, the film begins with the trope of journey which becomes a journey of a person who has to carry his or her memories, legacy, socio-cultural-geographical alignment along with the luggage which contains the clothes dried in the sunshine of India and will be unpacked in the moonlight of Karachi with nostalgia. As the Tanga[1] puller who takes Mirza back to his shoe factory tells him, "The wind is scorching and those who will not be uprooted will dry out and die" (My Trans. 00:04:48).

The idea of the 1947 partition of India was based on the two-nation theory which was posited as a requirement and historical truth thereafter. As V. D. Savarkar would claim that India for the Hindus was "not only a *Pitribhu* but a *Punyabhu*, not only a fatherland but a holy land. Yes, this *Bharatbhumi*. This *Sindusthan*, this land of ours that stretches from Sindhu to Sindhu is our *Punyabhumi*" (Savarkar 37). However, was that the real question? The partition also happened because both Hindu and Muslim leaders were vying for dominance in the politics of the nation. Was Jinnah truly rallying for the Muslims, or was he eyeing his own ambitions as a politician? Jinnah's ability to rally around the Muslims is not often viewed as the truth and success of his political postulations. His actions also, "...reflected his political acumen and vindicated the judgement that the India of the 1940s offered him as a God sent opportunity, denied to him by the obdurate Congress leadership in the mid 1930s" (Hasan 48).

A feeling of distrust between the two communities, Hindus and Muslims, developed gradually as the political scenario became fiercely competitive. The leaders of the nation were able to divide the population along religious lines and successfully infused a feeling of insecurity among the communities and a feeling of threat they felt from the Other. Thus, communities based on religious solidarity was the need of the hour and the gullible mass were made to believe that they need to create a community-based hoplite-phalanx and posited the Other as the enemy who needs to be thrusted off. However, there was resistance to this discourse as well. Not all the Muslims were in favour of the two-nation theory. Even the Viceroy acknowledged the fact that not all the Muslims were in favour of the idea of partition: "A section of the Muslim intelligentsia including Nawab Liaquat Ali Khan and Choudhry Khaliquzzaman wanted the Hindus and Muslims to be at the equal stakes. Nawab Mohammad Ismail Khan and the Nawab of Chhatari, friends of the Nehru and Sapru families, decided to stay in India" (Hasan 49). Many Muslims were afraid of the ending of the cross-cultural exchanges which satiated their intellect, elevated their social status, and also played a key role in their economic prosperity through the trading relations in the new economy of that era. The exchanges were socially, politically and economically symbiotic. Many were not prepared to get uprooted from the land of their forefathers based on sheer nostalgia. Ted Svensson analyses, "the Partition and Independence profoundly altered notions of space (inscribed into cartographic operations and the projection of the nation as coterminous with the entire territory of the new state) and of time (what were the historical grounds, what was the future trajectory of the nation; what did it mean to become complete, to reach consummation and maturity in the areas of citizenship and statehood?)" (Svensson 1). This dilemma and dichotomy of partition, which had deep psychological impressions on the minds of the Muslims in India, is deftly captured and represented in the film *Garam Hawa*.

The film begins with a depiction of the Mirzas, who reside in their ancestral house in Agra, and own a shoe manufacturing business in Agra, located in the United Province of northern India (present day Uttar Pradesh). The family consists of two brothers, Salim Mirza and Halim Mirza. Salim owns the business, while Halim is into politics and serves as a major provincial leader of the All India Muslim League. Although Halim had earlier publicly declared his intention to stay in India and fight for the cause of Indian Muslims, but later, as the film proceeds and the political and social situation deteriorates, Halim decides in favour of settling in Pakistan. This idea is strongly contested by Salim Mirza, who believes that this unrest will be resolved within a few days.

Although Salim Mirza is optimistic about the hostility, there is a growing distrust between the two communities. Many Muslims, especially from UP and Bihar, migrate to Pakistan, often without repaying their debts to banks and money-lenders, who are now reluctant to lend money to the Muslims out of the fear of losing their funds. However, this situation meant further economic difficulties for the Muslims who stayed back. In the film, one finds that even though the Mirzas are receiving contracts for supplying shoes, they do not have enough capital to undertake and execute the orders. Salim Mirza had a great reputation with the banks, but even that did not prove useful, as the banks' policies have changed in general. Muslims were not to being granted any loans. Mirza tries to convince the bank official that the changing times should not affect the decade old business relation he shares with the bank, only to hear in response that, "Many shoemakers have already fled to Pakistan without paying back their debts..." (My Trans., 00:20:42). This distrust is reflective of the growing change in the socio-political scenario. Referring to Moin Shakir, Balraj Puri in his essay “Indian Muslims Since Partition” foregrounds that the Indian Muslims have only experienced “frustration, anxiety and insecurity out of the partition” (Puri 2141). The Independence seemed to be a sudden disruption in the continuity of history in which there was smooth periodic transitional blending in of the Muslims. Although India’s history had inclusively integrated the Muslims, Independence seemed to have given birth to a completely new void in which radical forces were raging to become the new scribes who would write from a new ideological stand-point. Mirza, after being refused a loan, went to a money-lender named Seth Punamchand. He boarded a Tonga to go to *Cham Cham Galli* (Lane). The driver was a Hindu and demanded two rupees as fare. Mirza protested, saying that he had always paid eight annas for the same. The driver retorted by saying, “Gone are your time Miyan[2], if you pay eight annas, then go to Pakistan” (My Trans. 00:22:47- 00:22:55). The Muslim collective identity, once strongly represented by the League, is now in danger of losing its own self, with the majority of its leaders leaving the country for Pakistan. Veteran leaders like Shaheed Suhrawardy had to concede that the Partition had provided a homeland for the Muslims living in the Majority areas, but not for all the Muslims of India. Muslim League leader Khaliq-u-Zaman was of the opinion that “the Muslim community as a whole had lost its weight in the subcontinent due to the Partition” (Puri 2141).

