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EDITORIAL

The present volume of *Meher Journal of English Studies* is emblematic of the journal's continued commitment to interrogative scholarship, critical interdisciplinarity, and nuanced engagements with the epistemologies of literature, history, and culture. The 2024 issue constitutes a formidable corpus of essays that collectively foreground the role of literary studies in mediating between the imaginative and the material, the aesthetic and the political, the historical and the speculative.

The issue commences with "Exile at Home: Trauma and Kurdish Identity in Laleh Khadivi's *The Age of Orphans*" by Prasad Mohapatra and Anjali Tripathy—a text that unflinchingly confronts the aporetic condition of statelessness and the intergenerational inscription of trauma. Through the perspective of cultural trauma, the authors delineate the fraught negotiation of selfhood within fractured geopolitical imaginaries, revealing the palimpsestic nature of Kurdish identity in the shadow of nationalist erasure.

P. Muralidhar Sharma's essay entitled "The Banal Everyday: *Memsahibs* and Social Space in Late Colonial India" examines the hitherto neglected writings of the *memsahibs* as alternative history. It compellingly argues that the internalisation of banality constituted a central strain in the personal narratives of the hapless *memsahibs,* most of whom were handcuffed to the British project of imperialist expansionism. By drawing attention to the diverse social spaces these women inhabited in late colonial India, the essay problematizes the neat dichotomization of the colonial experience in terms of domination and subordination.

Pulastya Jani's essay, "Interface of Literature and Anthropology: A Study of Verrier Elwin as a Writer," provocatively reconsiders the disciplinary boundaries that have historically estranged the literary from the ethnographic. In revisiting Elwin's textual praxis, Jani excavates the writer's dialogic engagement with subaltern epistemes and oralities, thereby re-scripting the anthropological archive through a decolonial hermeneutic.

The Romantic body is re-inscribed in Shatarupa Mishra's "A Study of Trans-corporeality in Select Later Sonnets of John Keats". In this essay, Mishra attempts a reading of the later sonnets of John Keats through the critical lens of Karen Barad's feminist materialism and Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality. She suggests how these sonnets achieve a rare model of "blended physicality" through the blurring of boundaries between human and non-human entities.

In "Caste System Intrinsic to Hinduism: A Myth," Akhila Ranjan Parhi mounts a trenchant critique of essentialist historiographies that conflate caste orthodoxy with the ontological substratum of Hinduism. Drawing upon historiographical revisionism, the article disarticulates the hegemonic narratives that sustain caste as an immutable theological structure.

The aesthetic of temporal fracture and historiographic metafiction is central to Suman Das Mahapatra's "Configuring Fragmented Past by Re-imagining History: Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*." The essay closely examines how the novel facilitates an alternative understanding of the past through the mythologization of history and the historicization of myth.

In "Silence as a Catalyst to the Language of Existential Crisis: An Analysis of Harold Pinter's *The Room*," Kakalee Das revisits Pinter's *The Room* through the phenomenology of absence. Silence, in this reading, is not mere negation but an ontological signifier. Das argues how the fragmented nature of reality entailed the theatrical reproduction of pauses and silences as formidable indicators of the crisis of language and expression.

Shivangi Verma's "Liberalisation and Marginalisation: Reading Queer Paradox in Pre-Colonial India in Ruth Vanita's *Memory of Light*" offers a genealogical excavation of queer identities in precolonial India through Ruth Vanita's *Memory of Light*, locating within its folds the paradoxes engendered by liberalization discourses and their complicity in both recuperative and erasing gestures. The essay intricately dissects the dialectic of visibility and erasure operative within queer historiography.

Bhavya Aggarwal's "Shift in the Paradigm of the Detective in Detective Fiction" tracks the genre's evolution from the logocentric rationality of classical detection to the hermeneutic ambiguity of postmodern iterations. Through an examination of sub-genres like Locked Room Mystery, Howcatchem, Whodunnit and Cozy Mystery, the essay traces the paradigmatic shifts in the representation of the detective.

The final contribution by Subhra Souranshu Pujahari, "*The Viziers of Bassora* and the Dramatic Architectonics of Sri Aurobindo," undertakes a dramaturgical analysis of Aurobindo's philosophical theatre. By examining its symbolic topography and metaphysical scaffolding, the essay situates Aurobindo's dramaturgy within the larger trajectory of Indian modernist experimentation and spiritual allegory.

Together, these essays instantiate the journal's ongoing investment in scholarly rigor, critical reflexivity, and theoretical innovation. We remain indebted to our contributors for their intellectual generosity and to our readership for continuing to engage with the discursive spaces this journal seeks to open.

Anjali Tripathy

P. Muralidhar Sharma

Exile at Home: Trauma and Kurdish Identity in Laleh Khadivi's *The Age of Orphans*

Prasad Mohapatra
Anjali Tripathy

Abstract

This paper explores the interplay of traumatic memory and identity of the Kurds in *The Age of Orphans* (2009), the first novel in Laleh Khadivi's Kurdish Trilogy. Set against Iran's efforts to suppress Kurdish resistance and enforce cultural assimilation, the novel delves into the lasting impact of state violence on both individual and collective identity. By bearing witness to the trauma of Kurdish tribespeople, the novel serves as both a testimony to their past and a critique of systemic oppression. Central to Khadivi's narrative is the portrayal of trauma as an ineffable force that disrupts belonging, leading to fractured and conflicting identities. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma as an "unclaimed experience" and Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of "cultural trauma," this article contends that *The Age of Orphans* articulates trauma as a persistent and unresolved force that disrupts and destabilizes both personal subjectivity and collective identity of the Kurds.

Keywords: Theory of trauma, collective identity, postmemory, Laleh Khadivi

"Sitting around an old table
they drew lines across the map
dividing the place
I would call my country."
– *Lausanne 1923* by Choman Hardi (2004)

Introduction

The Kurds, numbering about 40 million, represent the world's largest stateless ethnic group, dispersed primarily across Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Greater Kurdistan lacks fixed territorial boundaries, shaped by historical and geopolitical dynamics. The Kurds share a common culture and language, yet face systemic repression from the nations governing their lands. The unified Kurdish identity has been undermined through cultural prohibitions, forced assimilation, and violent state actions, including the 1988 chemical attack by Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, and strict prohibitions on the usage of Kurdish language in the Syrian and Turkish controlled Kurdistan. Similarly in Iran, recurrent military invasions and genocidal campaigns shortly after the completion of the First World War has

reinforced the Kurds' identity as a stateless nation subjected to persistent political and cultural marginalization.

The endurance of Kurdish language, identity, and culture has been significantly influenced by mass migrations, particularly to Europe and other countries of the West like the USA and Australia. It has fostered the growth of Kurdish Anglophone literature over the past two decades. This body of work, encompassing fiction, poetry, and memoirs, foregrounds cultural trauma through thematic engagements of displacement, war-induced trauma, and the struggle for identity. Writers such as Choman Hardi, Nazand Begikhani, Ava Homa, Behrooz Boochani, Ali Bachtyar, and Laleh Khadivi have amplified Kurdish voices and testimonies of trauma onto the global audience.

This article examines Laleh Khadivi's *The Age of Orphans* (2009), the first novel in her Kurdish Trilogy, to investigate how state violence shapes and destabilizes both individual subjectivity and collective identity of the Kurds of Iran. The novel portrays Kurdish trauma as an ineffable and enduring force that fractures belonging and produces conflicting identities. As stated in the abstract, drawing on Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma as an "unclaimed experience" and Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of "cultural trauma," the article argues that Khadivi represents trauma not as a singular historical event but as a continuous disruption of memory and identity. Furthermore, through Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," the article explores how the novel engages with the transmission of inherited trauma across generations. By situating Khadivi's narrative within broader historical, political, and cultural frameworks, the paper contributes to critical discussions on the legacies of violence and the persistence of trauma in contemporary Kurdish literature.

Khadivi and Post-memory

Khadivi's novel is an imagined reconstruction that goes back to a distant past, about two generations before Khadivi, and represents a historical trauma inherent to her father's homeland of Iranian Kurdistan. Born to a Kurdish father and an Iranian mother, Khadivi's novel reflects on her own self as a possessor of the traumatic memory—something she has not experienced firsthand but has inherited from her father and uncles through stories and narratives. This memory is what Marianne Hirsch refers to as "postmemory." With reference to the Holocaust, Hirsch defines "postmemory" as "the relationship that the generation after bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up" (Hirsch 106). Khadivi's knowledge and experience of the past and Kurdish history is indirect and mediated, and not her own. In an interview with Persis Karim, Khadivi admitted to being more drawn to her father's background as a Kurd rather than to that of her Tehrani mother. She remarks, "My father spoke of it often, and it was fascinating to me. Growing up in high school and college and learning about the Kurds—a people of forty-five million without a country—fascinated me... I wanted to track the inheritance as well as tribal belonging, national belonging, and postnational belonging for my characters. I wanted to trace over three generations of men, how they inherit a sense of place, a sense of belonging. How do you know who you are and what you represent?..." Being a second-generation immigrant who fled the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1978 while still a child, and moving from place to

place before finally settling and growing up in the USA—a country whose culture vastly differs from her own—she dealt with the questions of cultural alienation, displacement, and loss of belonging throughout her life. Unlike other Kurdish Anglophone writers such as Choman Hardi and Ali Bachtyar, Khadivi's text does not represent the voice of Kurdish people directly, even though it engages with Kurdish history, albeit in a fictional form. Her work is a quest to find her own self, sense of identity, and belonging, which runs parallel to that of the protagonist. Khadivi's connection to her Kurdish past is indirect and mediated, passed down to her from her Kurdish father in the form of family memories and stories as well as through her own research. The novel represents a historical rupture and trauma inherent to her father's nation, which is a product of the memories she has inherited, much like Hirsch's contention that postmemory's "connection to its object or source is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (22). Throughout history, the Kurds have been recorded to migrate, partly because of their semi-nomadic pastoralist lifestyle and mostly because of the frequent wars they have participated in. As a second-generation immigrant herself, she has experienced displacement throughout her life—questions of belonging, home(land), and a sense of loss—which is why she admits to being more interested in her Kurdish background compared to her mother's Persian background.

Kurdish Historical Context

Shortly after the completion of the First World War, the power vacuum in the region paved the way for General Reza Khan to take over the modern Iranian state via a military coup. According to historical sources, Reza Khan soon adopted the title of "Shah" and brought forth a new form of constitution and created a government that was essentially a constitutional monarchy, with him as the head of state. The majority of Kurds living in Iran-controlled Kurdistan were primarily semi-nomadic pastoralist tribal folks who moved between the boundaries of the neighbouring nation-states of Turkey and Iraq. In his ambition to create a unified Persian identity, the Shah forced the Kurds to adopt a sedentary lifestyle and imposed restrictions on migratory activities. This forced sedentarization continued well into the reign of his son and successor, Mohammed Reza Shah, and often resulted in armed conflicts between the Kurds and the Iranian National Army. Some of the earliest instances of rebellion for the formation of a separate Kurdish autonomous state began during the reign of Reza Shah, as early as 1921, as a means of revolt against sedentarization and Westernization (McDowall 221–33; Yildiz and Tayasi 3–12). The Shah's dream of a unified Persian identity was more influenced by the West than by the ethnic past. It denied any minority group its own unique identity. The public was introduced to Western art and cultural forms, primarily those of Germany and the USA. The new constitution specified Persian as the official language of administration and education, while local languages like Kurdish, Balochi, Zazaki, etc., suffered heavily, as they were neither accepted nor given due recognition, though they were not explicitly denied either. By 1935, the Persian language had dominated and suppressed all other languages in the country. Educational institutions were deployed to instil the Persian national identity in the new generation. Suppression of the Kurdish language, spoken by about nine million people, as well as Kurdish culture, history, and ethnicity, was integral to the development of the modern Persian state. Thus, the official discourse of the state argued that the idea of being a "Kurd" was antagonistic,

reeked of "otherness," and questioned the legitimacy of modernized Iran (Vali 4–19). The advent of the Second World War and Reza Shah's affiliation with Nazi Germany led the Allied Forces to banish him and appoint his son, Mohammed Reza, as his successor. This disturbance in Tehran provided the Kurds with a great opportunity for freedom, and with the help of the USSR, the first autonomous Kurdish state, the "Republic of Mahabad," was formed in 1946. This new autonomous state helped achieve a broader sense of unified Kurdish identity, with rapid intellectual expansion in the Kurdish language. However, this autonomy was short-lived, as the Soviet troops withdrew support and the Iranian army promptly marched into Mahabad, publicly executing the leaders within a couple of months. Mass executions took place, and prominent Kurdish leaders and intellectuals were either forced to flee, jailed indefinitely, or executed (McDowall 237–53; Yildiz and Tayasi 17–22). Since then, there have been multiple attempts to establish an autonomous Kurdish state, only to face the wrath of the government, with the leaders being executed or imprisoned for life.

Unclaimed Experiences

In *The Age of Orphans*, Khadivi's depiction of the protagonist, Reza Khourdi, provides a crucial framework for examining the unclaimed nature of trauma and its manifestation within the context of cultural displacement and forced assimilation. Reza's psychological disintegration and fractured identity align with Cathy Caruth's concept of unclaimed experience, which posits that trauma is not fully assimilated at the moment of its occurrence but returns in disruptive ways, haunting the survivor through involuntary repetitions, fragmented memories, and emotional dissociation. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Caruth asserts that trauma resists immediate understanding, rendering it "unclaimed" and inaccessible to conscious narrative formation (Caruth 7).

Reza's trauma begins with the violent death of his father and the destruction of his village at the hands of the Shah's army. The perceived image of his father as a strong and fearless Kurd is shattered as he witnesses him being killed by a soldier, crying and begging for mercy in his last moments. The boy, instead of forgetting this gruesome act, "chooses to never remember, and thus never forget, and keeps the crushed face of his father secreted in a damp purgatory of forget and never-remember, to rove destitute as a ghost through the living days of a son who can never forgive" (Khadivi 67). However, rather than allowing space for mourning or integration of this loss, Reza is conscripted into the very forces responsible for his people's destruction. Upon conscription, he is named "Reza Khourdi," and is immediately put into an indoctrination program, where he, along with hundreds of other boys of his age—mostly tribal boys orphaned in the war—are taught their new identity.

Reza, throughout his childhood, has nightmares and flashbacks of the terrible night. In the initial days following his capture, he experiences bouts of madness, switching between "being calm and hysterical" as he runs among the soldiers, declaring that their uniforms are costumes they can now abandon to become Kurds again, as they have managed to defeat the murderous Shah. As days progress, the madness slowly turns into numbness and silence; however, the variety of nightmares continues to haunt him, where the Iranian soldiers always turn into

monstrous figures devouring people who remind him of cousins and neighbours from his village. Tortured by the insane dreams, the boy wakes up without any clear idea of what is happening around him, except that he must serve the soldiers mechanically and like a maniac, as per their orders, so that they will spare his village and its inhabitants, conjured up in his dream (Khadivi 78–84).

This dissociation from reality is nothing but the result of the boy's traumatic experience, which has since remained unprocessed, manifesting instead in emotional numbness, self-alienation, and PTSD. This linking of past, present, and future is a result of trauma creating a disruption in the mind's experience of time, making the subject endlessly waver between the present and "a primary experience that can never be captured" (Nadal and Calvo 3).

As Caruth notes, trauma does not emerge as a coherent narrative but as fragmented and involuntary reenactments of the past (8). Reza's compulsive need to demonstrate unwavering loyalty to the Persian state exemplifies this dynamic, even as his subconscious disrupts this assimilation through intrusive memories—fleeting visions of his father's voice, the Kurdish mountains, and his childhood innocence. His repeated attempts to suppress these recollections by embracing his new identity as a reformed Persian man ultimately fail, underscoring the destabilizing effects of unprocessed trauma.

The novel further explores the cyclical nature of trauma through Reza's transformation from victim to perpetrator. Having once suffered under the brutality of the Shah's military, he later becomes an enforcer of that same regime, tasked with the violent suppression of Kurdish resistance. This repetition aligns with Caruth's claim that trauma's recurrence is a failed attempt at mastery or resolution. Ruth Leys' mimetic theory of trauma further elucidates this phenomenon, arguing that traumatized individuals exist in a paradoxical state of neither full control nor complete autonomy, leading them to unconsciously reenact their own past suffering (Leys 8–10).

Reza's complicity in state violence—his participation in raids on Kurdish villages, his brutalization of children, and his sexual assault of a young girl with his rifle (Khadivi 125–136)—illustrates how trauma manifests as a compulsive repetition of the original wound, wherein the victim of violence becomes its executor. Through Reza's trajectory, Khadivi not only exposes the lingering psychological toll of forced assimilation but also situates his suffering within the broader cultural trauma of the Kurds.

Cultural Trauma

The novel portrays cultural trauma in several ways. Reza's forced assimilation into the Persian state mirrors the systematic suppression of Kurdish culture. From the moment he is captured by the Shah's army, he is stripped of his language, given a new name, and has a heritage forced upon him—elements that, according to Jeffrey Alexander, are crucial to collective identity (20). This forced transformation illustrates how cultural trauma is not just about physical violence but also about the destruction of historical memory and belonging. Alexander argues that for an event to be classified as cultural trauma, it must be collectively recognized

and narrated as a fundamental wound to a group's identity. Throughout the novel, Kurdish history is depicted as one of recurring loss and displacement. Reza's personal suffering—his father's death, his self-alienation, and a constant need to belong to a land—symbolizes the broader Kurdish experience of dispossession and state oppression. His initial separation from his mother for the rite of passage, his conscription into the Iranian Army, and his eventual move to Tehran mark a series of physical and psychological displacements. He is torn between successive new identities: first, that of a Kurdish man no longer permitted the comfort of his mother's lap, and then that of a born-again Persian soldier fighting for the glory of the Shah rather than any tribe.

Upon conscription, Reza is grouped with hundreds of other boys from various tribes and taught daily about the greatness of the Persian nation. Tribal groups are portrayed negatively; their tutor claims they were barbaric. Reza is shown to be unaffected by the violent history of the Persian state taught in class, yet he begins to panic when the tribes are mentioned. He is surprised at himself, unable to understand what is happening. Citing Cathy Caruth's work, Alexander explains trauma as follows: "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Alexander 7). In the novel, this is shown through Reza's sense of unease: "The word Kurd passes over Reza like a dark cloud and leaves him long unsettled in its shadow, and all the laughter is drained from him... The bad feeling churns in Reza, though now he cannot remember the cause. Has he broken a rule?... He thinks and checks but knows that the illness churns at one word: Kurd" (Khadivi 92–93). By focusing on Reza's internal conflict, the novel indirectly highlights the Kurdish people's struggle to maintain their identity in the face of systematic erasure.

Reza's transformation into a soldier of the very regime that oppressed his people underscores Alexander's idea that cultural trauma can lead to profound identity fragmentation. Instead of processing his trauma, Reza forcibly internalizes Persian nationalism and participates in the repression of Kurdish rebels. As Alexander et al. argue, "Experiencing trauma can be understood as a sociological process that defines a painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility and distributes the ideal and material consequences" (22). The childhood trauma in Reza remains deep within his psyche, bringing out the "terrors" in him whenever the word "Kurd" is mentioned. The education and military training he receives revise his identity, but not completely. Although he is now treated as one of the best cadets in the Shah's army, he still remains the "dirty Kurd" in the eyes of other cadets. Alexander defines this phenomenon as follows: "Identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity's earlier life" (22). This act of complicity reflects Alexander's argument that cultural trauma can produce deep divisions within a community, leading some members to revise and reconstruct their identity and adopt the dominant culture's ideology as a means of survival (22).

Another key aspect of cultural trauma is its long-lasting impact across generations. Alexander observes, "In the course of defining national identity, national histories are constructed around injuries that cry out for revenge" (8).

Further, he adds, "Identity involves a cultural experience. Only if the patterned meanings of the collectivity are abruptly dislodged is traumatic status attributed to an event" (10). The Kurdish struggle for recognition and autonomy, as hinted at in the novel, is not an isolated historical event but part of a repeated cycle of violence and suppression. Reza's inability to reclaim his Kurdish identity suggests that cultural trauma is not easily resolved; instead, it lingers, shaping collective memory and influencing future struggles.

Towards the end of the novel, Reza kills his Persian wife, Meena, as a means of resisting oppression within his own household. The act of Meena raising their children draws a strong parallel to the way Reza was conscripted by the army. He admits, "I have orphaned them just as I was orphaned" (Khadivi 286). The novel ends with Reza, now with the new identity of "old man Khourdi," trying to draw a map to return to his childhood home. Though he has returned to the physical area, he carries the traumatic ruptures of his childhood and his fragmented identity as that of a "Khourdi," which means "inferior" in Persian, as a reminder of his tribal lineage. According to Jan Assmann, "Identity is a matter of consciousness, that is of becoming aware, of an otherwise unconscious image of the self. This applies both to the individual and to collective life" (111). This is evident in the story, as the traumatic ruptures remain a part of Reza's consciousness, preventing him from fully assimilating into either of the cultures—Persian or Kurdish—both of which he has inherited. In the end, he remarks, "Still I am an orphan on this earth" (Khadivi 298), alluding to his fragmented identity and the longing for a place where he belongs, which has remained a central theme throughout the novel.

Ron Eyerman (2001) rightly observes that there is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as a cultural process: "As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (2). Khadivi's novel ultimately illustrates how cultural trauma is not just about remembering past suffering, but about the ongoing struggle to preserve identity, history, and collective dignity in the face of systemic erasure.

Conclusion

To conclude, Laleh Khadivi's *The Age of Orphans* (2009) serves as a powerful literary exploration of the Kurdish experience, encapsulating the traumatic history of displacement, assimilation, and violence that has shaped Kurdish identity over generations. Khadivi's work, while fictional, resonates deeply with real historical events and the ongoing struggles faced by the Kurdish people. Through Reza's fractured identity and perpetual longing for a home, *The Age of Orphans* highlights the broader Kurdish experience of exile and statelessness, reinforcing the idea that trauma is not confined to the past but remains an active force shaping the present and future. The novel serves not only as a testament to Kurdish suffering but also as an act of cultural preservation and resistance. By giving voice to silenced histories and marginalized identities, the novel contributes to a growing body of Kurdish literature that seeks to reclaim and assert a distinct Kurdish identity.

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The Banal Everyday: *Memsahibs* and Social Space in Late Colonial India

P. Muralidhar Sharma

Abstract

This article attempts to study the everyday in the lives of the *memsahibs*, a racially exclusive group of European women, most of whom accompanied their white husbands on their journey to the colonized domain. The article is interested in examining the banal everyday in the lives of the *memsahibs* as an important marker of their social standing in the racially hierarchized British *Raj.* It argues how the *memsahibs*, in their varied roles as chaste English wives, philanthropists, social reformers and feminists battled with the overarching sense of ennui that enveloped their lives in the *Raj.* The article does so by examining the diverse social spaces they inhabited and the spaces they transgressed, thus defeating all attempts at categorization.

Keywords: *Memsahibs,* British *Raj,* Banality, Everyday, Social Space

The period following the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 witnessed unprecedented changes in the policies of the British. New social and cultural re-orientations began to be noticed, with the adoption of hitherto unknown ways of governing a subject population. This period also distinguished itself in terms of the emergence of new regimes of control and surveillance, which complicated the relations between Indians and the English. The policy of cultural non-interference, which the East India Company had adopted to facilitate commerce, had already started losing its viability by the early decades of the nineteenth century. This policy of the British became surprisingly dysfunctional with the religious involvement of the missionaries in colonial projects. The Evangelical Protestant revival in Britain in the late eighteenth century provided an added impetus to the colonial endeavours of the British, and the infiltration of the missionaries as reformers in the Indian subcontinent became a recognized practice by the later decades of the nineteenth century. The evangelical missionaries began taking an active part in the restructuring of existing social and cultural norms in the colony. This was precisely the time when women's philanthropic roles in civilising the colony came to be recognized, and a number of women missionaries travelled to India to spread the message of the Gospel. The evangelisation of 'heathen' societies now came to be perceived as the white woman's burden. The simultaneous arrival and infiltration of the Englishwomen in India, mostly in secular roles, and especially to provide for the acute paucity of eligible

brides for the *sahibs* led to a massive social restructuring and re-allocation of gender roles in the *Raj.* Such women, popularly addressed as "*memsahibs"*, were arbiters of Englishness and European cultural refinement. Their role in the social life of the imperial outposts was seen as indispensable, though they had remarkably less influence on the political equations of the day.

Most of the Englishwomen who chose to come to India as accomplices to their husbands or as prospective brides would ordinarily have lived very unremarkable lives had they lived in England. In India, their presence was associated with the prestige and power of the *Raj*, which they strived hard to uphold. They had an overwhelming moral burden on them—to present the ruling race in images of civility and cultural refinement. On them was the onus to safeguard the 'honour' of the British race. Most *memsahibs* were conscious of this unique role they had to fulfil, and acted with caution. They had to live up to the expectations of respectable womanhood, and exude a certain notion of Englishness in their dress, manners and conversational abilities. Though primarily defined in relational terms as the wives of the *sahibs,* and therefore "*memsahibs",* they succeeded in carving out a niche for themselves in the restrictive environment of the *Raj.* In this respect, Margaret Macmillan writes in her book *Women of the Raj: The Mothers, Wives and Daughters of the British Empire in India*, "In India, British women were obliged to match themselves against a narrow definition of a good woman. They became memsahibs. They shared in the glory of the Raj, yet they had too little responsibility for it" (24).

I

For a very long time, Memsahib's accounts have been categorically overlooked in scholarly accounts of the colonial encounter. Their role in the imperial project has always tended to be perceived as minimal, and even marginal, to the extent that some of our celebrated works on colonialism do not so much as even mention them. Their erasure from official history, supplemented by their striking absence from scholarly studies, has led to a void in our understanding of the gendered dimensions of colonialism. Just as the colonial project has conventionally been understood as a man's prerogative, the scholarship on colonial cultural encounters makes the colonizing man more visible than the woman, leading to a massive gap in research. The progressive ghettoization of women's histories in the grand-narratives of nations and nationalisms has always tended to keep *memsahib's* life narratives hidden from academic purview. However, recent research has shown how these accounts, though not "official" and competent in the way men's accounts are, significantly alter our preconceived notions about the colonial space, making possible plural interpretations of what has always been perceived as a monolithic phenomenon. In her scholarly analysis of *memsahibs* and their role in colonial India, Ipshita Nath suggests the term "Epistolary Chronicling" to describe *memsahib's* archiving practices (xxvii). Such modes of recording daily experiences, albeit informal and diffusive, offer alternative interpretations of the equations between the colonizer and colonized. In many senses such writings act as counter-narratives to the dominant imperial narrative of the all-powerful British man. Though remarkably invisiblized in mainstream accounts, they interrogate the validity of such accounts from their peripheral positions. Contrary to popular belief, the *memsahibs* were not mere luxurious idlers in the leisurely ambience of the British *Raj.* They were aware of their

status and carved specific roles for themselves as educators, reformers, philanthropists, activists and the like. It would be a sweeping overgeneralization to attempt to cast the *memsahibs* in any limited role. Their roles were as diverse as their social, cultural and administrative positioning within the rigidly hierarchized British *Raj*. As Mary Procida forcefully argues, they were competent enough to assist their administrative husbands from within the secluded space of the home. It may be pertinent to mention here that Sir Edward Blunt dedicated his book *I.C.S.: The Indian Civil Service*, to his wife, whom he eulogized as equally intelligent as him. Although it is not entirely untrue that they had a very restrictive role to perform in the imperial project, they nevertheless determined the dynamics of its inner, less documented social and cultural aspects. As women they were strictly forbidden within the official empire, they had little or no direct responsibilities to deliver. In this respect, they were helpless outsiders to imperial machinery, determining its structure indirectly and from within the less seen domain of everyday interaction with natives. Their liminal positioning and contradictory status as simultaneously powerful and powerless, insiders and outsiders, dominant and subservient left them little scope for strong self-assertion while still retaining their housewifely respectability.

II

One of the major ideas that resonate in the writings of the *memsahibs* is the sense of the all-pervasive banality of their existence. Contrary to the more exciting and adventurous life of the British administrator, the *memsahib's* everyday was characterized by inescapable ennui and boredom. Their personal accounts of spending long hours in a predominantly hostile atmosphere, along with the attendant emotional turmoil and emptiness, constitutes a major thematic strain in most of their writings. Whereas the evangelical missionary woman spent a more active life outdoors, always interacting with the natives and engaging in tiresome efforts at proselytization, the *memsahib* had little to do beyond the supervision of her banal domestic activities. In his book *Prose of the World: Modernism and the Banality of Empire* Saikat Majumdar argues that the thematization of banality constitutes a central tension in textual representations of colonial experience.

> Nothing happens here; life is empty, uneventful, on the margins of human history. Temporality here is mired purely in the rhythms of the natural environment, which is iterative, unregenerative, and, in the end, banalizing, next to the imagined and subsequently realized fullness of life at the center of imperial culture. Yet the life of the protagonist must be rooted in this barrenness, if only for the sake of a promise of fullness from a distance.
>
> The oppressive banalization of everyday life on the margins of empire is an ineluctable experience of colonial modernity. (3)

The presence of a huge female population in the colonial outposts entails a deeper understanding of the gendered dimensions of banality. The apparent uneventfulness of the Raj was always contrasted with the pulsating social life of the metropolis where the leisurely hours of the *memsahibs* were filled with activity. This idea is best problematized in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, where the heroine battles the sense of an all-encompassing ennui and as a respite, develops associations with the native elite, the *Nawab* and his paramour, Harry.

The notion of the banal everyday as represented in the writings of *memsahibs,* is essentially a racialized one. Even as they struggle with the unfriendly and unhygienic environment, are not free from their racial prejudices. The perspective that colours everything around them is undeniably an imperialist perspective, imbued in the idea of cultural superiority of the European race. Whereas they arrived in India with an explicit hope of escaping from the irreversible non-activity of native English domesticity, they are ironically trapped in another kind of banality and emptiness in the *Raj.* Unless they entered and appropriated the arena of active social service, reform or burgeoning politics, by partially/provisionally defying social norms, they were inevitably destined to be suffocated by the emptiness of the social life of the *Raj.*

The social life of the *Raj* has tended to be depicted in somewhat romantic terms, as engulfing a vibrant culture of balls, parties, functions, picnics, excursions, hunting and the like. More often than not, the *Raj* has been depicted in images of exuberance, offering immense promise to young *memsahibs* for socialization. This tendency to romanticize *Raj* leisure has somewhat subdued the long intervals of ennui and boredom during which the *memsahibs* had little or nothing to do apart from looking forward to the next social occasion. In his incisive analysis, Charn Jagpal notes how most of these *memsahibs* chose to transform themselves into native prototypes of the essentially emancipated nautch-girl who had a certain degree of freedom of movement in the public sphere.

> ...the idea of "going native," the idea that intimate contact with alternative cultures and ways of being could perhaps free the British subject from the constraints of society, or the idea that by taking on the appearance, life, habits or customs of a non-European race, British men or women might just advance rather than regress. (252)

Transforming into the Indian courtesan, many Anglo-Indian women believed, would potentially absolve them from imperial obligations and foster freedom in the colonized space. Most of such women, best represented in the novels of Flora Anne Steel, chose to refashion themselves as "native" dancing-girls, and began entertaining their clientele through music and dance. Like the missionaries and the social reformers, chose to break the stereotype of the purposeless, leisurely *memsahib*. In her memoir *Up the Country* Emily Eden notes how the dearth of decent company made their lives miserable: "some are quite alone. No other European within reach. In a climate where for some months they can hardly get out of the house, and why they do not go melancholy mad I cannot conceive. Some do come back to Calcutta in a frightfully nervous state" (qtd in Nath 76). Most women strived relentlessly to maintain their contacts with "home", emotionally, if not physically. They maintained regular journals and letters which they mailed to their near and dear ones back in England, with hope of receiving news from them. Such news, albeit late in arriving, became the subject of intense gossip and nostalgic remembrance of days gone by: "It is thus likely that their frantic and obsessive letter writing and journalling stemmed from an anxiety of forgetting and being forgotten" (Nath 72). The awareness of the void in their lives, which mostly sprang from their peripheral role in the active public affairs of the *Raj*, left them despondent. The irreversible purposelessness of their lives, centered as they were on their husbands and their domestic comforts, left them

craving for the regenerative warmth of family and friends back in England. Much research has established how hunting, partying, picnicking and clubbing were the most important preoccupations of the *sahibs* and the *memsahibs*. In his celebrated work *Days of the Raj: Life and Leisure in British India* Pramod Nayar acknowledges the existence of a rich archive detailing the leisurely pursuits of the Anglo Indians, most of which included hunting, partying, attending nautch soirees, and the like. Such accounts, Nayar argues, enable us to examine the everyday activities of the unofficial *Raj* as an alternative to its more "official" responsibilities of administration and governance (viii). Research of this kind fails to show how, for instance, the compulsive necessity of attending such social occasions left the *memsahibs* even more exhausted. English social manners in the *Raj* were hierarchically constituted, and were class-exclusive. The *burra memsahibs* or the wives of superior-ranking officials led the gathering, and all other *chota memsahibs* were obliged to the superior in matters pertaining to social interaction. Preference was mostly based on the subtle social skills of the *memsahibs*. They had to be conscious of the consequences of their actions, and could not afford to displease their superiors. In fact, the very title of a "*memsahib"* was conferred on women who possessed certain desirable qualities-

> In fact, newcomer women discovered that the title of the 'memsahib' itself was exclusive and jealously guarded in the nineteenth century, granted to only those women who could 'make it'—that is, find suitable husbands or in some other way establish their position in British circles. Women who wanted to be recognized as a *'pukka'* (recognizable) memsahib had to abide by the Raj customs and practices. The pressure to confirm was exceedingly high, and lapses in fulfilling the proper social roles and duties were not taken too kindly... Those who defaulted became social pariahs. The British circles in India were close-knit and ruthless in this way, and word got around quickly. Sometimes, the misdemeanors of a lady also reflected poorly on the entire community of the British, who fought hard to maintain an image of superiority (racial as well as moral) before the subjects of the empire. Effectively, a memsahib's business was everyone's business. (Nath 58)

Social life in the *Raj* was inescapable, and *memsahibs* had the pressure on them to subscribe to the values of the society they lived in. Any deviation from the norm or disregard of the superiors meant the career of the husband was categorically endangered—after all, their career was a serious subject of concern in almost every domestic equation. Despite the monotony and replicability of such gatherings, Englishwomen made personal compromises to attend them and build meaningful contacts.

III

Most *memsahibs* hailed from a rigidly patriarchal set-up of late Victorian society, and were subject to strict moral surveillance by their senior family members or attendants and servants. Maintaining Victorian moral strictures while on the ship *en route* India or in the new country were equally challenging, as these women were often threatened by the apparent openness of Indian social etiquette. Englishwomen who took on themselves the arduous task of travelling to India by sea did so as part of their attempts to find a suitable husband in the mostly masculine colonial domain. Imperial India offered lucrative marital prospects to spinsters who would not

ordinarily find good matches for themselves back in England. The journey to India by ship was a very romantic, though physically unsettling, endeavour. Most alliances between young women and men were formed on the ship, where passengers were required to give good company to each other to ease the tiresomeness of the long journey. Additionally, the ship offered an interesting interstitial space that was free from the restrictive norms of Victorian society. Women could easily mingle with men of their choice; men could find opportunity to flirt with women without the fear of becoming victims to moral policing. The complete absence of qualms of conscience meant that these spaces could be sexually volatile, offering easy recourse to scandals and licentiousness. Interestingly, historians have noted that not all women who ventured to India hailed from reputable backgrounds. Some of them were ostracized because of their unsocial and objectionable behaviour. A few others came to India as an escape from the oppressive norms of Victorian England. There were also a few who wanted greater independence for themselves. The "Fishing Fleet" as such women were usually known, came on a specific mission of husband-hunting, and left no stone unturned in seeking opportunities of rubbing shoulders with all classes of men with explicit intentions of a possible wedlock.

The Victorian ideal of the separate spheres, which entailed a neat demarcation between the public and private domains as conventionally belonging to male/female respectively, effortlessly extended to the colonized space, where women were protectors of the private, domestic domain. Whereas the Englishman toiled under the tropical sun for the betterment of the natives, the woman was expected to act as an upholder of domestic bliss, and balance out the inconvenience caused by the hostile world outside by providing him comfort back home. She was essentially the 'Angel in the House', spending countless hours of hard work and maneuvering to supervise the activities of the bungalow. Respectably married *memsahibs* were obliged to make their domain impeccably European. Most women found it increasingly difficult to maintain European standards of hygiene and elaborate culinary arrangements that would make them feel home in the mostly alien set-up. Few of them could easily adapt to the tropical climate and the unclean surroundings, often landing in massive health disorders. The urgency of upgrading sanitary practices and culinary cleanliness is a recurrent strain in most of their memoirs. Frieda Hauswirth, a Swiss woman who married Sarangadhar Das and lived in Orissa, notes how her attempts at bringing the standards of her home closer to European practices failed miserably, even as she ran out of her meagre means and landed in debt. She, like many other *memsahibs* of the time, displays a special interest in home-making, which in turn is inextricably interlinked to her identity as a racial superior to the Indian servants and commoners (Hauswirth 55). Superior standards of hygiene invariably entailed a conformity with evolving notions of scientific modernity, and complicity with imperial ideology. The educated lot among the Indians that came in the vicinity of such women are at awe for her sense of hygiene, and admire her for her infallible housekeeping. Manuals such as *The Complete Indian Houskeeper and Cook* (1888) edited by Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner, *The Wife's Help to Indian Cookery* (1888) by W.H. Dawe, *Anglo-Indian and Oriental Cookery* by Grace Johnson (1893), *The Curry Cook's Assistant* by Danie Santiagoe (1889), and Wyvern's *Culinary Jottings* (1885) (Macmillan 170-5) were a necessary reminder of the superior culinary and domestic standards of the European *memsahib*, which she must in no case compromise with. Such volumes created solidarity among the domesticated

European women, who became proud of their unconditional adherence to prescribed practices. Striving to safeguard European standards in the kitchen was one among many ways in which the *memsahibs* asserted their superior racial identity and kept their social status intact. Those of them that belonged to upper echelons of the hierarchical social order could afford an entire retinue of servants. Domestic help in the context of the Raj was highly specified, and separate servants were hired for specific jobs like cooking, cleaning the toilets and the lavatories, arranging water, among others. Most jobs were linked to the caste-identities of the servants, and they fussed about performing jobs that were not traditionally linked to their caste. Although this looked like a luxury, it was a primary necessity in the *mofussil* towns where the *memsahibs* came to live with their husbands.

Handling the servants required a high degree of skill and tolerance, as the domestic manuals suggested. Such reliance on servants, mostly male, also came with its attendant risks of compromising one's privacy and exposing oneself to native gaze. Servants were so well integrated to the overall climate of the domestic space that most *memsahibs* either became oblivious of their presence or started ignoring the highly nuanced codes of conduct in matters of dressing, and behaviour. Frieda Hauswirth describes her endless struggles with servants who would run errands most enthusiastically, but on their own terms. She also records incidents when she is forced to use violence on servants because they were unyielding. The *memsahib's* stringent dealings with her servants have tended to be compared with the *sahib's* ruthless treatment of his Indian inferiors. Just as the Englishman's dealings with his inferiors in the public domain were reminiscent of the unsparing, dehumanized treatment of the natives, the woman's interaction with the servants represented another dimension of this equation between master and slave. On the whole it might be said that the *memsahibs* strived hard to maintain British/European standards of domesticity.

IV

One of the things that made a deep impression on the minds of the *memsahibs* was the apparent sensuality of India. The fear of the unknown and the constant threat of moral contamination haunted them like death. The entire country seemed to be overflowing with eroticism and sexual suggestiveness. The teeming sexual life of the *Raj* seemed to shatter their notions of rigid morality and gentility. All manner of restraint in sexual matters, nudity and frankness seemed for once and all disregarded in Indian temple carvings. They were compelled to come in close quarters with men who were scantily clad, often in the roles of servants and domestic helps. Such men were indispensable to the domestic life of the *Raj,* and most tasks remained incomplete without them. The all-pervasive Victorian strictures demanded Englishwomen to exercise sexual discipline and curb sexual passion, and the men themselves were way too busy with the Herculean task of empire-building. This led to a considerable degree of anxiety about native promiscuity. The untamed masculinity of the Indian man became a perennial source of fear for most women. Their fear was not always figurative. During the Mutiny of 1857, numerous white women were ruthlessly raped and molested by Indian mutineers. The impending threat became real in the worst way possible. Exposure to male gaze and the perpetual threat of being raped or dishonoured formed an inseparable aspect of their

consciousness. Inter-racial rape and the imagined sexual coercion lingered in the minds of the *memsahibs* both as a fear of being violated by a supposedly unclean racial outsider, but also as the manifestation of the repressed desire to experience the fabled sexual energy of the Indian male. This idea best manifests itself in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India,* where Adela Quested feels threatened by the unbridled masculinity of Aziz and accuses him of assaulting her in the Marabar caves. In her book *The Englishwoman in India* (1909) Maud Driver refers to the absolute lack of sexual self-control in Indian servants, and cites this as a sure sign of the moral inferiority of India. The *sahibs,* for their part, perceived the Indian male as a tough sexual competitor, and panicked at the very idea of their women acting otherwise, had they been allowed greater autonomy. The dangers of exposing their women to the public sphere were many, and the British decided to restrict them to the private domestic domain to ensure their honour remained intact. The English wife was expected to distance herself from the Eurasian and working-class white women, who symbolized the worst possibilities of sexual promiscuity and lasciviousness.