Pakistan, the newfound haven of the Muslims, also served as a utopia for those who stayed back. It appeared to be a land of promise for them, as the America once seemed to the East (ignoring realities). Letters kept coming from relatives who had gone to Pakistan, bringing news of the excellent quality of *Halal*[3] meat and rice available there. The women, who were mostly confined to their homes, complained that everything in India was adulterated. Jamila, Salim’s wife, read a letter sent by Halim Mirza’s wife, who had now settled in Pakistan. It mentioned, “Things are of finest quality in Pakistan. Fine rice, good whole grain wheat and fresh *Halal* meat” (00:26:09). Jamila reacted to this by lamenting, “Here you won’t even find good quality rice. You try to make *pulao*[4] but it tastes like *khichdi*[5]” (00:26:15).

The film begins after the assassination of Gandhi: “Two events which had played an important role in swinging back to favour the discontent Muslims of India were the assassination of Gandhi and annexation of Kashmir. Gandhi’s death swept the nation by shock in front of which the communal parochialism could not stand. Annexation of Kashmir appealed to the sentiments of Muslims which was complimented by an atmosphere of secularity which Nehru tried to establish with his able leadership” (Puri 2141). Halim’s clandestine migration to Pakistan has placed the Mirzas in a socially questionable position in India. This intensifies Salim’s struggle as the legal owner of their ancestral home is Halim, and now that Halim has chosen Pakistan as his country, the property has become an evacuee property. The government sends an order to the Mirzas to vacate their property. Salim’s sheer struggle to stick to his roots seems to be in vain. The Mirzas are uprooted from the nostalgic confines of their ancestral household as they take with them the memories of their forefathers and their times: “These were stories of sudden abandonment, uprooting and more gruesome events. The story of independence and partition includes this forgotten history” (Kumar 77). Badar Begum, Salim’s mother, refuses to leave her husband’s place and chooses to hide as everyone else is leaving. She has to be forcibly carried by Baquar, Mirza’s eldest son, who also looks after the business. Badar Begum’s world ceased to exist long ago. She still recalls the time when women used to get married at a very young age, unlike the women now. She represents that past which the generation of Salim Mirza respects, acknowledges its grandeur, while the present generation refuses to acknowledge. The lost glory of Muslims in India is depicted through the episodes of Amina’s futile love affairs, set in the Diwan-e-Aam[6], Diwani-e-Khas[7] and other historical relics reminiscent of the glorious history of an Islamic past. Badar Begum’s futile efforts to control the household and establish the glory of the past sadly emphasizes the fact that there is now an unbridgeable time gap between the past and the present. Time past and time present cannot coexist; there is a dissociation.

Fakrruddin, the brother-in-law of Salim, meets him as he is leaving the ancestral home. Fakrrudin is dressed in white, and when asked about the attire, he replies that he has joined the Congress party. Salim expresses his wonder, as he knew Fakrruddin to be a staunch supporter of the League. Fakrruddin immediately deters Salim from uttering this fact, as he believes that there are only two ways out for the supporters of League in India: either to join Congress or to leave for Pakistan. He is now the President of the local committee. Fakrruddin tries to convince Salim that there is a great advantage in joining Congress: *"Bade Jam ke kaum ki khidmat hoti hai"!* (One can serve the nation well) (My Trans. 00:49:26). The senior Muslim leaders who remained could not consolidate the community's political future with the vigour and tenacity required. Many chose the option of joining the Congress. The newly created democratic structure required a redefinition of the community, "a task attempted by Abul Kalam Azad and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai in the political domain and by Zakir Husain, Mohammad Mujeeb, K.M. Ashraf, Humayun Kabir, K.G. Saiyidain and Abid Husain in the realm of ideas" (Hasan 54). Apart from this, there were Jamiyat al-ulama-I Hind and the Jamaat-e-Islami who were trying to set a strong foothold over the nationalist politics to consolidate the Muslim solidarity and interests. Mushirul Hasan in his essay "Adjustment and Accommodation: Indian Muslims after Partition" observes that the Partition had its worst effect in UP and Bihar. There were violent riots and most of the Muslims migrated. Muslim representation in various domains of offices and social affairs dwindled significantly: "*karkhandars*, petty traders and shopkeepers suffered heavily at the hands of dispossessed refugees from their homeland in west Punjab" (Hasan 51). In the film we see Salim's nephew and Halim's son, Kazim returning to India after the partition with the hope of marrying Amina, Salim's daughter, as it was decided prior to their migration to Pakistan. Salim, a meticulous man, advises Kazim to report to the police about his arrival. Kazim being too eager to marry Amina forgets and is eventually taken away by the police and deported. This event simultaneously shatters Amina's love and Salim's reputation, and Salim is now perceived as a spy:

> Delhi, UP and Bihar had the worst record in providing the healing touch after the trauma of partition. Take the implementation of the evacuee property ordinance. Nehru was pained to discover that some of his comrades in the nationalist struggle were harassed simply because some distant relative of theirs was in Pakistan. Mohanlal Saxena, Union Minister for Rehabilitation, ordered the sealing of Muslim shops in Delhi and UP. (Hasan 52)

The film also depicts the bleak condition of the youth in general and the predicament of the Muslim youth, which was even bleaker. Sikandar Mirza, Salim's younger son, goes for an interview. He is also against migrating to Pakistan as he considers India his motherland and true home. Further, the young man ethically believes that he should not leave his aging father alone. Sikander attends an interview in which he is interviewed by a Muslim official who states that he cannot offer the job to Sikander as the Hindus in the office might accuse him of communal nepotism. Sikander argues that his qualifications should be the parameter and not his religion. The man informs Sikander that his case is further complicated as Salim Mirza, his father, has been accused of espionage. Sikander protests saying that the court has acquitted him of all charges. However, the man responds that no one cares about what the court has said. Sikander angrily states that till date, no Hindu has ever mentioned this in any of his interviews. The man says that he is the only Muslim in the department and that he has to take every step cautiously. Sikander retorts in anguish, that it is for people like him that many young Muslims are denied opportunities in this country. The film showcases the sheer frustration of the youth and their predicament in the newly formed country. It was the leaders who inculcated this extreme religious fundamentalism: "Govind Ballabh Pant, Chief Minister of the state, had an equally dismal record. He made it known that Muslims would not be employed in government or recruited in police. He discouraged the teaching of Urdu and suspended aid to Urdu-medium schools" (Hasan 52). Nehru himself was agonized by the non-secular attitude of his Hindu comrades. In the movie, dejected by the predicament of Muslims in India, Salim finally decides to leave India. As they are on their way to the station, they get caught amidst a protest by the youth against unemployment and discrimination, a demonstration that Sikander himself had planned to join. Sikander's friends call out to him, and in a moment of epiphany, Salim realises that India is his predicament, and leaving it is against all that he has followed in his entire life. He tells Sikander to join the protest, and he himself joins it, giving the message that not all Muslims will leave India, deterred by the present to carve a better future for the Muslims and India in general.

The film simultaneously captures the everyday social realities and problems that the Muslims had to face as well. Amina has come-of-age and needs to be married off. The women are often seen discussing the fact that the girls remain spinsters because all the men have fled to Pakistan. Amina's relation with Kazim breaks up due to Partition politics and related laws. She tries to hold on to Shamshad, who also betrays her. Amina's desire to have a family of her own, to be married, and to live a secure life also shatters. She offers her body and soul to Shamshad with the hope of holding onto him. Amina decks herself up in a bridal dress and the film, thereafter; captures a brilliant yet gore cinematic moment. We see Amina commits suicide, lying dead on a bed with a white bed sheet on it, reminding us of Shakespeare's Ophelia[9] and also everything that is pious about Islam - the prosperity and serenity represented by the colour white. The piousness of the white colour and the serene beauty on Amina's countenance manifested a state of peace that she had attained by liberating herself from the problematic dynamics of this world.

The film, based on an unpublished short story by noted Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai, adroitly captures the existential crisis of Muslim community in post-partition India. The making of the film was as challenging as the representation of the content:

> The film was initially accepted by a commercial producer, but then pressure and fear of the critical and governmental reception of such a work led to a rapid withdrawal of the offer. Sathyu turned to the government sponsored Film Financing Corporation (FFC) for support. This agency was created as an alternative for filmmakers seeking financing for work which was not commercially embraced by institutional distributors. Its aim was to free these artists from the dominance of loan agencies and their control of film content. Sathyu secured FFC financing and his film, based on an unpublished story by Marxist activist Ismat Chughtai, was completed in the city of Agra. The production of the film was plagued by a smattering of public protests; ultimately, Sathyu had to divert attention from his actual locations by using a fake second unit crew and sending them out with an unloaded camera. Once finished, *Garam Hawa* was again the subject of controversy; it was banned as an "instigation to communal dissension." Sathyu was strong in his conviction, however, and he showed the film to many government leaders and journalists. The influence of these people on the censorship board led to a reversal of the ban. The film went on to win a national award for its contribution to "national integration." More recognition followed, including accolades that praised the film's efforts to create "a language of common identity" and to humanize the situation endured by Muslims in North India who did not wish to move from their homes after the partition. (Kinsey Web)

A contemporary spectator is left with a heavy heart, wondering whether Salim's final abandonment of his decision to leave for Pakistan has been justified by the nation or not. In 2023, even after seventy-six years of independence, we have not been able to transcend the communal fundamentalist dimension in the Indian socio-political scenario and daily existence. Rather, the clutches of jingoistic fundamentalism have tightened their grip on the psyche of the Indian community, intensifying the fears instilled by the opportunistic politics played by power-hungry devils, the so-called people's representatives, the nation-makers of the present time.

Notes:

1. A light horse drawn carriage.
2. *Miyan* may mean Prince. A royal title. Often Muslim men addressed each other and are addressed as out of respect as *Miyan*.
3. Meat cut following Muslim religious law.
4. A Middle Eastern or Indian dish of rice (or sometimes wheat) cooked in stock with spices, typically having added meat or vegetables.
5. An Indian mish-mash dish made of lentils, rice, and veggies. At times meat if also added in some genres of cuisines.
6. Diwan-i-Am, or Hall of Audience, was the room in the Red Fort of Delhi where the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (1628-1656) and his successors received members of the general public and heard their grievances.
7. The Diwan-i-Khas or Hall of Private Audiences, was the chamber in the Red Fort of Delhi built in 1648 as a location for receptions. It was the location where the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan received courtiers and state guests. It was also known as the Shah Mahal.
8. T.S. Eliot, “Four Quartets”.
9. Ophelia in Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* committed suicide after going through sheer psychological agony due her unrequited love for Hamlet. She was also affected by Hamlet’s continuous insolent behaviour towards her.

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An Enquiry Concerning the Star-text of *Chiranjit*: Significations of Star-images of the Film Industry of West Bengal during the 1980s and 1990s

Siddhartha Sankar Chakraborti

Abstract: This paper seeks to explore the relationship between stardom as images and the concept of actors playing themselves repeatedly in their collective representations to come to terms with their popular public images which seem to be the breeding ground of personality centric ideas of characters affecting public recognition of some qualities that a person embodies or is deemed to embody. This understanding involves perceptions relating to star-images through media circulations concerning the construction of the desirable version of the star-self in commanding attention from the largest possible audiences, designed on the strategies that assist in excogitating a way to measure the connection between images and the market. During the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, among the contemporary Bengali actors who emerged to be the stars, Chiranjit Chakraborty was one of the most celebrated figures. In many ways, the popular characters played by Chiranjit Chakraborty became the embodiments of the pangs, anxieties, disillusionments, disappointments, conflicts, struggles of the suppressed, subaltern and downtrodden people. The purpose of this paper is to find out how his successful images are repetitively reproduced by situating them in relation to the specific ways of understanding discussed here. The paper intends to recognize the significance of these images with respect to the contemporary central features of human existence experienced by that particular class among whom he became very popular.

Key words: Star-texts, Star-images, Chiranjit Chakraborty, Bengali Cinema

This paper seeks to explore the relationship between stardom as images and the concept of actors playing themselves repeatedly in their collective representations to come to terms with their popular public images which seem to be the breeding ground of personality centric ideas of characters affecting public recognition of some qualities that a person embodies or is deemed to embody. This understanding involves perceptions relating to star-images through media circulations concerning the construction of the desirable version of the star-self in commanding attention from the largest possible audiences, designed on the strategies that assist in excogitating a way to measure the connection between images and the market.

During the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, among the contemporary Bengali actors who emerged to be the stars, Chiranjit Chakraborty was one of the most celebrated figures. In many ways, the popular characters played by Chiranjit Chakraborty became the embodiments of the pangs, anxieties, disillusionments, disappointments, conflicts, struggles of the suppressed, subaltern and downtrodden people. The purpose of this paper is to find out how his successful images are repetitively reproduced by situating them in relation to the specific ways of understanding discussed here. The desire of this paper is to recognize the significance of these images with respect to the contemporary central features of human existence experienced by that particular class among whom he became very popular.

His popular images are entwined into the fabric of the films according to the formulaic script targeted at its faithful audiences. How is he positioned within the parlance of the formulaic script to reveal his constructed image can be cited through one of his most sustained dialogues that goes as, “Bou Harale Bou Pabi Re Bhai, Maa Harale Maa Pabi Na” (One can get another wife after the demise of the one but one cannot get another mother).

Even though this dialogue was vehemently criticized by a certain section of the society, his image as an obedient son created a huge impact among the audiences. This image of him became so popular that he was cast in a host of movies where this image was reproduced again and again. Each of these films constantly played with the supposed desire of his followers to see Chiranjit in this particular image. The stories with their twists and turns, the setting, the costumes and the dialogues revolve around establishing this particular image.

To be able to personify this kind of image, the actor must possess a specific kind of "naturalness" in his physicality and personality with which the audiences could identify. This "naturalness" emerges from the "flow" of the real life of the actor and the contemporary socio-economic background of the audiences.[1] The implicit force of the character of a film is revealed through that naturalness capable of embodying the scripted character with its fluid movement caused by the creative transaction between the real day-to-day world and the scripted world. This fluidity is fed by the artistic faculty of the persona; the combination of which is instrumental in fabricating a natural identification from the point of view of the viewers causing possibilities of a virtually viable belief in matter of justifying that certain image with the persona of the actor. When this happens, the poetic justice earned by the character played by the actor is realized in a cathartic manner in terms of arousing expected emotions. Thus, this can be deducted that the actor while portraying a certain role personifies certain naturalness and this naturalness emanating mostly from the physicality and personality of the actor along with his/her acting credibility certifies the truth of the constructed image.

This assertion of truth in relation to the image portrayed by the star is so reflectively visible on screen that intellectual queries are momentarily suspended. Although this particular image is untouched by the complexities of the issues, this naturalness is radiant in portraying a sacrificial innocence devoid of the ingrained shades capable of staining the straightforwardness and unidimensional purity of the image. Thus, the actor wearing this scripted image seems to be extraordinarily attractive to the masses, even to the extent of irrationally innocent overpowering intellectual faculties with physicality and superficially pure sentiments.