V

In their multiple roles as proud wives exuding Englishness, meticulous housekeepers upholding impeccable domesticity, and benevolent white sisters rescuing the 'unfortunate' Indian woman, they straddled through diverse colonial spaces, creating a unique niche for themselves and challenging some of the major stereotypes about the coloniser-colonised equation. In her book *Gender and Colonial Space* Sara Mills suggests that the assumption that British males had complete freedom of movement within the colonial space, and women were confined, is an oversimplification. Instead of demarcating social space neatly in terms of gender roles, she calls for an examination of

> ...the way that discursive constraints work to produce often conflicting and contradictory frameworks, where within certain colonial contexts, confinement for some women is the dominant mode of negotiating spatiality, whereas for other women, in other colonial contexts, transgressing these boundaries is condoned. In still other situations, transgression will be a strategy of resistance. (27)

The existence of the *memsahibs*, albeit on the periphery of the colonial social space, consistently defied the neat categorization between domination and subordination. By regularly interacting with their servants, vendors, *ayahs* and other Indian acquaintances, the *memsahibs* disproved the notion of unsurmountable racial boundaries that restricted each community's access to another. Though haplessly bored of their monotonous existence, they carved out a unique niche for themselves in the hierarchical milieu of late colonial India, leaving behind volumes of personal narratives that offer an alternative understanding of the colonial experience.

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Interface of Literature and Anthropology: A Study of Verrier Elwin as a Writer

Pulastya Jani

Abstract

Literature and Anthropology as two separate disciplines share similar intellectual interests. It is quite difficult to put them in water tight boundaries. They are not static and bound entities, but instead fluid sites of shifting cultural currents and academic interest. Verrier Elwin as a writer is situated within these disciplines but is not confined by it. He adopts a distinctive approach to present the lives of the aboriginals, living across India, through his writings which was shaped by his education at Merton College Oxford and the influences of eastern philosophy. His personal life and writings are not divorced from the subject he was writing and the life he was living, which he calls the life of a "philanthropologist." This paper attempts to study Verrier Elwin as a writer, who stands in between these two areas, and to explore his skilful blending of ethnography and literature in his works. It also aims to study the factors which shaped his sensibility as a writer.

Keywords: ethnography, philanthropologist, literature, anthropology, aboriginals

Ramachandra Guha, a renowned historian, compares Verrier Elwin with J.G. Frazer, but holds Elwin much higher because of his intimate experience with which he writes his ethnography. Verrier was the son of Edmund Henry Elwin, Bishop of Sierra Leone. Harry Verrier Holman Elwin, born in Dover on 29 August 1902, was from Anglo –Saxon family of genteel but not aristocratic background. Verrier was born during the absence of his father who was carrying out his duty as a religious preacher in West Africa and spent his early years with his mother and siblings. The family included Verrier, his younger sister Eldyth, who was a year and a half junior to him, and their brother Basil. The family's religious environment was profoundly influenced by their mother, Minnie Elwin, who infused it with a strong belief in the Second Coming. Verrier Elwin joined the Dean Close school in September 1915. His interest in English literature was kindled by Dr. H.W Flecker, the Head Master of the school, who was an admirer of John Donne's poetry. He was introduced to the works of Horace and Pope by other masters. He discovered many other writers on his own when he was in charge of the school library for a short time.

His academic career took a significant turn when he joined Merton College, Oxford in 1921. The educational and intellectual atmosphere of the college was significantly different from the English public school, which offered ample freedom to students to express their thoughts and interact with a large variety of co-learners. The move from Dean Close to Merton exposed Verrier to a new world of different

belief, race and nationality. In the English Literature course, Verrier had the good fortune to be taught by H.W Garrod, who was an authority on Keats and Wordsworth, Horace and Charlemagne, and also the author of a famous depreciation of Jane Austen. David Nicol Smith, who was having a versatile mind and range of interests was another influential teacher for him. Verrier graduated in 1924 with a first class in English Literature. He was one of the three students to achieve this feat and was awarded one hundred pounds as scholarship to pursue his next degree. He followed his family tradition of reading theology. During his theology degree he was immensely influenced by two persons: F.W Green and Alston Dix. Verrier had taken from these teachers the belief that "God was, or at any rate should be, on the side of the poor." In a paper which he read in October 1925 at the Church Society he rehearsed his move away from the "genteel inanities of conventional religion, that "set of dead, schematic rules," that "series of many formal syllogisms" (Guha, *Savaging the Civilized*, 24).

In the summer of 1926, he was awarded a First in his Theology Finals. There was a huge opportunity for Elwin to go forward in the religious services. During this time there were certain events which started orienting Verrier towards India. Verrier with some of his friends attended a conference at Swanwick of the Students Christian Movement, where they met a visitor from India, looking for young men to take back with him. That visitor was J.C. Winslow. He founded the Chista Seva Sangh (CSS) in 1920, which was inspired from the traditional ashram ideal of Hindus, as well as from its more recent reinterpretation by Gandhi, whose ashram at Sabarmati was at once a centre of the religious life and of service to the poor. Before meeting Winslow Verrier had already started looking eastward. He was guided to the writings of Tagore and the work of Gandhi by an undergraduate at Jesus College, known as Bernard Aluwihare, who was an anti-colonialist and later law minister of independent Cylon. Verrier had the opportunity of a personal introduction to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan who was soon to be appointed as Splading professor of Eastern Religions at Oxford. In the summer of 1926 Radhakrishnan took Verrier and Bernard on a leisurely punt down the river and discussed comparative religion. Radhakrishnan seems also to have handed over a reading list and later that year Verrier published a poem which was inspired by an Eastern text, on the solitariness of the spiritual life:

The lantern
(after the *Bhagvad Gita*)
The silent soul is as a sheltered flame
That in a windless spot unwavering
Offers its light to God. Is hidden name
Fire vested angels sing.
Around it blow the trade-winds of desire;

Breezes of passion, gusts of sudden dread,
But not a breath intruding stirs the fire,
By heaven"s silence fed.
O heart that stirreth with our loss,
Temple of silence built in pain
We light our lanterns at thy Cross
A purer flame to gain.

Verrier Elwin's works fall into diverse categories which make it difficult to define his work. In addition to being a missionary, a Gandhian, a social worker, an activist, he was essentially a writer. His extensive personal experiences enriched a body of work that is truly remarkable in its scope. Fujii compiled a bibliography of Elwin in 1987which spans thirty densely printed pages, listing approximately four hundred articles and forty books. What's equally impressive is the diversity of genres Elwin explored. He delved into writing a variety of works which include religious tracts, novels, poetry, anthropological monographs, collections of folklore, official reports, polemical pamphlets, manuals, editorials, travelogues and reviews. His autobiography titled *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin* (1964) is widely regarded as his finest literary achievement. It was rewarded with the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for being the best book in English. It was mentioned in the citation as "outstanding contribution to contemporary Indian writing in English, written with sincerity, courage and charm, revealing a mind in which Western and Indian idealism were uniquely blended" (Guha "Between Anthropology and Literature", 331). Elwin's position and the unique circumstances in India enabled him to be a privileged interpreter of cultures, where he could show the beauty of one culture to another. His keen sense of understanding culture and human life enabled him to show the Hindus the mystical aspects of Christianity, to the Civilized world what it might learn from the tribals and to anthropology what it can learn from literature.

Through his autobiography Elwin reveals that his interest in anthropology began with literature and Jane Austen and Swift were his first teachers. A considerable volume of sociological information and analysis can be found in texts like *Pride and Prejudice* and *Gulliver's Travels.* Elwin in his autobiography says that:

> I came to anthropology through poetry. I still cannot see what was wrong with this. The chief problem of the student of man is to find his way underneath the surface; he has to "dig" people. Poetry is the revealer, the unveiler; by heightening a man's own sensitivity, by opening to him the treasures of the imagination, it increases his powers of sympathy and understanding. And when his people are (as they were in the Maikal Hills) themselves poets by temperament, there is a link between him and them; they talk the same language, love the same things.
>
> Ever since I left Oxford poetry has been my inseparable companion. It has brought me "in hours of weariness sensations sweet": comforted and restored me in stormy weather; filled times of loneliness and illuminated all that has been dull and dark. Like Keats I cannot exist without Eternal poetry to fill the day.
>
> Now feeling as I did, when I first went to live in the tribal hills of India, with my Wordsworth, my T.S Eliot, my Blake and Shakespeare burning like torches in my little mud house, it was natural that I should look about me for poetry. And I soon found it, for among these gentle and romantic tribal people, poetry jumps out at you. It is there everywhere, in their eyes, on their lips, even in some of their actions. And so now poetry became, from something external to be admired, part of me, a personal possession, and whatever I have done in the name of poetry comes from the work I have done with my tribal poet-friends. (Elwin 143)

He further says,

> I found the people talking poetry. An Old Woman speaks of fire as a flower blossoming on a dry tree, of an umbrella as a peacock with one leg. Children playing round the fire at night ask each other riddles which are sometimes real poems. Chillies are red and green birds sitting on a bush; a lamp is a little sparrow that scatters its feathers about the house. A man speaking of his pregnant wife, says to me, "she must be treated as a flower, or the light may fade from her blossom." Young lovers sing poems to each other across the fields, arranging an elopement in verse, discussing their love in poetic symbols. The grain in the fields is beautified: the smallest of the millets is sweet as a lotus; tiny as it is, when it is cooked with milk it swaggers about. (144)

Literary writers function as ethnographers by crafting narratives that explore human emotions, experiences, places, and events within specific contexts. Like ethnographers, they immerse themselves, either openly or discreetly, in the daily lives of people, observing, listening, and gathering insights to shed light on their subjects. In literature, the writer acts as an observer who shares fragments of others' realities, offering readers a lens to understand cultural and societal dynamics. By approaching a literary text as a cultural artefact, readers engage in a form of social research. The writer-ethnographer conveys information that transforms the reader into both an observer and participant, enabling them to form their own interpretations. Scholars such as historians, classicists, folklorists, mythologists, archaeologists, and ethnographers frequently turn to literary works to reconstruct the past or uncover cultural patterns.

Elwin's interest in writing poetry stated early when he was in Oxford. He started writing his full length works while staying at the Christ Seva Sangh. His two important works aimed at finding the common ground between Christian and Hindu Mystical traditions published during a time when religions were intolerant of each other. These writings highlighted what he referred to as "the bhakti movement in fifteenth-century Europe," drawing parallels between the efforts of European mystics to bring religion closer to the people and the literary creations of the Indian poets of the Bhakti tradition such as Kabir, Mira, Tukaram, and others. Elwin's books resonated with Indian Christians, who reflected on potential connections between their adopted faith and the spiritual heritage deeply rooted in Indian culture (Guha, "Between Anthropology and Literature," 327).

Christ and Satyagraha is Elwin's another work on comparative theology, written for the perusal of Indian Christians, which aimed at justifying his admiration for Gandhi. It argued that Christians could claim biblical sanction for offering civil disobedience to the Raj, for "the campaign initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, both in its method and spirit, is more in accordance with the mind of Christ than any other similar campaign that the world has ever seen" (Elwin, *Christ and Satyagraha* 17). Elwin became deeply aligned with Gandhi and the Congress party, who recognized his importance as a persuasive intellectual on their side. The Congress utilized his exceptional writing and speaking skills to their advantage. Acting on behalf of the Congress, Elwin investigated instances of police repression against non-violent protesters and authored tributes to the freedom movement. These writings,

published in England, aimed to influence the sceptical English audience toward Gandhi's cause. Much like his later anthropological work, Elwin saw himself as a bridge between two worlds, striving to foster understanding. He sought to enlighten Hindus about the nuances of Christianity while urging his fellow countrymen to acknowledge the injustice of British rule in India.

Elwin's life and writing took a significant turn when he left the Congress and went to live among the Gonds in 1932. From this point Elwin lost interest in politics and devoted himself to social work and anthropology. Elwin and his colleague Shamrao Hivale started living in the tribal settlements in Central India. The longer he lived among the tribals, the more deeply he began to look at the world from their perspective, a process that was solidified and affirmed when he married a Gond woman named Kosi in April 1940 (Guha "Between Anthropology and Literature," 327).

After settling in the midst of the Gonds there was a break in the older allegiances of Elwin. He broke away from the church after the Bishop's refusal to renew his license. It was followed by his disenchantment with Gandhism whose puritanical rules such as vegetarianism, asceticism and prohibition seemed incompatible for a tribal life. *Leaves from the Jungle* published in 1936, which contains Elwin's early experiences in Mandla in a diary form, captures these shifting allegiances. His gradual discontentment with the ideologies of Gandhi and Christ is revealed in the book through flashes of irony and wit through the description of a khadi mosquito net as "though utterly patriotic and highly mosquito proof, appears to admit no air whatsoever", or a confession that he spent a day of rest reading Agatha Christie "though aware it would be more suitable for me to employ my leisure reciting the Penitential Psalms." The anthropologist's protective instincts supplanted the reformative aspirations of the social worker. Elwin emphasizes that several aspects of the Gond ethos deserve preservation, such as their simplicity, freedom, love for children, respect for women, independence, and liberation from many typical oriental constraints. Moreover, the tribal community carries a profound lesson for our modern, sophisticated world, which faces fragmentation due to its obsession with material possessions and a lack of love.

The London based publisher John Murray brought a book of Elwin each year between 1936 and 1939. Elwin's subsequent work following *Leaves from the Jungle* was a novel centred around a beautiful tribal girl afflicted with leprosy and abandoned by her lover. Enriched with poems, riddles, and tales drawn from tribal folklore, the story, seamlessly blended with direct dialogue. Considered as one of the earliest, if not the first, ethnographic novels, its narrative revolves around the destiny and circumstances of its central character. H.E. Bates in his book review "Another Delightful Novel from India" considered the book "a piece of the best kind of romance, rich in emotion but unsentimental, rich in colour but firmly rooted in fact...realistic and as frank, in its portrayal of love, as Maupassant". The book mixes fictional narrative with sumptuous ethnographic data that includes the totem identity of characters, black magic, the power of the witch doctors and other information about the tribe (Baral 22). Elwin published another novel *A Cloud That's Dragonish*, in the next year, which is a sequel to *Phulmat of the Hills*. The narrative progresses as key characters from *Phulmat of the Hills* reappear in *A Cloud That's*

Dragonish. Both novels share a similar social milieu, setting, and backdrop. The Gond women, Phulmat and Satula, take centre stage in the story. Elwin offers a detailed examination of the socio-psychological experiences of Gond women within a patriarchal society, highlighting their strong responses to these conditions.

A generous review of Elwin's works was offered by the first Indian anthropologist Sarat Chandra Roy. *Leaves from the Jungle* and *Phulmat of the Hills*, wrote Roy, provided "vivid glimpses of Gond life. Written with "intimate knowledge and deep sympathy," they showed how successfully the writer had sought "to identify himself in spirit with the state of soul- evolution of the people he studies" (Roy 150). *The Baiga*, published in 1939, is Elwin's first ethnographical work, which contains the same spirit of his earlier works. It is an extensive monograph that delves into a small tribe of swidden cultivators whose livelihoods were undermined by the state's confiscation of their forests, compelling them, against their wishes, to adopt plough-based farming. "The pen is the chief weapon with which I fight for my poor," wrote Elwin to an Italian friend in July 1938, while completing *The Baiga*. It was the first book in a series of ethnography and essays which expressed Elwin's concern and fighting spirit for his poor tribals who didn't have any representation.

While Shamrao Hivale dedicated himself to social work, Elwin carried out fieldwork across various districts in what are now the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. From 1940 to 1942, he resided in Bastar, a vast, remote, and densely forested region primarily inhabited by tribal communities. Between 1943 and 1948, he dedicated several months annually to exploring the highlands of Odisha's eastern province. As an anthropologist driven by curiosity and care, Elwin ventured through the forests, seeking tribes to both study and safeguard. Along the way, he gathered an extensive collection of facts, poems, and stories, which later featured in a series of substantial yet engaging monographs.

The Agaria (1942) recounted a poignant story about the decline of charcoal iron-smelters, a community devastated by heavy taxation, the rise of factory-produced iron, and government neglect. *Maria Murder and Suicide* (1943) investigated the reasons behind homicides within a tribe that stood out as an exception to the otherwise well-earned reputation of Indian aboriginals for kindness and peacefulness. *The Muria and their Ghotul* (1946) provided a captivating depiction of the romantic customs of a tribe hidden deep in Bastar's chiefdom, particularly emphasizing the ghotul, or dormitory, where young boys and girls were introduced to the arts and poetry of love. *Bondo Highlander* (1952) examined the character of a highland Odisha tribe, focusing on the interplay between individualism and collective living. *The Religion of an Indian Tribe* (1955), also based in Odisha, delved deeply into the Saora people's rituals and beliefs, earning acclaim as the most comprehensive study of an Indian tribal religion ever penned by an anthropologist.

All of these works were published by the Indian branch of the Oxford University Press, including a trailblazing study on tribal art in Middle India and five folklore collections under the shared title *Specimens in the Oral Literature of Middle India*. Among these, the books on the Baiga and the Muria received the most attention. Both works benefited from the close connections formed during prolonged stays with the tribes, featuring rich life histories inspired by the author's focus on individual character rather than social structures. They also challenged critiques with

their substantial length, each exceeding six hundred pages, and were infused with literary references, drawing as much from Shakespeare and Blake as from Malinowski and Firth. Above all, the books gained fame (and infamy) for their meticulous documentation and vibrant celebration of the role of sexuality in tribal life.

Verrier Elwin as a writer discards the perspective of the social scientist and employs a literary perspective to his ethnography. Considering the fact that Verrier Elwin was not academically trained as an anthropologist rather trained as a student of English Literature and theology makes it imperative to look in to his ethnography from a literary perspective. Elwin's works is a product of close observation and engagement with a life which cannot be known fully from the offices and temporary camps. His close contemporary S.C Dube observes that "Elwin was not a dry-as-dust technician; he was a poet, an artist, and a philosopher.... His love, his human sympathy, and his sense of wonder sometimes detract from objectivity and neutrality required in scientific writing, but no one ever seriously questioned the fact." (Dube 1964). The study will help in understanding the literary sensibility of an artist who had suffered a bad name by the social scientists. The study also aims to promote the inter-disciplinary relationship between Anthropology and Literature where both the disciplines can be mutually benefited.

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A Study of Trans-corporeality in Select Later Sonnets of John Keats

Shatarupa Mishra

Abstract

The human being acts and is acted upon continuously in a web of indistinguishable identities. Language, which apparently keeps the human thinking mind distinct from thoughtless nature, also dissolves these attributive and bodily differences. This paper attempts to illustrate the above idea through a close reading of some of the later sonnets of John Keats (written between 1818–1819) using the lenses of Karen Barad's feminist materialism and Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality. Keats's images within the compact structure of the sonnet form bring together the idea that a notion of Anthropocene continues the illusion of a unique human agency. The interconnectedness of life manifests itself easily when dead trees provide food to birds, thus morphing smoothly into a lasting existence. The belief that the differences between forms are unalterable is a fallible one. Keats's word-pictures entail the dissolution of borders between the human and the non-human, thereby leading to a recognition of the pre-eminence of blended physicality. Death and continuity, distinct body and indistinct matter, culture and nature also commingle through language. Through the recurring motif of feminine body and elements of nature, Keats's sonnets chart their own course in the development of a collective consciousness that acknowledges the reality of a borderless corporeality.

Keywords: Trans-corporeality, feminist materialism, agency, body, borders

Trans-corporeality is a term introduced by Stacy Alaimo, a Professor of English and a researcher on material feminisms, to imply that there is no material discontinuity between man and nature. The human body is not separate from other bodies in nature and corporeity is a continuum, the only actuality being "tangled materialities" (Alaimo, *Exposed* 7). Just as a palimpsest makes borders between texts ambivalent, the awareness of bodies in nature continuing into each other makes identity and agency debatable concepts. A book review titled "The 'Environment' is Us" says: "The 'environment,' as we now apprehend it, runs right through us in endless waves, and if we were to watch ourselves via some ideal microscopic time-lapse video, we would see water, air, food, microbes, toxins entering our bodies as we shed, excrete, and exhale our processed materials back out" (Fromm). Romantic scholarship has expanded itself in the recent years to include questions pertaining to the body. A research article titled "Metaphors of fever in the poetry of John Keats: A

cognitive approach" uses conceptual metaphor theory to understand medical metaphors in Keats' poetry in connection with negative mental states (Al-Jumaili). In another paper titled "The Pre-Raphaelites and their Keatsian Romanticism: An Analysis of the Renderings of *The Eve of St Agnes* and *Isabella*," Keats's sensual imagery is studied with a view to understanding his impact on Pre-Raphaelite art (Díaz Morillo). Another paper titled "In Keats's Haggard Shadow: Reading Dr Haggard's Disease as a Postmodernist Comment on Keats and Keatsian Romanticism" studies changes in a patient vis-à-vis changes in passion with a backdrop of postmodernist unreliability (Vermeulen). However, none of the recent studies on Keats and his poetry focuses on the corporeal theme in ecofeminism. Therefore, this paper aims to add to the scholarship centring on the representations of the body in Keats's poetry. It takes up select sonnets written by Keats between 1818 and 1819 and uses Val Plumwood's ideas about the intersection between ecocriticism and feminism, in addition to Alaimo's concept of the trans-corporeal and Barad's concept of intra-action, to study the import of Keats's imagery of the feminine body in the twenty-first century.