To be economically viable, stars are embroiled in making themselves into saleable commodities. They constantly make themselves and are also being made by a host of media industries and agencies. A star image is the result of the combined and consolidated labour of so many persons; the star him/herself, dress designers, hair-dressers, make-up artists, personal trainers, photographers, publicists and so on. This process of shaping the star out of the raw material of the person has been very beautifully summed up by Dyer:

> First, the person is a body, a psychology, a set of skills that have to be mined and worked into a star image. This work, of fashioning the star out of the raw material of the person, varies in the degree to which it respects what artists sometimes refer to as the inherent qualities of the material; make-up, coiffure, clothing, dieting and body building can all make more or less of the body features they start with, and personality is no less malleable, skills no less learnable…Second part of the manufacture of the star image takes place in the films the star makes, with all the personnel involved in that (Dyer 5).

Molly Haskell has pointed out, "The enormous economic importance of the stars, the elaborate machinery of image building and film's importance in establishing character types—all suggest the potential power of the forces of cinematic production for creating the star phenomenon" (17). Elizabeth Burns has emphasized the process of the construction of the character by the actor. She has mentioned that the actor "intervenes…between the authenticity of his own self and its past as known to himself (and as known or assumed at least in part to the audience) and the authenticated life of the character he is playing" (Burns 146-147). Writings of Morin, Walker, and Griffith state that ideological functioning of star phenomenon emerges from the historical paradigm of the development of stardom. For example, in the early period, stars used to be the Gods and Goddesses; heroes in short, the embodiments of perfection and the ideal ways of how to behave in a specific society. Even the history of the filmic presentation has some similarity in this regard. In the early period silence was the most important thing in the construction of stardom. The absence of dialogue made them images to be worshipped. With the advent of dialogue on their lips the stars suffered a definite loss of divinity. Walker writes:

> A loss of illusion was certainly one of the first effects that the talkies had on audiences. Richard Schickel defined 'silence' as the most valuable attribute of the pre-talkie stars…Once they had dialogue on their lips, the once-silent idols suffered a serious loss of divinity. They ceased to be images in a human shape personifying the emotions through the delicately graded art of pantomime. Their voices made them as real as the audience watching them (Walker 223).

Along with their images as normal human beings with whom the audiences can relate came the display of social truth within the film-text. This loss of divinity paved the way for a newly-formulated optimistic structure which favoured the escapism of the audience and subsequently departed from realism. Morin thinks that this constituted the embourgeoisement of the cinematic imagination. Along with this trope, happy ending has also been emphasized. The presentation of stars as extraordinary images beyond the normal human level seems to be missing in the film-texts, rather the insistence is to find a combination of exceptional with the ordinary:

> Bourgeois individualism cannot take the death of the hero; hence the insistence is on the happy end. So, the stars become more usual in appearance, more psychologically credible in personality, more individuated in image…The star does not cease to be special, but now combines the exceptional with the ordinary, the ideal with the everyday (Morin 19).

Morin's fabrication, thus, speaks in favour of combining the ideal with the typical reflecting in this process the mingling of the proletarian and the bourgeoise imagination. Marcuse found the early stars maintaining the distinction between the ideal and the typical. The later stars could cross that bridge and close the gap between the ideal and the typical. Gradually they became the part of a journey in the history of the construction of the stardom where the type, to be very precise, the average, became the ideal. Klapp also is not interested in suggesting the reason behind the deterioration of the hero from their exalted, almost divine position; rather he is interested in noticing the changes in the idea of the model character. He finds that with the passing of time the high character failed to create that greater impact as it used to be early on; the diverse and contradictory models substituted the good fellows.

Klapp, in his book, *Collective Search for Identity*, has suggested that stars can have one of the three different relationships to prevalent norms, namely, reinforcement, seduction and transcendence. Reinforcement happens when a person is encouraged to play that type of social roles which are morally standardized and with it to maintain the group image as well. This is presumably considered to be the classic functions of heroes in every society. In case of seduction, the hero takes up a rebellious sort of attitude to break the rules and norms, but he does this in a gracious way. He makes the situation look wanting in the eyes of the audiences, thus making it look possible even admirable. Klapp has argued that "The main shortcoming of the seductive hero as teacher is that he leads a person into experience felt traditionally to be wrong, but does not redefine and recreate standards by which experience is to be judged. He eludes and confuses morality, but makes little contribution to it in terms of insight" (Klapp 228). Transcendence needs the hero producing a fresh point of view, constructing a new man with a definite sense of integrity. In case of seduction the hero only breaks the rules and norms but here, he redefines and recreates standard by which experience is to be judged. In this context, Richard Dyer has found the idea of compensation working between the stars and people. He has pointed out that compensation lies in the construction of an image that convinces one all over again to believe in those threatened values. He opines that:

> The notion of stars compensating people for qualities lacking in their lives is obviously close to the concept of stars embodying value that are under threat. The latter are presumably qualities which people have an idea of, but which they do not experience in their day-to-day lives. However, compensation implies not that an image makes one believe all over again in the threatened value, but that it shifts your attention from that value to some other, lesser, "compensatory one." (Dyer, *Stars* 28)

With other various innovations and manipulations in the evolution of stardom, the star persona itself becomes very significant in this image-making process. This process does reveal the social functions of stars in legitimizing the ideological understanding. Max Weber has mentioned three alternatives in his account of how political order is legitimized. His suggestion of three alternatives, namely, tradition, bureaucracy and charisma are always instrumental in legitimization of the political order. His notion of tradition is about doing the same things what we generally do; bureaucracy is about performing things according to the agreeable but alterable rules. He has defined charisma as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least superficially exceptional qualities" (Weber 329).