In the sonnet, "When I have fears that I may cease to be," the images invoke the realisation that it is only arrogance and futility to brand a geological epoch as Anthropocene when the human species might soon cease to be. But the poem doesn't just acknowledge this predicament. The word 'may' leaves room for the fact that the human may not cease to be after all. In the poem, we see that the teeming brain continues into full-ripened grain. This movement happens through the language of poetry, through the printed word that we read now, which is symbolic of rational understanding, and which has till now been a marker of difference between man and "unthinking" nature. Though the poet talks about fears that the pen might not be able to achieve this before he ceases to be, the transition seems plausible because of the juxtaposition of the images. "The magic hand of chance" (Keats 283) touches and becomes one with the stars and clouds. Why is it called a *magic hand of chance*? It is magic, because it exists only in the poet's non-existence and it is a matter of chance, because there is possibility of humans living on after death in other bodies of nature. Who's the "fair creature of an hour" (283)? The phrase could stand for those species who are on the verge of extinction. The poet realises what has been done to them and also recognises the blind, unthinking love for modernity and technology that has perpetuated the precariousness of these species. It could also mean the human species on whom nature has been acting unfavourably (thereby reflecting the contemplative quality of nature). It could be a narcissistic self-pity that he indulges in before passing into the state of human non-being. So, he uses this last opportunity to think, because till this point, he has prided himself on thinking everything into existence. He thinks, till love (of development at the cost of sustainability), fame (of being the master of nature) and man's defining physique/mind are subsumed into the waters: "to nothingness do sink" (283). The Other is the Self, mind gives in to body, culture becomes nature. There is apocalypse, and there is continuity.

In the sonnet, "On Fame (I)," the images invoke the mingled agencies of nature and human practices. Celebrity Studies as a branch of academic study emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century, looking at fame as a discursive practice. Keats' sonnet subtly allows nature to take over and reconstitute the boundaries of those social institutions that ensure the fame of the human race as the

creator of patterned and managed spaces. And this taking over is achieved through a subversive (and not an essentialist) union of the feminine and the natural. The first image used is that of a Gypsy woman, a female Romani traveller having a wandering way of life. In popular culture, we understand a girl with a gypsy soul as one who is free spirited, who is deeply passionate, fiercely independent, unabashedly unpredictable, on the lookout for novelty, who values her freedom above everything else, dances to the beat of her own drum and embraces chaos. Inherent in this image is the breaking down of the concept of home as something that has the ability to keep the human separate from the nonhuman. The second image is one of a Jilt, the verb form of which means to walk out on or break up with (a romantic partner). Even in the twenty-first century, many women find it difficult to come out of a toxic relationship for a variety of reasons: social stigma, social/financial insecurity, fear of being alone or sexual deprivation, healthy growth of children and so on. In such a context, to jilt becomes a prerequisite for a healthy living. In other words, it is a natural survival instinct. Woven into this image is the dissolution of the ideas of romantic love as an epistemological advantage and as a basis for collective survival of the human race.

The third image used is a daughter of Nilus, the Greek God of River Nile. While the word "daughter" is part of the natural process of radioactive decay (creation of daughter isotopes from parent isotopes), River Nile has been associated with sarcophaguses, stone coffins lined with limestone used for burial of the dead. It is important to note that the west bank of Nile is linked not just to death but to afterlife. Limestone, a natural resource, and organic in origin, dissolves the dividing line between human and stone. Thus, materialities flow into each other and there's a sort of progression. Fame, being referred to as Nilus-born, also dissolves the difference between human as the observer and human as the observed, thus making agency intertwined and continuous. The fourth image is that of sister-in-law to Potiphar, a biblical figure. Here, fame is biologically associated with the wife of Potiphar whose unsuccessful sexual attraction for Joseph led to the latter's saving the Israelites from famine (Adamo 241–242). Embedded in this narrative is the melting down of borders between public and private, fortune and misfortune, fickleness and stability, and this meltdown is the consequence of sexuality, a biological drive.

"On Fame (II)" begins with the proverb "You cannot eat your cake and have it too" (Keats 441). This is a hint towards overconsumption of nature considering it an unlimited resource at the disposal of humans just because nature is believed to be "*terra nullius*, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings" (Plumwood 4). That it is part of the poem also hints at doing away with the partition between communal (proverb is part of daily discourse) and exclusive (a poem is an instance of a particular poet's sensibility), between environment (as something which is given and passive) and the human (as something which acts and evolves). The expressions *fevered*, *mortal days* and *vexes* (Keats 441) hint at the unrest that overpowers human life today and this is precisely because nature is not unassertive emptiness. Nature thinks, observes and acts. Nature has agency. Unhealthy ecosystems are the sources of disease, as we have seen during the destruction caused by COVID-19 pandemic. When developmental activities destroy animal habitats, they are forced into smaller areas and hence, they get sick. They are likely to transmit diseases to domestic animals and people who come in contact with them owing to illegal wildlife trade in

many places. So, man "robs his fair name of his maidenhood," (441) and this probably refers to the fact that there is no uniqueness or newness in a human body when it is one among numerous other infected bodies.

The poem then uses imagery which marks its movement towards what Alaimo calls "a place where corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in productive ways" ("Trans-corporeal" 238). The human being's susceptibility to annihilation is beneath the image of a rose plucking herself with the futile intention to retain her beauty in separation from the plant. It is hidden in the idea of a ripe plum that grows attached to its impermanent tautness. It is embedded in the portrayal of the water nymph Naiad polluting herself with her murkiness. The images of rose, plum and Naiad refer to the sensual beauty of a woman. It would seem at this point that the poem is perpetrating inherence of meaning so far as both women and nature are concerned. But the tone changes when the poet asserts that the rose does not pluck herself but offers her beauty to the humans (through the wind) and nectar to the bees. The plum is comfortable in its not-so-taut skin because it knows that it would be of much use even in its dried stage. The lake by itself never becomes muddy. This stresses that nature (and, by extension, woman) perhaps understands the life principle (i.e., nature thinks) and so stays away from self-harm. But the roses, plums and lakes are not immune from the harms inflicted by civilisation's commercial enterprises. So are women if we take sex trafficking into consideration. The human race, thus, goes on rendering ecosystems (natural and social) fragile (does 'man' really think?), thereby leading itself into damnation. The poem, in this way, explores issues pertaining to feminist new materialism as a critical lens. Alaimo says, "Whereas discursively oriented studies of human corporeality confine themselves to the corporeal bounds of the human, material feminisms open out the question of the human by considering models of extension, interconnection, exchange, and unravelling" (244).

The sonnet "The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!" centres on the theme of death. While the speaker laments the loss of union with the body of his beloved and grieves the loss of connection with the beauty of a flower at eve (his death), there is the other fascination or "hid delight" (Keats 507) of assuming identities enmeshed with the non-human world. The love now is described as "fragrant-curtained" (507), an expression which can refer to the plant extracts that are applied to the bodies of the deceased before burial and that make the shroud fragrant. The night heralds an afterlife that manifests itself in more-than-human identities. The speaker is confident of salvation because he has understood this transcendent connectedness, hinted at by the phrase "love's missal" (507).

The sonnet "I cry your mercy – pity – love! – aye, love!" furthers the themes of death and highlights what Karen Barad terms "matter coming to matter" ("Posthumanist Performativity" 120). If we interpret the apostrophe used in the poem as an address to death, we see an evolving understanding that in the face of material continuities, death is a mystical force to be grappled with. Seen as a mistress or bride, death is equated with the ultimate love. It is interesting to note that while Byron, in his poem "The Destruction of Sennacherib," speaks of the Angel of Death as male (Guthke 15), Keats' words in the poem hint towards death as a female figure. With a "million-pleasured breast" (Keats 513), individual death as perceived in the sonnet

becomes a portent of mass extinction. Forgetting life's (insidious) purposes, losing the taste of one's (scheming) mind and (uncontrolled) ambition turning blind (513) are positive images of the human giving in to effacement and being one with nature in any form. Death/extinction is sure of herself; she is "one-thoughted, never-wandering" (513) and doesn't indulge in deception. She is "without a blot" (513). The poet wants to understand this certainty among uncertainties and hence implores death to give him all. If death holds back even an atom of knowledge about her, it will amount to the poet failing himself: "Withhold no atom's atom or I die" (513). If poetry lives on without a fulfilled quest for demystifying death, there will remain the illusion that the human is under the "wretched thrall" (513) of death whereas, in reality, death is desirable, merciful, and loving. This recalls Keats's short poem 'On Death':

> How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
> And lead a life of woe, but not forsake
> His rugged path; nor dare he view alone
> His future doom which is but to awake. (29)

Reading the sonnet "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art" would serve as a conclusion to this paper. In many cultures, the image of the star is associated with materiality after death. For example, the following line describes the Anishinaabe thinking: "Because the stars move from east to west, the Anishinaabe believe that when we die, our spirits travel to 'Ningaabii'anong,' the Western sky" (Price). The speaker in this sonnet also expresses a similar wish of taking the form of a bright star after dying. But he doesn't want to observe the flowing water or the layers of snow on mountains or plateau, like the saint-like bright star does. This could be read as a sort of realisation that the human being is not just an onlooker of the biological/ geological processes that take place in the environment (referring perhaps to Earth Observation through satellite remote sensing platforms). The boundaries of the human fall apart and bodies flow into each other in a network of processes. The rest of the lines continue the speaker's dalliance with the feminine form of death, all the while aware that immortality lies in the realisation that there is never an end to material life as matter is conserved through physical and chemical changes, only the form of survival changes. Thus, Keats's later sonnets anticipate the nuances of environmental posthumanism.

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Caste System Intrinsic to Hinduism: A Myth

Akhila Ranjan Parhi

Abstract

It is a widely accepted belief that the caste system is an intrinsic part of Hinduism. But this is purely a myth. This false belief is spread by two categories of people—the orthodox elements within Hinduism and those outside Hinduism who possess a mischievous intention of proselytizing. It is ironic that both these groups are opposed to each other, yet they jointly cause significant damage to Hinduism. This myth has harmed the relationship between the upper castes and lower castes.

In this paper, I have tried to present logical proof and documentary evidence to show that Hinduism—even Vedic and classical Hinduism—never supports the caste system. Both in principle and in practice, the caste system is not an intrinsic part of Hinduism. Moreover, Hinduism has had to bear a great deal of pain in opposing the caste system. The caste system has emerged and survived due to several other factors that have nothing to do with the Hindu religion.

In this context, I would like to quote from M. K. Gandhi's writing:

One need not despair of ever knowing the truth of one's religion, because the fundamentals of Hinduism, as of every great religion, are unchangeable and easily understood.

— M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, October 6, 1921.

Key words: Hinduism, myth, orthodox, proselytizing, caste system.

Introduction

The caste system has evolved into the most rigid and complex system along the path of the Hindu way of life over the ages. In the course of time, it incorporated several features that developed the essential characteristics of the caste system, along with untouchability, which came into force at a much later stage. Now, we can look at these features one by one.

Features of the Caste System

The caste system is not simply a division of labour where each varna is associated with a particular type of occupation. Here, the division of labour is also determined by birth. This division never permits social or occupational mobility. Caste and class are distinct. The system is so rigid that it separates one caste from another through the fear of *varnasamkara*. It also evolved from varna to jati, making it more ambiguous. Gradually, it became a hierarchical system, ranging from upper to lower castes in terms of purity and ritual status.

The fourth *varna*, or *antyajah*, played the least role in society in terms of power and wealth, while possessing the maximum number of disabilities. The system functioned on the notion of purity versus pollution. It became institutionalized and was linked to birth. Brahmins were considered the purest. Purity declined hierarchically down through the Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, and further down to the untouchables, culminating with the scavengers. Upper caste people had to perform ritual baths or other expiatory measures to rid themselves of pollution.

This discourse became a powerful instrument to prevent the creation of *varnasamkara*. The whole system, along with its taboos and restrictions, was authenticated by religious canons. Originally, it was founded on a subsistence-oriented production system aimed at meeting local needs. It represented a kind of mutual dependence between patron and client. The client did not consider changing patrons for better wages, and the patron extended all possible help to the client during times of hardship.

Caste System: A Myth

The above-mentioned features cannot form an integral part of Hinduism. Because Hinduism is not Varna Dharma based on Jati or birth. Non-violence, tolerance, compassion, piety or righteousness are the basics of Hinduism as observed by Gandhiji. This religion is very much liberal to embrace all Bonafide notions from society. It is not a fixed Dharma revealed once for all. It is a dynamic religion. Hinduism cannot be exclusively identified by the religion of the Vedas, Upanishads or Dharmasastras nor along the Hinduism of the medieval thinkers like Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhava nor by the modern thinkers like Vivekananda, Dayananda, and Aurobindo etc. It also cannot alone be comprehended by the leaders of the Bhakti movement who completely rejected the caste system. Hence, Hinduism is a continuous process which adopts changes every now and then. The following observation can be made to prove a caste system not intrinsic to Hinduism but a myth. We do not find any spatial or temporal co relation between Hinduism and the caste system. We find a huge difference between theory and practice. There has been sufficient social and occupational mobility. No Hindu canon or philosophy admits birth-based caste system. Hinduism sets several legendary examples on immorality and invalidity of the caste system. Several movements have been taking place in different periods to raise voice against caste system.

Hinduism and Caste System: A Way Apart

It may sound surprising, but we must agree to the fact that there is no co relation between Hinduism and caste system. Luis Dumont has made a thorough study on the caste system. He observed how caste distinction surpassed religious boundary and went ahead to enter other religion. Caste distinction including untouchable castes is also found among Christians in India. A catholic Brahmin searches for catholic Brahmin spouse. There are even separate seats in churches and separate burials. In south Asia, Islam communities have also caste distinctions between Ashrafs and non Ashrafs. The converts of superior caste enjoy separate status from converts of inferior caste. In Sri Lanka, we also find difference of status among Buddhists. The Lingayat community who reject the Vedas and Varna Dharma also maintain caste gradation. But, among the Hindus who settle outside India like in Bali, Fiji, Surinam, West indies, Mauritius etc., Varna based caste system is almost nonexistent. They are identified from regions like Guajarati, Marathi, Bihari etc. Hence, caste belongs to a South Asian feature but not to Hinduism itself. It is not a religious but purely a peculiar socioeconomic character.

Chronologically the tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda was the last to be composed. Here, in two verses of the Purushasukta hymns, we find reference of four Varnas is given for the first time. At this point, we can conclude that there was no Varna system in Vedic society. In Bhagavat Purana, it is mentioned that there is no caste but one Varna of human beings. All are the children of Vaivasvata Manu. The word Manava is used in all Indian languages, Puranas and all other Hindu scriptures. This term Manava reminds us of the golden age of one human race in the past when there was no caste.

According to B. R. Ambedkar, there were three Varnas in the Vedic society but no fourth Varna which is called Shudra. Due to the advance of economy, the division of labour gave rise to fourth Varna but without hierarchy or divine origin. Hence, Purushasukta hymns are interpolations being developed after caste systems were established. If we do ethnic study, we find that Shudras were a part of the Kshatriyas and were not non-Aryans. There was a part of ruling class. When Brahmins were insulted and suffered in the hands of Shudra kings, they stopped Upanayana for them as a part of revenge and disgraced them as fourth Varna. Untouchability got a much later origin. It was developed as a post Buddhist phenomenon. Hindus gave up animal sacrifice and beef eating under the influence of Buddhism. But those who continued killing animals and eating beef were regarded as untouchables. Thus, the caste system is a post Vedic phenomenon and Hinduism will also survive after the collapse of caste system.

Caste and Socio-occupational Mobility

The model of caste system hardly ever works in the society in practice. Actual occupations have deviated from the Varnas theoretically for centuries. Dharmasastras also allow this exception under Apaddharma. It states that one can take to other occupations for livelihood. As a result, we find Brahmins entering into manual labour like cooking and serving for the lower caste people. Untouchables

are found serving as soldiers. In this way, B.R. Ambedkar points out plenty of examples of social and occupational mobility during the Vedic and Upanishad age. S. Radhakrishnan, the former president of India observes from the story of Satyakama Jabala of Chhandogya Upanishad that, family had very insignificant role to play. Many Rishis are found to have obscure origin. For example, Parasara, Kapinjala, Vyasa, Vasistha, Valmiki, Madanapala etc. had a very low birth but, they enjoyed higher status than Brahmins. One who protected people was called Nrupati or king. He need not be a Kshatriya. If we analyze the Bhakti movement in India, we find several saints from lower origin lead the society. In the post Vedic period due to competition for superior status process of sanskritisation started which made the caste system more mobile. Inter marriages between different castes also made it mobile. Anuloma and Gandharva marriages were tolerated. But Pratiloma and Rakshasa marriages also could not be checked though despised in society. Though, Varna means colour, race and colour cut across castes in course of time. Caste distinctions were not based on racial or colour distinctions. Upper caste people are also found in black complexion and untouchables in fair complexion. Both Rama and Krishna are black gods but, they are highly adored and worshipped. Hence, sufficient social and occupational mobility and inter marriages have made the whole caste system messy, complex and a mismatch to lose its meaning and purpose.

Canon and Caste

There has been wrong interpretation of many parts of the canon to support the caste system. Not all canons are supportive of the caste system. Only Dharmasastras and Smritis support the caste system. But Sruti literature always prevail over Smritis whenever there is conflict. The *Bhagvat Gita* never supports the caste system. Shruti literature intervenes *Manusmriti*. *Apastamba Dharmasutra* supports untouchability but, it is not regarded as canon. All the *Dharmasutras* have no unanimity on caste system. Jaimini, the writer of *Purva Mimamsa* supports Shudras in respect of performing Vedic rites. *Katyayana Srauta Sutra* and *Bharadvaja Srauta Sutra* (v-28) confer eligibility to Shudras to perform Vedic rites. P.V. Kane in his *History of Dharma Sastra*, observes that most of the *Dharma Sastras* allow the Shudras to perform Vedic rites. Interestingly, *Manu Smriti* (4.176) states that- discard wealth and desire if, they are contrary to Dharma and even discard Dharma if it arouses people's unhappiness and indignation.

Two verses in the *Rig Veda* (X.90.11-12) stating birth hierarchy are certainly interpolation as these two verses are in a narrative mode. We should interpret these two verses as metaphors to organize society through division of labour and not through caste or Jati. All the body parts support society without hierarchy. No one is higher or lower than the other. The *Bhagvat Gita* (IV-13) refers, Varnas are created on the basis of Guna (nature, attitude, character) and Karma (work, action, occupation). It does not refer to birth. P.V.Kane points out (p.1635-36) here Jati or Janma is not mentioned. Hence, in the Geeta, Dharma means Guna not birth. In the *Mahabharata* Krishna refers the warriors as Kshariyas. At that time non-Kshatriyas were also participating in war. It tells of comparative advantages but not absolute advantages. In the Ramayana, Rama adores the saint Matanga who was an

untouchable by birth. But, Shambhuka story belongs to Uttara Kanda of the Ramayana which is an interpolation (P.V. Kane, vol.1, part1, p.389). Here, we can cite some verses from the Geeta where caste distinction based on birth is not supported. He who sees Me in all things and sees all things in Me never becomes departed from Me nor am I lost to him (6.30). He who judges pleasure and pain in others that Yogi is the highest (6.72). Those who possess non-violence, truth, compassion, absence of anger and hatred, charity, selfless service, forgiveness, non-covetousness and modesty are divine (16.1-3). *Rg Veda* (V.60.5) mentions no one is superior or inferior. All are brothers marching forward to prosperity. *Taittariya Samhita* (V.7.6.3-4) refers to equality irrespective of caste- "put light in Brahmanas, kings, Vaisyas, Shudras and in me by your light". The Mahabharata (Udyoga Parva, ch.34v-41) says- "high birth cannot be a certificate for a person of no character". So, a person with good character can distinguish himself irrespective of low birth. A Shudra can be a twice born by good conduct like self-control, truth, righteousness etc. Virtues not birth bring welfare and elevation in the society. A Chandala observing vow can be a Brahmin. Shankaracharya prostrated himself before a Chandala due to the latter's talent. He has written in his *Manisha Panchakam*, "he who knows the supreme whether a Chandala or a twice born is his Guru". The medieval thinkers like Ramanujacharya rejected the caste system. Madhavacharya declares in his *Brahmasutrabhasya* that the low born also has the right to name and knowledge of God if he is devoted to him. Tiruvalluvar in his *Tirukkural*, venerated as Tamil Veda, mentions that all men are born alike, the difference is due to difference in what they do (972nd aphorism). *Vajrasuchika Upanishad* clearly rejects caste differences. It is the last Upanishad edited by Dr. S.Radhakrishnan. It states that a Brahmana is distinguished by him who knows his self but not by class, body, soul, deed or rites. Brahman is the indwelling spirit of all beings. This Upanishad calls upon meditation and search for the supreme removing all distinctions and egoism from mind. Hence, Hindu philosophy and religion are against caste system.