The period, 1980s in Bengali film industry was marked by its adaptations of new technologies and forms. This transformation categorically changed the cinematic traditions of Bengali popular cinema in terms of content, style and technique commonly referred as "masala" films. Before this era, the scripts of Bengali cinema were mostly centered on Bengali literature and literary themes. These scripts were relevantly enriched by necessary realism, naturalistic acting style, easy and lucid cinematography and more than anything else the untainted Bengaliness.[2] In the late 1970s Bengali film industry was going through a severe economic crisis. The audiences started watching more technologically equipped Hindi films for superior visual quality and other novelty factors. As a result, the number of Bengali films being produced drastically decreased. This scenario impacted single screen theatre in such a way that they began to pull down their shutter. The condition of the surviving halls got deteriorated. Owing to the unhygienic experience of watching films in deteriorating cinema halls duly encouraged by the rapid proliferation of visually superior Hindi films into Bengali middle-class homes through television and Video Cassette recorder, the footfalls of the audiences on single screen theatre decreased sharply. After the death of Bengali matinee idol Uttam Kumar, Bengali cinema went through several changes, especially in terms of financial crisis which left a huge impact on the number of films being produced in a year in Bengal. Contemporary newspapers were repeatedly lamenting the fact that the demise of Uttam Kumar had created an irreparable vacuum in the Bengali film industry. Most of the studios having failed to earn necessary revenue to maintain their stuff were gradually becoming dysfunctional. Even the films directed by the directors like Tapan Sinha, Mrinal Sen failed to carry the economic burden of the Bengali film industry. The decades spanning through 1980s reflect the struggle of the people associated with the Bengali film industry in finding out the right formula of producing "hit" films. The terms like "hit", "flop", "blockbuster" used in this paper are entirely business-oriented terms indicating how much profit these films generated. There is no singular institution or organization that would validate the business numbers or the tags like "hit" or "flop" associated with these films. However, the information regarding the business numbers is collected from contemporary newspapers, articles and conversations with the industry people. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the directors and the producers were frantically looking for the right kind of content, narrative style and the saleable and bankable lead actors that could bring the Bengali audiences back to the cinema halls.

However, the biggest issue emerged during late 1970s was not limited to finding out the 'hit' formula of commercial Bengali films; rather the lack of sufficient cinema halls was a matter of huge concern. In 1979, 32 films were released but due to the lack of adequate cinema halls, these films could not reach to the audiences and consequently this threatening crisis halted the distribution and exhibition process. Anugyan Nag and Spandan Bhattacharya have narrated this scenario very precisely in their book, *Tollygunge to Tollywood*:

> Only five Bengali films could be screened simultaneously in Calcutta in the then functioning five chains: Uttara-Purabi-Ujjwala, Minar-Bijolee-Chobighar, Rupobani-Aruna-Bharati, Sree-Indira, and Radha-Purna-Prachi. Many films remain unreleased due to the paucity of cinema halls. Reputed film distributors of that period, such as Chandimata Films, had five movies; and Piyali Films and RB Films had three each, which remained in cold storage. It was obvious that producing good films alone was not enough, if you did not have theatres to release them. (Nag and Bhattacharya 18)

The situation was so alarming that the then Finance minister called for a press meet along with the then Information and Broadcasting minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya where they offered interesting packages to attract investors in building new cinema halls. However, this announcement could not fix the scenario. Even a houseful show was not enough for the hall owners in matter of earning adequate revenue to maintain the standard of existing cinema halls and to pay the salaries of their stuff. One or two hits did not seem to be enough to change the scenario. This alarmingness was furthered by a host of flops ensuing huge loss for the cinema hall owners. The distributors were left with the only option of entering into the rural territory.

When Uttam Kumar passed away he was involved in more than six incomplete films and left eleven films unfinished in total. These unfinished films where Uttam Kumar was scheduled to star made the producers crumble under ensuing economic crisis. Added to this was the insuperable respect of the audiences for their matinee idol. These factors aggravated the grimness of the situation to such an extent that the audiences even stopped visiting cinema halls in lamentation of their most coveted superstar. This can be very clearly perceived from the article, *Uttam Kumar er Obhab Tallyganj Para Ekhono Bisesh Ter Paini* (Tollygunj has not yet realized the loss of Uttam Kumar) by Bhaskar Chowdhury which appeared in a monthly periodical called *Parivartan*. According to Bhaskar Chowdhury, during 1980-81, 28 films were released without Uttam Kumar starring in them. Nineteen of them were average grosser. He has also remarked that even the state government's decision to reduce the ticket price to Rs. 1 could not change the ill fate of this industry. This offer did tempt a definite section of the audiences but this policy severely failed to attract the cinegoers in vast numbers. Those directors who normally used to produce films incorporating the starry presence of Uttam Kumar in them were in such a dire distress that they stopped releasing films for more than a year after his death.

However, the paucity in numbers was also visible in those films starred by Uttam Kumar in his last years. Out of the three releases namely, *Ogo Bodhu Sundori* (O my beautiful Wife) by Salil Dutt, *Raja Saheb* (The King) by Palash Banerjee, and *Khana Baraha* by Bijoy Bose, after the death of Uttam Kumar only *Ogo Bodhu Sundori* was a hit. Rest of the two films flopped at the box office. So, the films starring Uttam Kumar in his last years could not continue his legacy as a star capable of carrying the economic fortune of the industry almost singlehandedly. So, the initiation of a depressed market of the Bengali film industry which began in the last years of Uttam Kumar got accelerated after his death. The industry remained so much economically assured under the starry guardianship of Uttam Kumar that they did not endeavour to fabricate any other bankable superstars. Thus, the dearth of having adequate superstars in the industry did not allow the success of one or two films making a mark in matter of changing the existing scenario of the industry.

This was also the time when the new directors along with some of the experienced ones and new technicians started producing experimental films keeping in mind the threads of *Indian New Wave Movement* emerged during 1970s. This new wave movement focused on the socio-political issues of the time. The manner of storytelling, characterization, use of realism, other technical forms and content emerged as a counter movement to the dominant practices of commercial cinema. The content of the new wave films mainly revolved around social injustices, class conflicts, women subjugation, stereotyped hierarchies, repressive ideologies and so on. In Bengal, directors like Buddhadev Dasgupta, Aparna Sen, Goutam Ghosh practiced filmmaking according to the threads of the movement by introducing new actors and new techniques of filmmaking. However, these films could not generate the required revenue to help the industry running smoothly.

In 1984, Anjan Chowdhury came up with the right kind of formula in his first feature film, *Shatru* that the Bengali film industry was eagerly looking for. *Shatru* changed the severe economic crisis of the industry to a greater extent; at least in the form of attracting new producers and investors. It was a colossal hit. It ran for more than one and a half months with "houseful" boards in the major cinema halls in Kolkata. This film was a striking departure from the tradition of popular genre of romantic films in Bengal. Many factors contributed to the unprecedented emotional response it evoked among the audiences. Its appearance at that particular moment, its conjunction with various elements that Chowdhury incorporated in his scripts like class conflicts, a host of social and political issues and tendencies and subsequent theatrical developments revealed through over-the-top dialogue delivery, "farcical" comedy, and a musically enhanced climax. It was the public sentiment in the period from the 1980s to the end of 1990s that was evocatively captured by Anjan Chowdhury in his film, *Shatru*.

This period brought about some prominent changes in Bengal society by introducing new economic policies, the growth of capitalistic consumerism, opening of newer job sectors and infrastructural changes in the concept of "middle class." This resulted in the growth of middle class in large numbers with their access to capitalistic consumerism. With the advent of private companies, the education, skills and expertise honed by this newly framed middle-class people were interpolated in the corporatized framework, potentially the most significant addition in the political spectrum of contemporary Bengal capable of reconstructing and restructuring social arrangements on corporatized principles. However, with factories closing down and a newly developed private sector, a certain section of the population did not match the vision of a new era promised by the introduction of new economic policies. The decade of 1980s is associated with a comprehensive growth in economy for the "new middle classes," skilled working class, the rise of income levels, a sudden uprise in consumer goods, raised consumption level and an increase in owning television sets.

It seemed that this newly formed middle class had entered a new era of affluence and prosperity and had successfully uprooted the problems of class division and unemployment. This idea was even reinforced by the popular media and political commentaries. However, a section of the population felt betrayed and disillusioned. Affluence was visible in some sections and areas of Bengal society but there was a certain section which did not benefit from these new employment opportunities in private sectors. Despite claims poverty did not disappear from this certain class. Rather, the class differences between the newly formed middle class and the suppressed section became prominent. This disappearance even entered into the joint family structure. The concept of nuclear family with its consumer aspirations attacked the familial harmony. This growth of consumerism created a more sophisticated lifestyles and values among the youth opposed to the traditional familial values. Especially the television advertisements and other media advertisements were instrumental in circulating this consumer aspiration among Bengali youths, even to the extent of motivated solely by self-interest. With the advent of television sets, people from different parts of the world could view different lifestyles adapted in different parts of the world. Ethical conflicts too started getting measured by globally popular views. Some contemporary filmmakers did not hesitate to raise these issues as the basic content of their films. Even though the influence of popular Hindi films can be prominently felt in these films, the stylization in matter of preparing these scripts were inextricably linked with the demands of this underprivileged class.

Anjan Chowdhury, in an interview to Dipankar Chakraborty of *Anandabazar patrika*, did mention the narratorial ingredients he incorporated in his film to create the desired impact among the audiences. He talked about the necessity of using melodrama in terms of emphasizing human emotions and relationships. The concept of revenge working as the fulcrum of the story carries the narrative of the story in a fast pace. He figured out that section of the people who now formed the major bulk of the Bengali film audiences and likewise he catered the content mostly akin to "jatra".[3] Thus, *Shatru* remains to be a significant marker in initiating a new phase in the history of Bengali cinema.

Chiranjeet performed in diverse range of films during 1980s and 1990s. He made his debut with the film, *Sonay Sohaga* which was released in 1981. He became popular after acting in Anjan Chowdhury's *Shatru* released in 1984. However, the film, *Antarale* released in 1985 is considered as his first solo hit. He never looked back after that. He starred in a series of hits like *Beder Meye Josna* (1991), *Pratikar* (1987), *Prateek* (1988), *Paap Punya* (1987), *Jibon Joubon* (1997), *Jibon Joddha* (1995), *Firiye Dao* (1994), *Mayer dibyi* (1998), *Rokto Nodir Dhara* (1994), *Tomar Rokte Amar Shohag* (1993), *Shakti* (1993), and so on. Among these films, there were three major tropes of film narratives that can be found repetitively. The first trope concentrates on class conflicts and the issue of illegitimacy; the second centers around Bengali folklore and mythological stories with snake goddess playing the pivotal role in shaping the narrative and providing the much needed divine poetic justice; the third emphasizes family melodrama, especially the issue of discrimination and consequent separation within the joint family structure where he plays the role of an obedient son, benevolent elder brother and more than anything else a responsible family person who is even ready to sacrifice his life for his family. However, there are some films where these tropes coincide partially.