Legendary Weapons Against Caste System

Hinduism has created legends on fighting against casteism and untouchability. These legends have appealed Indian popular mind directly. In these legends we find Dalits have attained sainthood and god's mercy through their great devotion, elevating themselves and undermining the Brahmins. We come across these saints namely, Iruppan Alvar, Kanakadasa, Chokhmela, Dasiabauri, Salabeg etc. giving a blow to the casteist Hinduism. They have excelled Brahmins in respect of sainthood. Dalit lady devotees like Sriyachandaluni, Janabai also appeal the people rising above caste distinction.

Movements Against Caste System

The Bhakti movement was the most prominent movement against casteism within Hinduism. Though it started in 6th century by Saiva saints of Tamil Nadu, it gained momentum with the leadership of Basavana of Karnataka in 12th century. In Maharastra, it was spearheaded by Santh Jnaneswar. This movement democratized and humanized Hinduism. All these

leaders rejected the authority of texts which supported the caste system. Veerasaiva movement and Shikhism rejected authority of the Vedas. Later, this movement cut across caste and went beyond religion. Some Muslim leaders like Kabir, Shishunal, Sharif, Shirdi Sai drew attention of the Hindus for a classless society. Santh Jnaneswar and Vasavana introduced inter marriage against hullabaloo of the upper caste. Natha cult and Mahima cult developed to make Hinduism classless. Hence, Hinduism has fought against caste system and untouchability from time to time even before modern age and western influence.

In the 20th century, the upliftment of Dalits also continued to bring them into mainstream. Two Dalit communities, Ezhavas in Kerala and Nadars in Tamil Nadu, with their self-effort could be able to uplift their caste status within the framework of Hinduism. Towards the end of 19th century, Narayana Guru, a religious reformer started preaching, "one caste, one God, one religion for man. Ask not, say not, think not caste. Let man improve himself irrespective of caste". Due to his leadership, Sanskritization took a leap in the southern India. Modern Hinduism has become very liberal due to some effective leadership. Spiritual and moral development of life of a man has given more importance. Hence, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Brahma Kumaris, Satya Sai, Mata Amrutanandamayi, Ravi Shankar, ISKON have appealed to people cutting across caste system. Now, we can establish that Hinduism can very well thrive without caste system.

Survival of Caste System

Truly, Hinduism as a religion and philosophy is against the caste system. But the caste system survived due to some prevalent social functions and the people attached to it. These functions had nothing to do with religion. We can discuss it one by one.

Check and Balance

The Varna system was not only a division of labour but also a system of check and balance. It limited the concentration of power and economic surplus of a class. Brahmins were supposed to seek knowledge and collect gift for livelihood but not to amass wealth. The Kshatriya kings were to listen to the ministers chosen from all classes. Though the Vaisyas held the largest source of revinue, they had to obey the Bahmins and Kshatriyas. People from all the class had representation in the king's council. The king who could not uphold Dharma was removed. Thus, an ideal of perfect harmony and alliance was established.

Ecological Balance

Every class of people was restricted to a particular trade. As a result, ecological balance could prevail at that time. There was no fear of outsourcing of resources. Nature and natural resources were consumed systematically. Wildlife could also be preserved not being overused to put pressure on cultural

change or technical innovation.

Security of Livelihood and Employment

Caste system localized production to meet local needs rather than larger market. Right to work and livelihood were well maintained due to patron-client relationship between land- owner and cultivator. It also controlled competition. This patron-client relationship continued for generations. It was the obligation of the patron that the client's family did not starve. The client also needs no change of his patron for more wages. P.V. Kane cites *Apastamba Dharma Sutra* (vol.1.part.1. pp. 57-58) that, if some unexpected guest arrives, the head of the family and his members had to cut down food for the guest but servant's food is not cut down. This patron- client relationship continued without the interference of the Muslim rulers or the British. Many Hindus have been converted but this caste system has imbibed into the new religions of Islam or Christianity in India. That is why, caste system has nothing to do with religion.

Collapse of Caste

With regard to the collapse of caste system in India, M.N. Srinivas points out that, paradoxically, this system has expired but, caste identities remain and show no sign of going. It is dead but, the ghost remains. This system was based on production, economy and occupation. Now, all its functions have collapsed. Hence, it has lost its relevance, role, utility and justification. It has been replaced by a much powerful, stronger modern state with its three pervasive wings, executive, legislature and judiciary. So, the functional significance of caste system has vanished. Decentralised democracy has shut the doors of village Panchayats. Judiciary replaced the role of *Dharmasastras*. Democratic and secular forces defeated caste forces through the method of adult franchise. Modern secular educational institutions with all its professional courses have made education mobile bringing it out of the clutch of family. Hereditary education has become redundant. The new age is the age of information. It gave rise to new occupations and the extinction of old occupations which were confined within Varnas. Alvin Toffler in his book *The Third Wave* mentions how gap between producer and consumer is minimized with new development as "prosumer". It refers to 'do it yourself' system which means self-service. For example, toilet cleaning, shaving beard or washing clothes have come under prosumer category. The distinction between artisan and arm-chair consumer has fallen apart. Division of labour between manual and intellectual has lost its meaning. Arvind Sharma in his book, *Hinduism of Our Times* mentions that the system of every individual contained in one Varna has shifted to all Varnas contained in every individual. Because manual labour, economic or professional activities, governance, and the military are unified, the caste system lost its economic role due to the emergence of a larger market and the decline of caste-based village production. Factory production replaced artisan production. Due to ideological attacks on hierarchy, the caste system also lost its moral role. Values like self-respect, dignity, and equality were widely accepted. All natural resources were taken

over by the state, so it lost its ecological role. Caste also could not play a role in the joint forest management by the state and village. It lost its political role due to the emergence of democracy based on adult franchise.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is evident that the emergence and survival of the caste system has nothing to do with Hinduism, as a religion. His sytsem is a pure social phenomenon in the mundane sphere (*Aihika*). It is not *Paramarthika* or *Adhyatmika*. As it is mundane, its rules of conduct and customs are liable to change from time to time. Manu Smriti is just the result of the then social significance and role of caste system of that time but not the cause of it. Dharmasastras reflected the then society which already existed. They also approved rejection of it (Manu Smriti IV.176) if it led to people's unhappiness and indignation. A present, it would never give a new lease of life. Most of the verses of Dharmasastras are irrelevant today. Presently, collapse of caste system poses no threat to the continuation and survival of Hinduism. Hinduism is now thriving with new vigour with the emergence of new leaders like Aurobindo, Shiridi Sai, Satya Sai, Shivananda, Anukulachandra, Nigamananda, Ravi Shankar, Mata Amritanandamayee and institutions like Ramakrishna mission, Brahmakumaris, ISKON etc. Some of these modern religious institutions are non-caste based or classless. If the caste system was intrinsic to Hinduism, then no such leaders would have thrived over these times.

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Configuring Fragmented Pasts by Re-imagining History: Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*

Suman Das Mahapatra

Abstract

Post colonial literature consistently challenges the imperial assumptions of identity and history in a motif to deal with the disturbing aftermath of colonization. The fusion of history and fiction is a recurring technique that emphasizes difference and otherness. In this context, Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* presents an alternative understanding and presentation of history, achieved through the mythologizing of history and the historicization of myth. Rushdie adopts a stance of pluralism, scepticism and relativism, a stance that shatters epistemological certainties and the comfortable stability of traditional references. This article examines how Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* parodies and challenges the traditional construction of history by configuring and re-imagining of the history through alternative forms of narration that challenge western logocentrism and understanding. The notion of "Kashmiriyat" is also validated by unfolding political, sociological and religious colors through this novel.

Keywords: Post-Colonial, History, Myth, Pluralism, logocentrism, Kashmiriyat

It is a fact that the fascination with main stream or national history has dominated the regional expression for a long time. Partha Chatterjee in his famous essay "Histories and Nations" says ". . . if there were many such alternative histories for the different regions of India, then the centre of Indian history would not need to remain confined to Aryavarta or, more specifically, to the throne of Delhi" (115). Chatterjee's argument tries to focus on regional histories that have generally remained ignored and do not receive much scholarly attention. History should not be taken as mere re-telling of what happened in past because no one person can ever be certain of all the data and chronological facts of an event, even if s/he has experienced it personally. There are several memories of individuals or communities but history is one for everyone. Facts are sometimes subjective and history depends on the choices of a historian, he chooses what information is to be stressed, and what excluded. Thus, there is no absolute history or truth but it is a pool of data from where a historian chooses and multiple interpretation of a single event is possible by different interpreters. This observation would definitely point out a basic proposition of the importance of self-experiences, memories, myths and folk tales to understand history more authentically. They sometimes even challenge the monolithic narration

of the official historical records and seem to most reliable agents of an alternative history. Benedict Anderson describes nation as a construct, a politically imagined entity. A nation is imagined "because the members even of the smallest nations never know their fellow members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communions" (7). The holy history of the holy nation is thus always suspicious when it is judged through the experience of its individual inhabitants, which is always suppressed in presentation. Memory has the power to resist the onslaughts of history. As Agha Shahid Ali puts it in his poem "Farewell" from the collection *The Country without a Post Office*:

> My memory keeps getting in the way of your history.
> ...I hid my pain even from myself;
> I revealed my pain only to myself.
> ...If only somehow you could have been mine,
> what would not have been possible in the world? (09)

Rushdie's writings are considered to be a product of and a response to the colonial history of the Indian sub-continent in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The reclamation of the past is the impetus behind Rushdie's literary enterprise. His writings are archaeological excavations of the forgotten and erased past, a means to salvage what was lost or suppressed. In his works, counter-memories and anecdotes are the vital keys that lie beneath the surface of official history. His novels function as revisionary accounts of colonial as well as nationalist epistemologies that work within the framework of binary structures of self-versus other, West versus East and local versus global.

Shalimar the Clown (henceforth *SC*) although comes into the category of those works which are open to multiple valid interpretations, this essay pertains to *SC* as a historical novel. Though Rushdie interconnects the history of the Kashmir unrest with a parallel interpretation of Holocaust history, this paper is particularly focused on the Kashmir valley embedded with legendary myths and full of imaginary figures and their own histories. It deals with the horrifying history of fundamentalism, terrorism, and military violence in Kashmir. In another novel *Midnight's Children*, also we find Rushdie to draw a comparison between the horrific present condition of Kashmir and its glorious past. The portrayal of the enormous geographical beauty of Kashmir is placed amidst the turbulence of present situation. Rushdie writes in *Midnight's Children*:

> In those days, the radio mast had not been built and the temple of Sankara Acharya, a little black blister on a khaki hill, still dominated the streets and lake of Srinagar. In those days, there was no army camp at the lakeside, no endless snakes of camouflaged trucks and jeeps clogged the narrow mountain roads, no soldiers hid behind the crests of the mountains past Baramulla and Gulmarg. In those days travelers were not shot as spies if they took photographs of bridges and apart from the Englishmen's houseboats on the lake, the valley had hardly changed since the Mughal Empire (02)

In *SC*, the entire process and complexity of a historical epoch of Kashmir is epitomized through the life of individuals. Though *SC* is a story of honour, passion, love and betrayal, Rushdie fits this story into the contemporary context where the

actual personages who appear in this novel resemble the real persons of history. The purpose of the writer is to show that history is always very personal. Though this novel is a history of Kashmir's down fall after the partition of India and Pakistan, Rushdie makes it clear that Kashmir is only the reference point in this time of globalization: "Everywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer are own, individual, discrete" (Rushdie 47). Rushdie's claim is perfectly echoed with the proposition of Edward W. Said. In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said remarks, "Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (6).

In a true sense the novel like Rushdie's earlier ones, is a "national allegory." It is Rushdie's most detailed literary engagement with his ancestors' state Kashmir. Interestingly, the novel has been dedicated to his Kashmiri grand- parents Dr. Ataullah and Amir-un-Nissa Butt (Babajan and Ammaji). Abdulrazak Gurnah's remarks in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, ". . . Rushdie published Shalimar the Clown, a novel in which the Indian sub-continent, with Kashmir as a central political event, features prominently, returning his writing to the location primarily associated with him" (7). With his smart craftsmanship and allegorical humour Rushdie is able to transmit the individual experience to the realm of history. At a first glance, the novel seems to be a Shakespearean tragedy in which several killings occur. The novel begins in Los Angeles featuring the disturbed mental condition of India Ophuls, the illegitimate daughter of fictional U.S. Ambassador to India Maximilian Ophuls. The opening of the novel refers to his violent and cruel murder at the hands of his Kashmiri driver Shalimar. The initial violence foreshadows the later trajectory of the tale, as Rushdie informs the readers in the very third paragraph of the novel that "the ambassador was slaughtered on her (India's) doorstep like a halal chicken dinner, bleeding to death from a deep neck wound caused by a single slash of the assassin's blade" (Rushdie 4). The outermost level of the novel appears as a thriller where the brutal killing of Maximilian Ophuls, a retired diplomat and ambassador to India is killed by an act of revenge and Max's daughter named India Ophuls attempts to find out the real story behind her father's murder. In this way it could be assumed that the novel begins near the end as its first section portrays the central act of revenge while the rest of the sections then describe what led up to it. This brings the second level of the novel which unfolds a narrative of a cuckolded husband who becomes a terrorist and takes revenge by killing both his wife and her extra-marital partner. The narrative circled back in time to thirty years earlier and opens in heavenly idyllic Kashmir, where Noman, known as Shalimar and Bhoomi known as Boonyi's newly affair is being ripened on the bank of the Muskadoon river. Though these love birds are from two different religions of Islam and Hinduism, they celebrate the serenity and multiculturalism of Kashmir. Their marriage jubilantly mingles the rites, rituals, and customs of both Hindus and Muslims and evokes the sense of "Kashmiriyat," a notion of universal brotherhood that originated in the valley. However, Boonyi always had a claustrophobia which tempts her to leave Shalimar who is a gymnast and tightrope walker. Boonyi finds an opportunity to lead a better life when American ambassador Max Ophuls happens to witness a dance performance by her. Fascinated by her beauty Max arranges a dance

performance at his residence in Delhi. The performance is only a pretext for Max to seduce the innocent village girl. Boonyi deserts her husband Shalimar in an expectation of fulfilling her dreams "to make the leap from the village to the world" (Rushdie 242). She establishes a relationship with the American Ambassador Max in the hope of a better future. Max maintains the relationship till he finds that Boonyi has conceived a child. At this time, Max's wife Peggy Ophuls, who has also come with her husband to work for the orphans in India, interrupts and takes claim of the baby and forcibly sends Boonyi back to her native village. Having lost her beauty, charm, honour and child, Boonyi returns to her village Pachigam only to find that she has been declared dead by both her husband and father and is forced to live as "living dead" in a hut poorly provided, delirious with disease, waiting for death at the outskirt of her village. Meanwhile the political situation in Kashmir worsens, and Shalimar joins the terrorist group and plans to track down Max through the close network of international terrorist groups. He finally succeeds in killing his wife and Max. The novel ends where he chases Boonyi's child, India also known Kashmira in her New York house.

However, if we limit our study of the novel as the story of lust, betrayal and revenge we can hardly do justice to the complex artistic literary design that Rushdie has characteristically woven. The betrayal is not of a wife to a husband or of a rich powerful diplomat to a simple village girl but of history to the nation. The story of Boonyi is the story of Kashmir, and her final disease, doom and death is artistically associated with the downfall of the rich tradition of Kashmir, once known as paradise. Rushdie depends on the folk tales, legends and myths to depict history instead of facts. Thus, at the very beginning of the second part of the novel he talks about the myth of "bhoomi", the earth and "boonyi", the tree. Pandit Pyarelal Kaul had taught his daughter Bhoomi and Shalimar the story of the earth and the planets. The planets are the grabbers, they are nine in numbers: the sun, the moon, Mercury, Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Rahu and Ketu. "They were called this because they could seize hold of the earth and bend its destiny to their will" (Rushdie 71). Pyarelal and Pamposh's daughter was named Bhoomi(land) for it is the fate of the woman to be the subject, the destiny of the land to be grabbed by the more powerful. Bhoomi felt that her name was "mud, dirt and stone" and changed her name to Boonyi, the Chinar tree (Rushdie 72-73). Like the trunk of a tree, she bends herself to fulfil her desire that brings ultimate destruction for her. All characters in the novel undergo journeys in search of a lost or forgotten past or a desired future. National and local cartographies are transgressed in the quest for a new identity (Boonyi), the recovery of the past (India/Kashmira) and to seek revenge (Shalimar). Inherited names are questioned, abnegated and new names adopted in tandem with alternative identities. Bhoomi becomes Boonyi, India becomes Kashmira and Norman Aher Noman changes into Shalimar the clown. This change in nomenclature is synchronous with the notion of becoming and constant movement that characterizes shifting identity and culture. Rushdie's characters, "living in a situation of not belonging, are chameleon like in the sense that they easily change their identities and affiliations; their identities are shaped and reshaped, and surf from one space to another (Amrani 84). The inner most layer of the narrative is like the looking glass through which Rushdie resurfaces the history of Kashmir. Thus, when India as Kashmira finally comes to find her mother's story she finds a mute grave carpeted by spring flowers. Old Hasina and Bombur Yambarzal who tell how her mother was killed thrice: once by the betrayal

of Max, then the refusal of her family and finally by the knife of her husband Shalimar. "Tell her what she wants to know," blind Bombur muttered spitefully, surrounded by smoke. "Then see if she's happy she came" (Rushdie 596). Thus, this narrative can be said to have at least two strands in it: the love story gone wrong of Shalimar and Boonyi and the historical cataclysm of Kashmir.

Rushdie presents the history of Kashmir since the partition of the Indian subcontinent to the militant aggression for separation of Jammu and Kashmir. If history is the macrocosm its movement, its process, pain, suffering, and dilemma is also reflected in the life of an individual who then becomes a microcosm displaying the process of history. In *SC*, Rushdie builds the myth of a golden-age of interreligious and interracial harmony. This is seen in the line "Abdullah Noman as Lord Ram -a Muslim actor playing the part of a Hindu god-would shoot an arrow at Ravana" (Rushdie 71) that depicts unity between the people of both religions. The Golden Age is seen in Kashmir and particularly in the villages of Pachigam and Shirmal, when a Pachigami Muslim boy Shalimar and a Hindu girl Boonyi falls in love and get married. Boonyi and Shalimar's love is symbolic of the Hindu-Muslim amity of Kashmir. The village panchayat with Abdullah Noman as its sarpanch decides that the children's love for one another is more important than their religion. Noman says:

> Kashmiriyat, Kashmiriness, the belief that at the heart of Kashmiri culture there was a common bond that transcended all other differences . . . There is no Hindu Muslim issue. Two Kashmiri-two Pachigami-youngsters wish to marry, that's all. . . To defend their love is to defend what is finest in ourselves. (Rushdie 180)

Rushdie conjures up "Kashmiriyat" in the romance between Shalimar and Boonyi. Shalimar's Muslim identity and Boonyi's Hindu identity is immaterial to the community that eventually marries them for the sake of "Kashmiriyat." This relationship is an illustration of public sentiment that is utilized to overcome any barrier among ethnic and strict contrasts to make an environment of syncretic patriotism. This syncretism in the heart of Kashmir is a so-called myth that injected into the popular narratives of Kashmiri nationalism by the opportunist politicians who want to obtain profit out of this sentiment. Rushdie with his artistic expertise depicts the hollowness of "Kashmiriyat" as soon as Boonyi disgraces herself by engaging her in an illicit relationship with the fall of moral and traditional histories of Kashmir. *SC* indicates that the fabulous belief of "Kashmiriyat" is a vague idea that has been used by the communities as an intrinsic propensity of storytelling. It is this exaggerated syncretic tale that poses present Kashmir valley crisis. Rushdie laments:

> May be Kashmiriyat was an illusion. May be all those children learning one another's stories in the panchayat room in winter, all those children becoming a single family, were an illusion . . . Maybe tyranny, forced conversions, temple smashing, iconoclasm, persecution and genocide were the norms and peaceful coexistence was an illusion. (Rushdie 239)

To manifest the notion of "Kashmiriyat" is nothing but a fable; Rushdie compares the love story of Boonyi and Shalimar with the mythical story of Sita and Rama. Boonyi thinks about "the blessed hermitage as Panchavati, near the Godavari River during the wandering years of Lord Ram's exile from Ayodhya" (Rushdie 77) when Sita

(Boonyi) betrays Rama (Shalimar) and becomes the illicit partner of Ravana (Max) which result in killing of Boonyi and Ravana by Rama.

Rushdie lays special emphasis on the pathetic condition of Kashmir, the state which suffers by both the hands of terrorists and Indian militaries. The conflict that is going on between India and Pakistan regarding Kashmir is taking a horrible shape. Other countries are unaware of the fact as to what condition Kashmir stands "the shape of conflict in Kashmir had seemed too great and alien for his Western mind to understand . . ." (Rushdie 180). Rushdie depicts in the novel that before Boonyi and Shalimar's generation Kashmir was known to the world for its characteristics of tolerance, syncretism and innocence where the Hindus and Muslims and the Jews lived together in the villages of Bhand Pather artists of Pachigam and Shirmal, well known for their Wazawan cuisine and folk plays. In this great age of tolerance even a socially marginal woman like Nazar-e-baddor was accepted who continued to nourish the villagers with her homemade dairy products and adorned their imaginations with her power of foretelling the future which was always happy. Yet the perfect state of Kashmir was not going to continue forever. Nazar-e- baddor felt the tragic forewarning that the misfortunes were piling up somewhere and stopped foretelling future. She told Pamposh, her close friend and confidante, who was heavy with the burden of unborn Boonyi: "the age of prophecy is at an end, because what is coming is so terrible that no prophet would have words to foretell it" (Rushdie 110). Misfortune strikes the villagers on the cold October day when both Shalimar and Boonyi take birth. The entire valley of Kashmir has come under the attack of the Pakistani tribesmen or Kabalis. Abdullah Noman realizes that the world that he knew so far is fast disappearing, revealing a darker future that awaits them as Nazar-e-baddoor prophesized.

While Shalimar and Boonyi grow up, the control of the Indian army who came to save them from the Kabalis becomes stronger over the life of Kashmir. In his characteristic humour Rushdie names the army area as "Elasticnagar" (Rushdie 152) for it keeps on stretching and expanding itself, claiming more and more land reserved for agriculture. Rushdie sketches the character of Colonel Hammirdev Suryavans Kachhwaha of Indian-Army, in-charge of the Elasticnagar. Hammirdev, nicknamed as Kachhwa Karnail or the "Tortoise Colonel" comes from a typical patriarchal Rajasthani household, who are exceptionally proud of their martial past, and thinks of nothing but the ingratitude of the Kashmiri people who never acknowledge the importance of presence of armies in their land to protect them from invaders. He seems as a representative of a rigid nationalist feeling who has forgotten the complexity of the political condition of Kashmir and taken it for granted to be the "integral" part of India. Rushdie plays with the word "integral" that has acquired such a disputed multi dimension in the history of this conflict zone:

> An integer was a whole and India was an integer and fractions were illegal. Fractions caused fractures in the integer and were thus not integral. Not to accept this was to lack integrity and implicitly or explicitly to question the unquestionable integrity of those who did accept it. Not to accept this was latently or patently to favour disintegration. This was subversive. Subversion leading to disintegration was not to be tolerated and it was right to come down on it heavily whether it was of overt or covert kind. (Rushdie 155-156).

Kachhwa never takes any step against Bulbul Fakh or the iron-mullah who teaches "fire-brand" Islam to the local people, his army is absent when the Laskar-e-Pak militants come to the village of Pachigram to force their women to wear burkha, rather he kills Anees Noman, a JKLF militant, who is inspired by Che-Guevera and nicknamed baby Che, for defending his native village from the mad fundamentalists and orders an ethical cleansing of the village of Pachigram and destroys it completely (Rushdie 501-05). Hammirdev thinks that "every Muslim in Kashmir should be considered a militant. The Bullet was the only solution" (Rushdie 475). He believes that rape is a "strategic and tactical matter" that should not be "discussed emotionally" (Rushdie 480). Hammirdev's brand of counter terrorism and militant nationalism comes close to Bulbul Fakh's preaching of "fire-brand" Islam. Rushdie's portrayal of him also reinforces the idea that the so-called Islamic Jihad in Kashmir was a result of the long-standing conflict which was gradually losing its secular cosmopolitan nature. The iron-mullah is also the reminder of the growth of jihadists in the valley. Mullah believes himself to be a reincarnation of Bulbul Shah, "a fabled saint who had come in Kashmir in the fourteenth century" (Rushdie 189), but unlike the Sufi saint who came to teach the word of peace the Mullah is like dragon's breath.

Yet the novel can't be said to end on a pessimistic note full of disasters. The killing of Max Ophuls, a playboy and American diplomat born and brought up in Europe by a Muslim guy could be symbolic of the killing of western corruption and the end of United States' imposition of rule over the Middle East Muslim countries. On the other hand, India, named as Kashmira picks up her bow and arrow weapons to annihilate the hatred and fury raising in the heart of Shalimar- no longer the Clown but the product of extreme fundamentalism, is a sign of destruction of evil energy by divine power. Two killings in the novel are described in ritual terms, that of Max Ophuls in the Islamic "halal" way and of Shalimar with a bow and arrow that flows as regeneration and the cleansing of demonic evils in the kind of Hindu Philosophy. There are other references of myths, superstitions, omens and prophesies like the superstitious legend of the two dragon planets Rahu and Ketu, the legend of the gold-digging ants, then the Seventh Sarkar who can make the Shalimar Gardens disappear, the magic snake-totemism of Firdaus Noman. Here, Rushdie combines real and magical worlds. The story is thus the mythical representation of an eternal story of lovers in a valley stricken by disease of terrorism and moral disgrace. Their individual experiences have come into a constant conflict with the historical changes affecting the future of an entire nation and have constantly transgressed the limitations of historical time by their mythic potentiality.

The problems present in Kashmir are rooted in a long history of antipathies. It is this long history that has led to the making of present situation. In *SC*, starting from the names of the character to the setting of the novel everything is representational. Through this novel Rushdie not only sketches the pain and agony of the inhabitants but also builds a narrative of loss that Kashmir has suffered and continues in the form of political conflict. Rushdie represents the turning of the Kashmir from heavenly vale to a land of bloody conflict which is not less than hell. The representation of the village of Pachigam is the miniature of the whole Kashmir which is shattered when both military and insurgents wreak havoc in the village.

SC calls for a rethinking of established ideas of nation and historical representation. It debunks the notion of a secular nationhood as it appropriates regional and cultural differences under the rubric of a unified history. In the novel national and regional space are rewritten as a space of complex heterogeneous, pluralistic experiences that articulate and produce constructions of cultural and national identity. Behind this univocal world space, imagined by radical religious or nationalist or globalized discourses lie a plethora of diffused, different and often subsumed local narratives. The tendency to silence or erase local stories, often unwittingly, can fuel and bolster religious radicals and fanatics. In *SC*, Rushdie enumerates the stories that have been appropriated or erased by the global culture in the name of homogenization and unification. The novel can be considered a political allegory in which the characters are metaphorical extensions and repercussions of global-local politics. Through the interaction between the global and the local, Rushdie attempts to celebrate the fluidity of identity and the dynamism of spaces. The novel is a double-voiced discourse where the monology of canonical history is refracted and diffused into a plurality of previously suppressed voices which vie for a place in history. Shalimar's story, as the narrator says, was "just one of many stories, one small particular untold tale in a crowd of such tales, one minuscule portion of the unwritten history of Kashmir" (422).

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Silence as a Catalyst to the Language of Existential Crisis: An Analysis of Harold Pinter's *The Room*

Kakalee Das

Abstract

The atavistic journey of literature began after the end of the second world war when words failed to express the existential crisis and angst of the people. Literature during that period no longer aimed at producing poetic language to please the audience, instead it aimed at staging the grim reality of life. Writers like Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, among others, resorted to the literature of silence which according to them spoke the unspeakable. Therefore, Pinter aimed at bringing transparency of reality by incorporating "silence" in his texts. The present study focuses on Pinter's play *The Room* where he deliberately uses "pauses" and "silences" throughout the play that acted as a catalyst to unveil and speak about the crisis of the characters which was indescribable through words.

Keywords: Existential crisis, silence, pauses, second world war, Pinter.

> I think we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is continual evading desperate regarded attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. (Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright* 51)

Harold Pinter (1930-2008) began his atavistic attitude towards language by interpolating "silence" in his texts that acted as a catalyst to the language of existential crisis. Though Pinter was reproached by many critics for his unique style, the former justifies his use of silence as a mechanism to expose the characters' strife with the outside world. His narratives unveil the characters' alienation and crisis in the post-modern world and their inability to express it through words. The critic Martin Esslin considers Pinter's use of silence as "a highly personal way of experiencing, and reacting to, the world around him" (97). Pinter deliberately incorporated pauses within the text to signal the readers to rethink the action or the words that were just done or uttered by the characters. Mel Gussow in his text *Conversation with Pinter* (1994) states what Pinter meant by his silences. Gussow states that according to Pinter, "a silence equally means that something has happened to create the impossibility of anyone speaking for a certain amount of time until they can recover from whatever happened before the silence" (36). Therefore, by using the pauses in his texts he makes sure that the readers are

continuing their thought process as to what happened and what is about to happen next. The play *The Room* (1960) by Pinter is about two characters Mr and Mrs Hudd (husband and wife) and the latter's constant trepidation for the alien world outside the room. Pinter in this text makes his characters resort to silence in the midst of conversation to exhibit the diverse feelings experienced by them and also make the readers experience it simultaneously. Again, by using silence and pauses within the text Pinter tried to bring transparency of reality that words often fail to bring.

The play *The Room* is set in a room where the couple Mr and Mrs Hudd (also known as Bert and Rose respectively) dwell and as the plot advances it is made clear that the characters are ignorant and detached from the outside world. The story begins with Rose being busy at the kitchen and engaging in a monologue addressed to her husband about the weather outside, the basement (where they used to live before) that lies in contrast to their familiar and comfortable space in the room. It is observed that Rose continues her monologue irrespective of the fact that her husband Bert does not acknowledge or reply to any of her queries. Their silence hints at the dilemma of the modern man where they choose to remain alienated. While Bert refuses to acknowledge his wife's existence in the room, yet it is seen that he embraces the existence of inanimate things. This is evident from the way he describes his van by giving it womanly attributes. This hints at the hopelessness of the modern man who finds comfort in inanimate things rather than enjoying the company of another human being. Rose, on the other hand, is seen from the beginning being over protective of the room and therefore any sense of intrusion in that space threatened her security and existence. Rose's incessant references to the basement signified her anxiety and a possible sense of menace from the world outside her room which she tries to express through her monologues. She states:

I don't know who lives down there now. Whoever it is, they're taking a big chance. Maybe they're foreigners I'd have pulled you through. (*Pause. She rocks herself*) If they ever ask you, Bert, I'm quite happy where I am. We're quiet, we're all right. You're happy up here. It's not far up either, when you come in from outside. And we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us. (*Pause*) (Pinter 3)

The silence that follows after the utterance of the phrases, "And we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us" (3) hints at the character's alienation from the world outside her room and her comfort living in that space. From the beginning Rose keeps herself busy in the household chores and avoids any connection with the world outside her room in order to feel secure. Rose stands as the archetype for all the individuals who are scared of the possible menace that would threaten their stability and identity in the society. When the landlord Mr. Kidd arrives, Rose becomes uncomfortable discussing the room which she thought might be taken away from them. Like Rose, Mr. Kidd too was in a state of hopelessness and that is apparent from the conversation between them. Mr. Kidd being the landlord does not know the number of floors in that building and he blames his sister's death to be the reason why he cannot keep track of things. Both the characters use silence as a method to escape from their present state of helplessness and avoid answering each other's questions. This is evident from the following conversation between them:

Rose: What did she die of?
Mr. Kidd: Who?
Rose: Your sister *(Pause)*
Mr. Kidd: I've made ends meet. *(Pause)* (8)

The meaningless conversation shared between them hints at the absurdity of the post-modern world which words fail to express. The critic Ludwig Wittgenstein in his text *Tractatus* states, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (151). Therefore, by using silence after these meaningless sentences, Pinter makes the reader wonder about the gravity of the situation. Michael Feingold in this context says, "In Pinter plays, the silences test the extremes of human behaviour: they are the silences of resistance, of terrified or complacent acquescere, of outrage" (18). The distrust of language is one of the prime characteristics of modern drama because it is believed that words often fail to mirror human experience which could possibly be expressed through silence. Pinter deliberately incorporated the "pauses" in Mr Kidd and Rose's conversation to unveil their disturbed psyche and hopeless existence. Again, silence is incorporated to highlight the element of menace in the play that arises due to the unpredictability and uncertainty. The element of menace in the play comes in the form of two strangers and a Negro. The character Rose faces an existential crisis after she comes in contact with these people. The warm secured space of the room gets disturbed by the appearance of Mr and Mrs Sands. When they enquire about the room and start talking about the stranger living in the basement of the building, Rose gets threatened by the idea of dispossession. In the article "The Dramatic Value of 'Pauses' in Harold Pinter's *The Room*", the writer Basaad Mhayyal states how Rose "appears to stand as a representation of all humanity, fearful of a world that conspires against the individual's need for stability and assured personal identity" (124).

Rose's sense of identity gets threatened again with the appearance of the Negro named Riley who had a possible connection with her past. Rose at first refuses to recognise him and uses various negative epithets to address him. She says, "They say I know you. That's an insult, for a start. Because I can tell you to spit on, not from a mile off" (*Pause*) (Pinter 21). Here Rose referring to Riley with such words of hatred shows her deep connection with the character and this is emphasised more with the pauses that makes the audience wonder why Rose was denying to recognise him. The Negro addresses her as "Sal" which according to the critic Martin Esslin represented her Jewish identity and the post- Holocaust nightmare (Mhayyal 102). He pleads with her to return home and reminds her of her family, an identity that Rose wished to forget. The moments of silence in the form of "pauses" incorporated within their dialogues, were made intentionally to highlight Rose's possible connection with Riley and how she tried to escape this past identity. Therefore, it can be stated that her existential crisis is manifested when she meets Riley. In this context, the critic John Pesta in his article "Pinter's Usurpers" says, "The play calls for a symbolic interpretation. Riley, threatening the womb-like security of the room, serves as a death figure" (55). According to the critic L. P. Gabbard, "the room is the womb that nurtured her" (26). Pinter presented Rose at her most comfortable as well as vulnerable position and employed the element of menace in her life by an unwanted visitor who visits with an "intent" (Kane 134).

Rose's husband Bert attacking the Negro articulates his superior position over the other characters who chose not to speak to his wife but resort to violence when he saw the Negro with his wife. It was observed that not only Rose, but also her husband treated Riley as inferior. The use of the word "negro" implies racial prejudice towards the character and therefore when Bert saw him with his wife, he resorted to violence. Rose becoming blind at the end shows her connection with Riley who was also blind. It also signified the end of her relationship with her husband. Commenting on the ending of the play Leslie Kane in her article "The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and Unspeakable in Modern Drama" stated that there is an element of similarity in Chekhov and Pinter's play because they brought homogeneity in the concluding and the initial scene of the play (134). This homogeneity is also seen in the incorporation of silence in the play. Bert never spoke and also didn't care to listen to either Rose or Riley. He didn't give Riley any chance to speak and attacked him immediately. Again, Rose towards the end resorted to inaction and didn't care to explain to her husband about the situation. The void in their lives was justified by the use of silence which signified the characters' rage, anxiety and a sense of fear for their existence. It can therefore be stated that silence acts as a catalyst to the existential crisis of the characters and leaves a room for the audience to interpret and decode the hidden emotions and feelings that words often fail to express.

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Liberalisation and Marginalisation: Reading Queer Paradox in Pre-Colonial India in Ruth Vanita's *Memory of Light*

Shivangi Verma

Abstract
This paper concentrates on the paradoxical existence of queer identities within pre-colonial India with special reference to Ruth Vanita's *Memory of Light*. Against the backdrop of the Mughal Empire, the novel engages in detailed description of courtesans' life, focusing mainly on the closeness of relations between Nafis Bai and Chapla Bai. The paper analyses how the *kothas* stood as a relatively autonomous emotional space in these women's lives and hence became almost a sanctuary where queer identities could flourish. To problematize this freedom, it has been interred with binding forces of the patriarchal and class structures. In the novel, one encounters subtle views of how queer identities were both tolerated, yet marginalized, within precincts of society. By making comparative references to other historical depictions of queer identities in pre-colonial India, the paper displays how *Memory of Light* becomes a part of a more panoramic understanding of gender and sexuality in South Asian history. The study will further show how its themes in the novel get echoed with modern discourses of queerness, revealing insight into continuity and evolution in queer experiences in the Indian subcontinent. It finally concludes that the work of Vanita is relevant both in historical and contemporary queer studies, pushing for the examination of queer identity representation in historical contexts.

Keywords: Queer, marginalisation, identity, same-sex, paradox

India in the pre-colonial period was characterized by complex hierarchies and deep-seated rules of gender, class, and sexuality. Although the social structure was predominantly patriarchal, with an enormous division of labor and life activities between men and women, there also existed at the same time domains of fluidity and visibility for cultures of optionality. This time was also characterized by an emerging culture typified by opulence and uneven social formations. Courtesans worked in the wider field with a kind of social uniqueness. It was in this tussle to balance between being educated figures with skills in arts that courtesans found themselves both respected and outcasts. They played important parts in the cultural and social life of the empire; they were entertainers, poets, musicians, and sometimes political advisors. But despite their influential positions, courtesans lived on the fringes of

respectability, and their autonomy was in reality more often than not bounded by the wills of powerful men.

Ruth Vanita's *Memory of Light,* an exploration into courtesans' lives, is placed against such a historical backdrop. The novel is of immense importance for dealing with homosexual love among the courtesans, seldom taken up in the historical narratives. An account of the alliance between the legendary courtesan Nafis Bai and her companion Chapla Bai, the novel details the emotional and the psychological facets of queer identities in pre-colonial India. The novel presents a world in which love among women is as much a source of liberation as it is a cause of marginalisation of the larger paradoxes of the time.

The *kotha* or courtesan's establishment in *Memory of Light* emerges as a space of relative freedom where women can express their desires and make connections other than those stipulated by the society in strictly heterosexual relationships. But still, this is not absolute. The *kotha* is a home apart from all the stringent norms on the other side; it is a space marked by outer overarching patriarchal and class-based structures of the Mughal Empire. Therefore, relationships in this queer space are both autonomous and bound, reflecting the contradictory scenario of liberation and marginalization.

Historical and Cultural Context

During this era, gender and sexuality were classified in a manner quite divergent from traditional Western constructs. Gender and sexuality were rather fluid in the Indian sub-continent, particularly in that time defining a paramount influence in the cultural or religious paradigm. For instance, the concept of "*tritiya-prakriti*" (third nature) in ancient texts acknowledges the existence of a population not falling in the binary notions of gender. It shows the historical acknowledgment that the widespread culture at that time had a diversity of gender (Nanda 99). The role of courtesans in this context has special importance. The independence and degree of agency that a courtesan enjoyed were nowhere close to ordinary women, who were more often confined to domestic spaces. Their ranks not only included entertainers but also connoisseurs of art, literature, and politics, many of whom played vital roles in the royal courts. In such a position, they were better placed to move freely across the barriers of societal norms and often emerged as patrons of the arts and literature (Chakravarti 86). Yet, despite this enhanced standing in the circles of culture and society, courtesans remained on the periphery of mainstream life. Their professional lives placed them outside the bounds of respectability, making their autonomy both celebrated and stigmatized. In pre-colonial India, historical attitudes to same-sex relationships were more nuanced than the binary categorizations of modern times.

Texts like the *Kama Sutra,* as also medieval Persian literature, depicts same-sex love and relationships often without the moral judgment that would later characterize colonial and post-colonial attitudes (Reddy 17). These references would thus imply that same-sex relationships were recognized, but not necessarily normalized or openly celebrated. Courtesans, with their relative freedom and cultural capital, could thus negotiate these relationships with a degree of discretion. Spaces for queer identities could thus be opened up, albeit contained within the constraints of the profession and societal expectations. The *kotha,* or the house of a courtesan,

had been a place of relative autonomy for women within pre-colonial India. Inside it, the courtesans had control over their lives and also their art; they could dictate their terms with the patrons and establish their own conditions pertaining to personal and professional relationships. Of course, this independence was already circumscribed by the necessity of pleasing the patrons and conforming to social norms, but it still represented an independence barely found among other women of that period.

In *Memory of Light*, the *kotha* plays out as a sanctuary for queer identities more specifically through the relation between Nafis Bai and Chapla Bai. Their relation was more than simply the transactional characteristics of a courtesan's life, and in fact, this was illustrative of the potential within a *kotha* to be a space where non-normative relationships could blossom. The kotha provided a screen from the outside patriarchal world; it allowed relationships like theirs to be born and to thrive, but always within the bounds of discretion alone (Khan 52). Yet, the autonomy of these spaces was not absolute. The very web of fabrics that allowed for such kinds of freedoms also simultaneously continued power differences, mainly along the axes of class and gender. But the kotha was also a site of commodification—within it lay the freedom of expression, always contingent upon the courtesan's ability to please others (Butler 135).