Prateek definitely falls under the first category. In *Prateek* (1988) directed by Prabhat Roy, Chiranjit Chakraborty became the spokesperson of the marginalized class. Prateek was a bastard child. His father did not provide him social recognition. He became rebellious due to constant infliction of ignorance from the society. The colour black suggesting darkness became the symbol of his wretched life. In spite of his lifelong poverty, underprivileged status he continued his battle against the deteriorating society and through his ethical struggle became the embodiment of the conscience of this society. Thus, he was portrayed to be the representative of the underprivileged section. Prateek's anger emblematized the anger of the thousands. This character is a symbolic protest to the gradually diminishing values of the society going through a transition. Prateek's journey in the film reveals the issue of illegitimacy; revolving around the struggle of a marginalized figure seeking acceptability from the privileged section.

Beder Meye Josna centres around the second trope. This film was inspired by a popular Bangladeshi "jatra" which was later made into a Bangladeshi film with the same name directed by Tojammel Haque Bokul. This Chiranjeet starrer film was directed by Motiur Rahman Panu. This film exhibited a love story between a girl, Josna belonging to "bede" community who used to make their living by entertaining people and selling medicinal herbs and a boy belonging to a royal family. Josna cures the prince played by Chiranjeet from snake bite. Then, the rest of the story dramatizes the struggle of the lovers to convince the king to allow them to marry each other. However, it was revealed in the climax that Josna in actuality is a member of an upper caste family. The film ends in a happy note with king's approval for their marriage.

Another hit film of Chiranjeet namely, *Mayer Dibyi*, undoubtedly falls under the third category. In order to keep his promise to his mother Ram, the protagonist played by Chiranjeet Chakraborty, went on to endure the atrocities perpetrated by an inhuman society, even to the extent of sacrificing his basic familial rights. He remained steadfast to his duties;

his unshakable, unfaltering, unwavering resolve made him triumphant against those extreme adversities. A happy ending is a kind of poetic justice delivered to the protagonist due to his virtuous and sacrificial nature. Among the hit images of Chiranjeet Chakraborty, the image of a dutiful and obedient son became a hit for a period of time. In the mythological stories of Bengal and Indian sub-continent, parents are considered as Gods and Goddesses. Those who followed these traditional values are considered as role models. Thus, undoubtedly this image conforming to these traditional values went on to become a huge hit in the box office.

This metonymic symbolization in Indian film language is strategically revealed through the star persona. This is where the physicality and the onscreen personality of the star provide them with the opportunity to be willingly captured within the entangled web of mythic virtues. Thus, by "tapping into archetypal preoccupation" the star image is instrumental in cleansing of "moral degradation and unified by an ephemeral sense of psychic coherence" (Banaji 7). Thus, these commercially successful films "seem to be about the construction of a dream space which cuts across class and boundaries where aspirations and desires blend with blunt skepticism and common sense" provocative of poetic justice for all (Banaji 9). In most of these films, the hero is seen to be articulating the crisis of the audiences and opens up a set of ways to cope with that crisis. These films do not merely reflect the social reality through its ideological and cultural forces, but construct a new reality as a whole which can be felt through the emotional responses of its inhabitants.

In all of these films, either the hero is found to have played the social roles which are morally standardized or to take up a rebellious sort of attitude to break the rules and norms in a gracious way or to make the situation wanting and admirable in the eyes of the audiences. All of these things lead to the hero producing a fresh point of view, constructing a new man with a definite sense of integrity. Thus, the star persona does reveal the social functions of stars in legitimizing the ideological understanding. In most of these star images, there are certain charismatic qualities connected with the very central features of man's existence and the cosmos in which he lives, which set them apart from the rest of the candidates (Dyer 112).

Thus, stars stand for a coherent, non-contradictory system where the onscreen portrayal of the characters reflect the constructed images of the stars as desired and desiring beings. Certain stars stand for certain types of entertainment. This paper has tried to understand the successful images of Chiranjit Chakraborty; how he rose to prominence by providing certain types of entertainment that led him to becoming one of the biggest superstars of this era and how did the context of the Bengali film industry sketch their ways to stardom and how did the backdrop of the contemporary Bengali society play a pivotal role in shaping their onscreen images.

Notes:

1. By the word "naturalness," I intend to mean the spontaneous, irreducible aspect of somebody's personality; untainted whatsoever from any kind of artificial imposition of any of those ingredients responsible in constructing an onscreen character. See also Dyer, Richard. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society.* 2nd ed. Abdington, Oxon: Routledge, 2004. pp. 17-20.
2. For a detailed understanding of the categorical changes in cinematic traditions of Bengali popular cinema, see Gooptu, Sharmistha. "Changing Contexts, New Texts: 'Inserting' TV into the Transforming Text of Post-1980 Bengali Cinema." *Television in India: Satellite, Politics and Cultural Change,* edited by Nalin Mehta, Routledge, 2008.
3. Jatra is a folk theatre form which became very popular in West Bengal, Bangladesh and in some parts of Odisha, Bihar, Assam and Tripura. Jatra is known for its over-the-top dialogue delivery, stereotypical characters, excessive melodrama and loud acting.

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