The Paradox of Emancipation and Marginalisation

In great detail, Ruth Vanita writes the tale of Nafis Bai and Chapla Bai in her *Memory of Light*. In this *kotha*, their love is characterized as a source of emotional and sexual emancipation. In one swoop, it is an equally powerful counter narrative to the heteronormative expectations of their society. The relationship between Nafis and Chapla is deep; it reaches a holiness that is rarely felt or experienced. It transcends the transactional confines of courtesan life and provides a sanctuary for both of them from the societal norms that have encroached on gender and sexuality. Their love is described as an act of subversion but also as a deeply moving and expressive moment. Vanita underlines that in a world of patriarchy, where women in the majority are objects of objectification and commodification, especially courtesans, Nafis's love for Chapla enables them the possibility of redeeming their agency and identity formation. On the whole, their relationship is one of tenderness and care that gives one a sense of freedom which is otherwise untrue in the real world, full of patriarchal bonds. For instance, Nafis reflects on her relationship with Chapla as one of the few aspects of her life whereby she feels truly seen and understood, emphasizing the emancipatory power of companionship (Vanita 102).

The patient with a self-prescribed label outside the norms of the society in Cattelan and Ferrari's work embodies Judith Butler's construction of performativity—that is, a gendered/ sexual identity is performative and not natural (Butler 25). In such a way, Nafis and Chapla are performing a version of the state of being a woman through making a decision to love one another, therefore negating traditionalist views of what is acceptable with regards to gendered performance and ultimately freeing up a space in which they can affect a form of liberation as a means of transcending these norms. In other words, their love is a performance of resistance against norms that condition the socials. The self-liberation that Nafis and Chapla have experienced in their private world is thrown in sharp contrast to the marginalization given to them through the overarching patriarchal framework of the

Mughal Empire. The freedom of their emotional and sexual selves is held in checks and balances by the society through multiple layers of bindings that society has chained them in as women, as courtesans. The Mughal empire, like most pre-colonial societies, was deeply patriarchal, with strict social hierarchies, dictating the behavior and roles that a subject should adhere to, especially of the female gender (Chatterjee 27). Within this world, the queer identities of Nafis and Chapla are both hidden and tolerated within certain confines. In their love, which hitherto had at the kotha a place of relative autonomy, the element of utter concealment made it also a prison of sorts, at least insofar as their love was to be kept out of the larger public eye for the sake of censure from society. Based on this the element of concealment attests to the precarious nature of their existence, for all the comfort that these secret trysts provide, they are seen to be in a constant dance of exposure to a society that sees their relationship as deviant. They are keenly aware that such love could bring tremendous consequences if discovered well, considering the tension between private liberation and public marginalization (Vanita 154).

This tension is further elevated when juxtaposed against the patriarchal and class-based structures that characterized the Mughal Empire in such a manner that even if courtesans were vastly powerful in their own right, they remained at the mercy of their male patrons and societal demands that were placed upon them. As Gayatri Spivak powerfully propounds, the subaltern figures have no capacity ever to speak for themselves within dominant discourse structures, and that per se perpetuates the problems of their marginalization; a classic case in point are the women in colonial and pre-colonial contexts (Spivak 104). Both Nafis and Chapla are basically subaltern figures and thus constrained by the power structure within which they have some freedom, yet are again reduced to marginality. This paradoxical existence, of being free in one's private experience and still marginal within the public space, is the complexity of queer existence in pre-colonial India. The characters' lived duality reflects the kind of resilience and resourcefulness they must have within a society that, in other ways, gives them refuge yet restrains them. Their story in *Memory of Light* is reminiscent of the fact that it is not easy to go through living in a society that is based on patriarchy and heteronormativity.

Queer Identities in *Memory of Light*

Ruth Vanita employs several narrative and symbolic methods in the course of narrating *Memory of Light*, through which the detailed representations of queer experiences in colonial India are presented. One important narrative strategy is the use of intimate and evocative descriptions by her in the portrayal of the relationship of Nafis Bai with Chapla Bai. By focusing on these private moments of two women, Vanita gives space to this love, where it can unfold with depth and sensitivity. As in this description of their nightly conversations, "Their whispered words were like a caress, a promise of secrets shared in the stillness of the night," such relationships are emotionally fulfilling and profoundly connect at a level beyond the limitations their environment imposes on them (Vanita 77). Symbolism is a very effective way to bring out the complexities of queer love. As previously explained, the kothas are also symbols of space. On the one hand, it is a double sign of freedom and a minority; at the same time, it indicates the general paradox of queer living in a patriarchal world. On another hand, uses imagery as well as a device of Urdu and Persian poetry by

Vanita indicating the love of Nafis and Chapla towards each other. For example, the lines, "in your eyes, I find the moon's light, a beacon in the darkness of our worlds," relate their love in a most timeless and transcendental way back to great tradition and classical poetry (Vanita 89). As evidenced by the poignancy of these poetic lines, the relationship, despite being constrained by societal norms, is a source of profound personal freedom and connection.

Language in *Memory of Light* is at once a tool toward visibility and a way of maintaining invisibility. Vanita's language and discourse describe well the tightrope that Nafis and Chapla are to walk. Poetic, metaphorical language allows them to say how they feel in a way that resonates with the norms of their culture and the literary conventions of that time, while it offers the veil of discretion required for their protection. Examples of the metaphoric allusion of intimate emotional and sexual connection exist in the dialogue developed between Nafis and Chapla. This is manifested by the former's utterances: "We are like the moon and its shadow, forever entwined but never seen together" (Vanita 94). The metaphor here communicates both how deep their togetherness is and, in its quality of hiddenness, the demand for discreetness their love makes on them within their social situation.

Vanita further complicates the portrayal of queer experiences by means of classical literary devices such as allegory and allusion. Indic and Persian poetry references lend layers of meaning in the classic representations of love and desire, which furnish the framework for the relationship between Nafis and Chapla. The lines "Your presence is my sanctuary, the forbidden garden where I find solace" was added, which solidly upholds their personal contributions to the larger cultural and poetic traditions in place and is a statement of how queer self-expression remains consistent over different historical periods (Vanita 107). The play of visibility and invisibility in the language of the novel thus exemplifies a still wider theoretical understanding of queer discourse. Michel Foucault, the postmodern philosopher, writes that language and discourse are powerful devices in the formation and control of identity (Foucault 27). In the novel, Vanita shows how language always attends to expressing queer love while navigating societal constraints. The language of the novel itself permits the display of queer identities amidst all the constraints pertaining to culture and history, forming a complex image of such relations in precolonial India.

Comparative Analysis

Memory of Light subtly represents queer identities in pre-colonial India, adding to the general understanding of historical representations of same-sex relationships. Although there exist historical and textual depictions of queer identities in pre-colonial India through various texts and artifacts, they seldom rise to the level of detailed narrative focus displayed by Vanita. For instance, texts like the *Kama Sutra* and the *Ananga Ranga* have allusions to homosexuality, though it is almost always expressed in a clinical or eroticized way rather than being a clear and elaborated account of experience (Reddy 15). They acknowledge the relationships but do not get deeply into personal and emotional aspects. Similarly, though there are historical accounts of courtesans under the Mughal Empire, with their influences and

roles in society amply brought out, the personal relationships elucidating those linked with same-sex love are usually elided (Chakravarti 38).

It is in this respect that Vanita's *Memory of Light* departs fundamentally from these earlier portrayals in its frank concentration on the emotional and psychic dimensions of queer relationships. The novel gives a vivid picture of how Nafis Bai and Chapla Bai lived, showing their love in a tone that forebodes emotional depth and, above all, challenges thrown by society in regard to this relationship. Unlike earlier texts, which would have brought up same-sex relationships either in passing or in a more abstract sense, Vanita brings these into sharp focus. The paradox of being liberated and marginalized is portrayed with a very fine-grained lens, sensitive in a very effective way (Vanita 112).

On the whole, *Memory of Light* is highly relevant to modern readings of queer identity and especially in the case of the Indian subcontinent. Simultaneously, the locating of the practice of same-sex love within historical reckoning gives a kaleidoscopic dimension to modern queer discourses. That is to say, by rendering an intricately nuanced portrayal of queer individuals inhabiting historical time, Vanita challenges modern assumptions in the origination and visibility of queer identities in India. These themes of the novel work together to make it resonate with contemporary LGBTQ+ discourses, showing largely continuing struggles for visibility and acceptance. Some contemporary queer discourses underline the historicity of queerness or even call for the reclamation of historical events if contemporary issues are to be understood (Puar 12). Vanita's portrayal of queer relationships as both free and bound provides a historical precedent for this contemporary struggle for queer visibility and rights.

In this sense, the novel's emotional and psychological emphases on queer relationships converge with contemporary LGBTQ+ advocacy—precisely focused on personal experiences and the identities of queers. By underscoring a sense of the personal and relational in Nafis and Chapla's love, Vanita facilitates a broader discourse seeking to affirm and validate diverse queer experiences (Butler 33).

Conclusion

Ruth Vanita's *Memory of Light* offers an exciting insight into the paradoxical nature of queer existence in pre-colonial India as at once liberated and marginalized. Ruth Vanita's style of relating the story of Nafis Bai and Chapla Bai reflects the tussle between agency and constraint in the time-space matrix of the Mughal Empire. The novel underscores how the courtesan's kotha makes available a locale relatively free for the expression of queer identities, while at the same time reinforcing the limitations set by the patriarchy and class. It is through these intimate portrayals and symbolic representations that Vanita brings out the subtlety of queer experiences negotiating with a world that shelters them but also restricts them.

In the way that this novel excavates the emotional and relational aspects of queer love against the historical constraint backdrop, the discovery adds layers to our understanding of experiences and articulations around same-sex relationships in pre-colonial India. This shifts away from those earlier texts of history that had neglected or smoothed over such experiences, bringing nuance and empathy into

representation. These findings point toward a sea change in current assumptions about the date of origin, visibility, and appropriative compilation of queer identities in India, proving that queer relationships are not any new phenomenon within the cultural and historical landscape of India. The novel offers an exact representation of queer love and its delimitations, showing a seamless continuum of queer experiences across time while underscoring that current queer issues need to be understood within their historical contexts.

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Shift in the Paradigm of the Detective in Detective Fiction

Bhavya Aggarwal

Abstract

Traces of detective stories have been found since the 18th century in different regions of the world but this paper will aim to trace the development of the character of a detective in the detective fiction genre in English language through some famous crime novelists and their most famous detectives. The paper will focus specifically on the character of C. Auguste Dupin by Edgar Allan Poe, Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle and Hercule Poirot by Agatha Christie. These detective characters remain highly influential even in the contemporary crime fiction genre. The paper will explore these detectives through different sub-genres in detective fiction like Locked Room Mystery, Howcatchem, Whodunnit and Cozy Mystery along with the early response of the detective genre in its establishment. The paper aims to explore the shift in the psychology of detectives, their stance in the society, their identity, their profession and their tussle with the police force.

Keywords: Detective Fiction, Detective Genre, Mystery, Sherlock, Poirot, Dupin

Detective fiction as a genre was established in the early 1820s when due to demands for industrial jobs, people began moving to cities leading to the creation of unknown environments. There was a sudden increase in crime rates, thus forming an appropriate setting for detective genres. The genre of detective fiction is believed to have originated from *1001 Nights* from the Arab region, including "stories about thieves, about murder, about robbers and rogue-stories" (Gerhardt 169). But detective fiction in English is said to have advanced from 1841 by Edgar Alan Poe through his short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* that introduced the first private detective, the eccentric and brilliant, Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin. Poe introduced the concept of locked room mystery through his short stories (Penzler 2). The first English detective novel is credited to British author Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) which introduced detective Sergeant Cuff, which established the classic tropes and attributes of a detective and a detective novel (Karl 2). The detective character that shaped the figure of a literary detective, as followed by contemporary writers, is Sherlock Holmes introduced in *A Study in Scarlet*, 1887. Doyle continued to write Sherlock novels and short stories until around 1927. The era between the two

world wars came to be known as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction and the more prevalent sub-genre being 'whodunnit' wherein the identity of the criminal was concealed until the climax where the method and the culprit both were revealed. The novels had "an original and exciting plot; distinction in the writing, a memorable and compelling hero and the ability to draw the reader into their comforting and highly individual world" (James 1). The reading world was introduced to the queen of crime fiction, Agatha Christie. Christie created two famous detectives in literary history — Hercule Poirot, *The Mysterious Affairs at Styles* (1920) and Miss Marple, *The Tuesday Night Club* (1927).

A detective story should have definite laws — "unwritten, perhaps, but nonetheless binding and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them" (Van Dine). The paper aims to follow the development of the character of a detective in its initial stage in the 19th century leading to the Golden Age. The focus will be on three major detectives — Le C. Auguste Dupin (Edgar Alan Poe) in *The Purloined Letter* (1844), Sherlock Holmes (Arthur Conan Doyle) in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and Hercule Poirot (Agatha Christie) in *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and their prevalence in the current era. The paper will explore the detectives' identity, profession, authority and power along with the subgenre and narrative technique of the writers.

Detective fiction is based on a mystery to be solved, usually a criminal that must be caught. This genre has been bifurcated into multiple sub-genres based on narrative styles. In *The Purloined Letter,* Poe uses a 'howcatchem' i.e., the crime and identity of the perpetrator is revealed in the beginning and the story describes the detective's attempt to find the method of crime. Doyle's mysteries were based on the 'whodunnit' genre. His stories are filled with clues that the detective fails to penetrate until near the end, this implies a certain sense of hesitance on the part of the detective (Kissane 358) which seems implausible but is necessary for the plot. In contemporary literature, Christie's style has evolved into cozy mysteries featuring minimal violence where the solution is achieved by intellect or intuition rather than formal police procedure with honourable and well-bred characters in a closed community.

One of the primary ways to create proximity between the detective and the reader is through first person point of view (Connelly 10). But the narrator idealizes the detective resorting to hagiography and the reader, hence, understands the detective from the perspective of an admirer. In Poe, the narrator is a friend "admiring a peculiar analytic ability in Dupin" (Poe 65). His notion of Dupin's superior ability dismisses any lack in his ways or judgment. Holmes commented "you have attempted to tinge it with romanticism" on Watson's attempt to biographize his cases (Doyle 65). Conan's stories were all narrated by Dr John Watson, an admirer and friend, creating a bias about the ability of Sherlock as a detective. Christie used different narrators in regards to Poirot's cases, usually Captain Arthur Hastings or a character of the story with a medical or police background. Even with diverse narrators, each has a sense of admiration of Poirot's capability as a detective. Though there is an exception in James Sheppard as an anti-narrator in *Murder of Roger Ackroyd* but even there the narrative respects the detective. All the reader has is the narrator's

view of the fictional universe which is limited to the narrator's awareness of the state of affairs in the novel limiting the character of the detective (Stuart 2).

The conversation about remunerations for the detective has been revealed in the novels by the writers creating the profession of Consultant Detective. In *The Purloined Letter*, Dupin surrenders the letter only after the receipt of the cheque for the reward mentioned by the Prefect (Poe 139) portraying a shift to contemporary capitalism (Rollason 13). In *The Problem of Thor Bridge,* Sherlock said, "My professional charges are upon a fixed scale. I do not vary them" (Doyle 984) while accepting any reward offered. In *Hickory Dickory Dock,* the employment of Miss Lemon as a secretary indicates Poirot's business (Christie 7) along with the mention of rewards for indulging in a case in other instances. These detectives represent the neo-bourgeois class in the 19th century with focus on capitalism that was on the rise. Being a consultant detective, they charged a fee to provide for themselves.

The neo-bourgeoise class in the 19th century lived in vain attempts to achieve the social position of the aristocracy. Since the detective was a part of this class, the authors created a middle-class intervention. *The Purloined Letter* lies in royal apartments wherein a Minister purloined a letter of a royal personage. *A Study in Scarlet's* victim is a wealthy American misusing his power receiving retribution. *Murder on the Orient Express* revolves around the aristocracy and wealthy people. The authors are mocking the aristocracy for their atrocities to provide a clear picture to the neo-bourgeoise class of the working of upper-class society and the vices that fill their lives.

A detective is a driving force in the narrative and their identity needs to be more nuanced to create an impression but the authors elicit an image of the detective even before the consideration of the plot creating an eccentric detective making them memorable (Connelly 9). Interestingly, the detectives who are well acknowledged seem to be partially anonymous i.e., unrecognizable by face. Dupin, Sherlock and Poirot are commissioned to solve cases but they are unrecognizable based on their presence only, rather it is their peculiarities and name that makes people conscious of their stature alluding to an intellectual prowess.

The age of the detectives should also be considered. Though not specified, Dupin and Poirot are shown as retired, hence their ages are well above 50 and they work with experience but Sherlock is an agile young man in his late 20s. This age difference reflects in their workings. Dupin and Poirot work within their minds and keep minimal mobility whereas Sherlock is more active with physical labours along with his intellectual abilities.

Auguste Dupin is a brilliant and eccentric amateur French criminologist (Bandy 509). Dupin's process of solving the mystery combines intuitive logic, astute observation and insightful inference rather than being analytical. For Dupin, "getting inside the criminal mind is the detective's most valuable skill" (Cohen 49). He employs the methods of a scientist (empirical deduction) and an artist (imaginative) (Rollason 8). Sherlock Holmes describes his method of reasoning similar to the historical sciences of palaeontology, archaeology and geology which had captured the imagination of the literate public in the 19th century (Snyder 104). He used his intellectual prowess, astute observation, deductive reasoning and forensic skills to

solve cases. Poirot relies more on his "intellect to untangle the web of methods, motive and means of a crime" (Hardesty 37). In *Murder on the Orient Express,* each suspect had a motive to kill but with his "little grey cells," Poirot propounds two absurd solutions leaving his company uncomfortable yet aghast.

The detectives seem to be working against or sometimes with the police protocols which could lead to a clash of interest in the two forces. But the authority and powers of the detectives ended up surpassing the authority of the police force. In Poe's story, Monsieur G, the Prefect of the Parisian Police approaches Dupin for consultation (Poe 132). Sherlock too receives a letter from Tobias Gregson of Scotland Yard for a favour in solving the case (Doyle 19). In *Murder on the Orient Express,* it is Monsieur Bouc, a member of the Belgian Police Force who asks Poirot to work on the case (Christie 26). In the process of investigation, a conflict arises between the two but the last say ends up with the detective reflecting his prominence. Through this portrayal, the image of the police force is tarnished as they are presented to be incapable to solve cases.

The nationality of these detectives seems relevant too. Dupin is a French detective in Paris written by an American writer, but why French? This was because of the lack of trust in the Parisians for their police in the 19th century. Policing was a hard job with a meagre salary (Polansky 2) leading to their lack of incentive to work and the rise of a private detective. Poirot is a Belgian detective who migrated to London during the World War hence he deals with the Scotland Yard. Christie's use of a different nationality was to poke fun at "Englishness" at the expense of a foreign detective and also creating a peculiar trait for Poirot. Sherlock is British, working alongside Scotland Yard. Doyle portrayed the formalities to be adhered to by the police, leaving them inflexible and incapable in solving a witty case.

The detective enjoys a superiority over the police in terms of power but this is problematized in the society. There is a distinction amongst the detectives under our scrutiny. Poirot is a retired Belgian police officer aware of the working of the police system. His approach in solving cases as well as dealing with the police differ as the police seem more accommodating to his way and he is rarely objected to by the inspectors. He is even given due recognition for his part in the investigation. Sherlock and Dupin have never been part of the system and are portrayed as outsiders. Their methods are acknowledged as they achieve the desired result but never recognized. Their deserved credit is published in the name of the inspectors. They were considered outcasts from society only due to their peculiar way of working and lack of recognition. This portrayed them as a problem in the society which is why they preferred their personal space more.

"Ah! Madame, I reserve the explanations for the last chapter" (Christie 139). The paper explored three major detectives in the detective canon — Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot with respect to their identity, profession, authority and power, the narrative style of the writers and the genre they succumb to. Their investigation wasn't merely out of kindness, rather due to their prolific profession as a Consultant Detective. With the advent of the genre, Dupin follows a more creative path to solve mysteries whilst using a certain sense of scientific approach followed by Holmes who is a scientific detective working with precision and accuracy. The Golden Age of Detective Fiction (1920s-30s) broke the monolithic

idea of a detective with the introduction of "cozy mystery" or mystery novels that depict crime lightly. Poirot, a prominent detective of this era, deduces a solution through his intellect and a severe inspection of the circumstances and the events. With their different approaches, these detectives usually support a companion, usually the narrator. Their skills and observations put shame on the police force giving them a higher respect. These detectives belong to the neo-bourgeoise class, focusing on the concept of capitalism i.e., working for a fee. Their aim is to shun the atrocity of aristocracy and a plea to other classes to reject aristocratic ideology. In the contemporary era, Robert Langdon, a professor of history of art or symbology, a consultant detective created by Dan Brown, has a specialty creating a distinction from his contemporaries. He belongs to a neo-bourgeoise class and finds himself in constant tussle with the police force. Through Langdon, the pre-existing norms that were set for a detective by the early writers are deemed predominantly relevant even in the current era and inspire the present writers' circle.

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The Viziers of Bassora and the Dramatic Architectonics of Sri Aurobindo

Subhra Souranshu Pujahari

Abstract

The Indian tradition of romance is a tapestry woven with threads of mythology, history, literature, art, and everyday life, creating a rich and diverse cultural heritage. It reflects the complex interplay of emotions, societal norms, and philosophical underpinnings that have evolved over millennia. Indian mythology is replete with stories of divine love and romance, serving as archetypes for human relationships. The epic tales of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* contain some of the most enduring love stories. Sri Aurobindo, a towering figure in Indian philosophy, literature, and spirituality, has made significant contributions to the literary world through his poetic and dramatic works. Among his diverse oeuvre, his plays stand out for their rich thematic content, deep philosophical insights, and sophisticated literary craftsmanship. Six of his plays are available in complete form, while two others exist only in fragments due to historical circumstances. The available plays of Sri Aurobindo include *Persus the Deliverer,* Vasavadutt*a, Rodogune, The Viziers of Bassora, Eric and Prince of Edur.*

Key Words: Indian mythologies, Kalidasa, *As You Like It,* Northrop Frye, Fredric Jameson

Sri Aurobindo, a towering figure in Indian philosophy, literature, and spirituality, has made significant contributions to the literary world through his poetic and dramatic works. Among his diverse oeuvre, his plays stand out for their rich thematic content, deep philosophical insights, and sophisticated literary craftsmanship. Six of his plays are available in complete form, while two others exist only in fragments due to historical circumstances. The available plays of Sri Aurobindo include *Persus the Deliverer,* Vasavadutt*a, Rodogune, The Viziers of Bassora, eric and Prince of Edur.*

On May 5, 1908, at around 5 a.m., the police conducted a sweeping search of Sri Aurobindo's house as part of the Alipore Bomb Case investigation. This case was a significant event in the Indian independence movement, involving a conspiracy to overthrow British rule through armed revolution. Sri Aurobindo was one of the key figures implicated in the case due to his nationalist activities and writings.

During the search, the police confiscated all papers found in his house, regardless of their relevance to the case. This indiscriminate seizure resulted in the loss of many of Sri Aurobindo's literary works, including the complete manuscripts of the two plays that are now available only in fragments. The impact of this event on his literary legacy is profound, as it deprived the world of potentially significant contributions to dramatic literature. The following quotation from K. R. S. Iyengar's Sri Aurobindo gives a very vivid account of this seize :

> Accordingly, on May 5, 1908, at about 5 a.m., the Superintendent, the Inspector and other police officers "entered Aurobindo's bedroom, and, on opening his eyes, he saw them standing round. Perhaps, he thought himself in the grip of a nightmare, gazing an apparitions in the half- light of dawn. However, he was not left in suspense long...After securing Aurobindo, his bedroom was searched. 'Search' is not the word for it. It was turned inside out. The ransacking went on for three hours..."As a result of the search, the officers found a number of essays, poems, letters, etc., which they took away from the house. (Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo* 153)

Before diving into the cognizance of Sri Aurobindo and his brilliant employment of romance in *The Viziers of Bassora,* it feels de rigueur to revisit Indian tradition of romance in short. The Indian tradition of romance is a tapestry woven with threads of mythology, history, literature, art, and everyday life, creating a rich and diverse cultural heritage. It reflects the complex interplay of emotions, societal norms, and philosophical underpinnings that have evolved over millennia.

Indian mythology is replete with stories of divine love and romance, serving as archetypes for human relationships. The epic tales of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* contain some of the most enduring love stories. In the *Ramayana,* the love between Rama and Sita exemplifies devotion, fidelity, and duty. Despite facing numerous trials and tribulations, their bond remains unbroken, symbolizing the ideal of conjugal love. In the *Mahabharata,* the relationship between Arjuna and Subhadra, as well as the tragic love of Bhishma for Amba, are significant narratives that explore the various aspects of love, from passionate romance to unrequited love and sacrifice. The Puranas, a genre of ancient Indian literature, also celebrate love in various forms. The *Bhagavata Purana* recounts the divine love of Krishna and Radha, a symbol of supreme love that transcends the physical and reaches the metaphysical. Their love is often interpreted as the soul's longing for union with the divine.

Kalidasa, esteemed as one of the greatest poets and playwrights in Classical Sanskrit literature, made lasting impression in the Indian tradition of romance. His works are celebrated for their lyrical beauty, emotional depth, and profound exploration of human relationships. Two of his most famous works, *Abhijnanasakuntalam* and *Meghaduta* (The Cloud Messenger), are quintessential examples of his mastery in portraying the subtle emotional dimensions of love. Kalidasa's contributions to the Indian romantic tradition are immense and enduring. His works not only capture the essence of love and longing but also elevate these themes to a philosophical and spiritual plane. By intertwining human

emotions with the natural and divine, Kalidasa creates a holistic vision of love that transcends the mundane and touches the sublime. His influence extends beyond literature into various forms of Indian art, including painting, music, and dance, where his themes and characters continue to inspire and resonate. Kalidasa's ability to portray the complexities of human relationships with such depth and beauty ensures that his works remain timeless classics in the canon of world literature. The most pertinent aspect of Kalidasa is that his projection of romance in his seminal works indicates his allegiance towards classical Indian aesthetics of rasa as propounded by Bharat Muni and further developed by Abhinavagupta.

The Viziers of Bassora, the first dramatic work by Sri Aurobindo, was written in Baroda sometime between 1893 and 1906. When Sri Aurobindo was taken into custody in connection with the Alipore Case, the police seized all his papers, including the manuscript of this play. The manuscript remained untraced until 1951 when, by a strange turn of events, it was discovered among the records of the Alipore Case preserved in a steel cupboard in the retiring room of the District Judge. Notably, in 1936, orders had been passed to destroy the records of the case, but they were kept unofficially in a corner of the Record Room and later transferred to a steel almirah in the retiring room of the District Judge. Sri Aurobindo had assumed the manuscript was lost. He had a special fondness for this creation from his youth and mentioned it in the introduction to the *Collected Poems and Plays.*

The play is a startling work that illustrates the dramatist's ability to draw upon various sources of inspiration and transform them into a unique and compelling narrative. The play is deeply rooted in the rich tapestry of stories from *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights* (commonly known as *Arabian Nights*) as translated by Sir Richard Burton. As for example in The Book of the Thousand and one Nights there is the "Tale of the Second Eunuch, Kafur" in which such characters as Haroun al Rasheed, the Caliph of Bagdad, Jafar, his vizier, Kut al-Kutub, a slave girl, Mohammed bin Sulayman al-Zayni and Ghanim are found. The love story of Ghanim and the slave girl, Kut al-Kutub, bears some resemblance to the love story of Nureddene and Anice al-Jalice. In another story, "The fifth voyage of Sindabad the seaman" there is a reference to merchants going from Bassorah to Bagdad, and in yet another story. "Ma'aruf, the cobbler and his wife Fatimah," adventures of Ma'aruf the cobbler and Princess Doonya are narrated. However, none of these individual stories closely resemble the plot of *The Viziers of Bassora.* It seems that Sri Aurobindo drew only hints and characters from various tales in *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights,* crafting an almost entirely original narrative. In fact, the source material undergoes a profound transformation in Sri Aurobindo's artistic creation.

Mohamad bin Suleyman of Zayni is the cousin of Haroun al-Rasheed, the Caliph of Baghdad. He has two viziers, Alfazzal Ibn Sawy and Almuene bin Khakan. The people of Bassora know Alfazzal as a noble and kind vizier, and Almuene as a wicked and cruel one. Alfazzal's family consists of his wife Ameena, his niece Doonya, and his son Nureddene. He leads a happy family life. Almuene's family consists of his wife Khatoon and his hunchbacked son Fareed. One day, Fareed visits the slave market. There, he sees a slave girl named Anice al-Jalice and decides to buy

her. He and his father underbid for her and try to take her from the market by force. Just at that moment, Alfazzal enters the market. He offers a suitable price for the slave girl and buys her for the king's harem. He brings the girl to his house and asks his wife to keep her hidden from the prying eyes of Nureddene. Doonya, his niece, cleverly manages to let Nureddene see Anice. Nureddene falls in love with her at first sight. Alfazzal comes to know of this love and permits them to be united in holy wedlock. Doonya is married to Murad, a Turkish captain of police in Bassora. Alfazzal then leaves for "Bourn" under the orders of Haroun al-Rasheed, the Caliph, to conduct talks on behalf of the Caliph with the emperor of "Roum" (Rome). In his absence, Almuene tries to exploit the fact that Alfazzal had gotten his son married to Anice al-Jalice, a slave girl bought for the king's harem. He attempts to ruin Alfazzal and his family by misrepresenting the facts to the king and succeeds to a great extent. Orders are given to arrest Nureddene and Anice. But before the order can be executed, they flee to Baghdad with the help of Ajebe, Almuene's nephew. In their absence, Fareed tries to kidnap Doonya, but in the ensuing brawl, he is killed by Murad. In Baghdad, Nureddene and Anice happen to enter the pleasure garden of Haroun al-Rasheed. Shaikh Ibrahim, the superintendent of the garden, is captivated by Anice's beauty and allows the pair to stay and celebrate in the pleasure garden of the Caliph. Her song and beauty attract the attention of the Caliph, who disguises himself as a fisherman and rushes to the garden. He meets them and is very much impressed. He promises to help them. Nureddene, with a letter from the Caliph to the king of Bassora, returns to Bassora. Anice is left in the Caliph's care. In Bassora, Almuene's wickedness takes effect quickly, and Nureddene is arrested and put on the scaffold. But the army of the Caliph enters the city just in time to save Nureddene's life. King al-Zayni and Vizier Almuene are punished. Nureddene is made the king of Bassora and is reunited with Anice, his father, mother, and Doonya.

As a distinctive watermark of romantic writings, *The Viziers of Bassora* can be said to be a study in contrast. The two viziers, Alfazzal and Almuene, are antithetical to each other: if Alfazzal is a good, kindly man, Almuene is a thoroughly wicked fellow. In fact, the main characters of the play can be classified under two headings: (1) characters who are essentially good, and (2) characters who are basically evil. Haroun al-Rasheed, Alfazzal, Nureddene, Anice al-Jalice, Ameena, Khatoon, and Doonya are essentially good characters, whereas Fareed, Almuene, and al-Zayni are evil characters. Hence, the ceaseless tussle and hardships that Alfazzal's family, along with Anice, undergoes at the hands of Almuene exemplify that the triumph of virtue, though certain, is never an easy affair. Haroun al-Rasheed is just, mighty, and angelic. He is "Allah's vicegerent," and it is his duty "to put down all evil / And pluck the virtuous out of danger's hand" (*The Viziers of Bassora*, Act I, Scene I, p. 379). This kind of savior-like reference to Haroun al-Rasheed nearly equates him with Queen Gloriana of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. He is the symbol of enlightened monarchy. Wrongdoers find in him a terrible monarch and receive dire punishment, as in the case of King al-Zayni and Almuene. The noble characters—such as Anice and Nureddene—oppressed and tortured unjustly, find in him a true friend and a protecting, guiding spirit. As a symbol of the high seat of justice, he remains ever alert to uncover and root out corruption and injustice and to promote nobility, love, and benevolence.

Alfazzal, Nureddene's father, is a noble and virtuous soul. He has a good word and a helping hand for everyone. Though himself a vizier, he addresses people courteously and is always ready to help:

> Make me your treasurer.
> I am ashamed to think good men should want
> While I indulge in superfluities.
> (*The Viziers of Bassora*, Act I, Scene III, p. 392)

The protagonist, Nureddene, is at first portrayed as a reckless and perverse young man. His father calls him "my wild handsome roisterer." And for Doonya, he specializes in the "taste of different wines and qualities of girls." For Anice, however, he is her prince and is described as:

> Fair-faced and merry,
> Fronting the world with glad and open looks,
> That makes the heart rejoice.
> (*The Viziers of Bassora*, Act I, Scene IV, p. 398)

The significant change in Nureddene's life comes after his wedlock with Anice. The most striking element of their relationship is even after belonging from nobility and though an imbecile at first Nureddene by choosing Anice espouses that love transcends hierarchy and class. Because of his excessive love for Anice he spends his money unwisely and is soon drowned in debts. He realises his mistake only when he is steeped deep in debt. The creditors surround his house and raise a great clamour for their money. There is no way out for him but to distribute his entire wealth among them. Some creditors still remain unpaid. He then knocks at the doors of his friends for monetary help but each one of them refuses to help him on this or that account. Some have the members of their family struck down with various ailments, some are leaving for Mecca and some have burials in their house. This unfriendliness makes him more religious in temperament. He develops a firm faith in the workings of Allah instead of hatred for those who had deceived him in moments of his need. A critical thrust at this indicates that unlike Redcrosse Knight, Nauredden though at times lacks dexterity shares a similar trait of unequivocal religious faith.

With the arrival of Anice, there is a transformative shift seen in Nureddene's character. In the beginning he is a carefree, vagabond, "hunter of girls" and even to some extent an impudent youth. But the moment he falls in love with Anice his character undergoes a sea-change. Love reveals to him the seriousness and purposefulness of life. He marries Anice and vows to become worthy of her, his "surpassing jewel." However, in this context it is worth remembering that the bond of marriage has not delimited the hero to become starry-eyed rather it works like a catalyst to bring forth other dimensions of human goodness in him and in further strengthening his faith upon the mercy of Allah. The next phase of his development begins when he receives unexpected and substantial help from Ajebe, his enemy, during one of the darkest moments of his life. This assistance from such an unlikely

source broadens and deepens his religious consciousness, making him more tolerant and forgiving. As a result, he is able to easily forgive Ajebe, the main architect of his downfall. He even finds the strength to tolerate the fisherman in disguise who demands his Anice as a gift. When in Bassroa he is arrested and put to the scaffold he remains calm and composed for he believes it to be an act of God's judgment and when in the end everything turns out exactly according to his pleasure and satisfaction he again has only to thank God. In the end he turns out to be a man well taught by experience, seasoned and mature taking life seriously and vowing to live it nobly. Nureddene's character, thus, is a round character.

Anice al Jalice, the heroine is a slave girl of great beauty and charm. She is delineated through soft, sweet and delicate images. She is a "Peri", a "smiling wonder," a "living sweet romance," and a "surpassing jewel". Her voice is as sweet "As Gabriel's when he sings before the Lord," and in her "the mighty Artist shows his delicate cunning." She is loved and adored by all members in Nureddene's family. Donya after seized by her beauty utters, "Why, as I looked downstairs, she smiled up at me/ And took the heart out of body with the smile" (Act I, Scene III, p. 394).

In Anice all the womanly virtues are surmised equally. It is not that her corporeal comeliness alone arrests the onlookers' attention rather she has a sharp and profound sense of wit that she displays at times. Her face and her song bring Haroun al Rasheed rushing down to his garden of all pleasure. To Haroun's question "Art thou as witty as beautiful," she promptly replies, "By Allah; that am I ! I tell thee very modestly that there is not my equal from China to Frangistan" and Haroun can only say "Thou sayest no more than truth." She is bold enough to directly question the Caliph himself about her husband's well-being.

Khatoon, Ameena's sister shares a opposite fate from her sister. Ameena, Ameena's son is generous and handsome. He loves and respects her. Khatoon's son is a hunchback and hates his mother. Amedna leads a happy family life, but she falls a prey to evil days during her husband's year-long absence from Bassora. Her son is put under arrest. However, the most remarkable thing about Ameena's character lies in her capability to remain calm and composed even during the worst days of adversity. Khatoon has to suffer many misfortunes. Her son is killed in a brawl. Her husband is awarded execution-sentence by the Caliph himself and his entire property is ordered to be confiscated and transferred to Alfazzal. For her, thus, the world becomes dark and void for all practical purposes. But she too, like Ameena, has extreme tolerance. She faces all the calamities with a rare composure of mind. And at last, as a reward, there comes one solace to her—she is left to the care of Alfazzal who promises to look after her well.

It is in Fareed in whom traits of "a ruffian" and "half devil" is most conspicuous. As a hunchback, Fareed has not only a crooked body but a crooked mind as well. However, his wickedness is further nourished and encouraged by his father Almuene himself, who is portrayed as "brutish amalgam of gorilla and Barbary ape." He wants to marry Doonya not because he loves her, but because after marriage he will make her suffer and thereby will make Alfazzal, whom he and his father hate, suffer:

I hate him to
And partly for that cause will marry her,
To beat her twice a day and let him know it.
He will be grieved to the heart. (Act I, Scene II, p. 386).

Fun and laughter in the play are provided mostly by Harkoos, the Eunuch, and Shaikh Ibrahim. Shaikh Ibrahim's hypocrisies and blasphemies prove to be an eye-opener for us. Men like him exist in the world in sizable number. Of course most of them stand exposed in the end like Shaikh, still they are a danger to humanity. The great Caliph rightly promises to reform Shaikh "Nay, I will reform thee, old sinner."

Sri Aurobindo, in *The Viziers of Bassora*, restores the traditional characteristic of romance, i.e., a study in the opposite. Bassora can very well be described as the battleground where good and evil forces clash together. This clash between good and evil is illustrated through a set of contrasting images. Animal and infernal images are used to represent the evil forces. Almuene is called a "brutish amalgam of gorilla and Barbary ape," a "dog," "the King's bad angel," "Satan," and "Iblis straight out of Hell." Fareed is referred to as a "young baboon," a "goblin" and "half-devil," and the creditors are compared to kites and vultures: "They have smelt the carrion and are all winging up, beak outstretched and talons ready." To Sri Aurobindo, evil itself is a horrible disease; he compares it to leprosy.

If we excuse such gross and violent fault
Done in our house, what hope to save our boy,—
Oh, not his body, but the soul within ?
'T will petrify in vice and grow encrusted With evil as with a leprosy. (Act IV, Scene I, p. 446)

In strong contrast with these repellent images are the images used for good characters and noble qualities. These images are drawn from celestial phenomena, Nature in her beautiful aspect, jewellery, music, smiles and laughter, etc. Every good, kindly man, we are told, "is like the moon and carries a halo." The voice of Anice al-Jalice is said to be "like a blackbird's"; it is sweet, "as Gabriel's when he sings before the Lord and Heavens listen."

As a matter of fact, in *The Viziers of Bassora*, we find the predominance of bright and colourful imagery. Sri Aurobindo called his play "a dramatic romance." The spirit of romance becomes the pervading feature as the play celebrates the triumph of good over evil. A sudden and pleasing change of atmosphere marks the opening of the fourth act, which has for its scene the pleasure garden of the Caliph's palace. This act is extraordinarily bright and colourful.

And flowers ! the flowers ! look at these violets
Dark blue like burning sulphur !
Oh, rose and myrtle And gilliflower and lavender; anemones,
As red as blood ! All spring walks here in blossoms

And strews the pictured ground. (Act IV, Scene I, p. 448).

And,

Do you see the fruit, Anice
Camphor and almond-apricots, Green, white and purple figs and these huge grapes,
Bound rubies or quite purple-black, that ramp
O'er wall and terrace; plums almost as smooth
As your own damask cheek.
These balls of gold Are lemons. Anice, do you think ?
Look cherries, And mid these fair pink-budded orange-blossoms Bare glints of fruit. (Act III, Scene I, p. 428).

These vivid images enhance the romantic effect of the play. Through these images the reader transported to a fairyland where brooks flow, flowers smile and sweet birds chirp. The world of this dramatic romance reminds one of Shakespeare's Illyria (*Twelfth Night)* and the forest of Arden (*As You Like It*). It is all enchanting here. Life is lived here lightly and lovingly. Northrop Frye while discussing romance in his seminal works *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (1976) talks about the semantic rather than the syntactic aspect of romance. Fyre's mythos of romance involves a series of adventures, collectively labelled the quest, that pits the hero against his antagonist in a simple, dialectical structure. Even though *The Viziers of Bassora* has references to escapade and the perils the hero and heroine have to undergo, Sri Aurobindo's Nuredeene is not on a quest nor he significantly exhibits any chivalric gallantry. He is more reposed and can mollify even the most disturbing burden through the faith and belief on Allah.

The Viziers of Bassora is not a piece of didactic literature but a dramatic romance. Here we find a rich feast for our ears and eyes. Sri Aurobindo has undoubtedly succeeded in conjuring up a romantic world of love, beauty and song. It celebrates, above all, the supremacy of pure love over hate and gross ephemeral passion. The religion which this play preaches is not the religion of the moralists and puritans but that of the lovers.

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