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2010 has been a year of vibrant literary activity. This is evident from the fact that there was a large output of books, academic seminars, book release ceremonies and literary festivals. Latest of these events was the Hay Festival in Thiruvananthapuram. For Shashi Tharoor, the convener, Kerala is an ideal place for holding the literary festival since it was a land of rare richness when it comes to literature and cinema. Several eminent writers including Vikram Seth, Jaishree Misra and Namita Gokhale participated in the festival.

Not only Kerala, Mumbai too has launched litfest this year, called Literature Alive. Modelled on popular festivals like Jaipur Literary Festival, Literature Alive was presented by Lavasa, a corporate group. Anil Dharkar, who conceived the festival, said that it would be an "eclectic pot pourri of literary genres to bring together some of the greatest Indian and international literary minds." Chetan Bhagat, Bachi Karkaria and many established and budding writers made their presentations in the festival.

It was a year when many books were published acknowledging the diversity of literature emanating from India. Various organizations announced short lists of books and announced the best book of the year. The prestigious newspaper *Hindu* instituted an award of Rupees five lakhs for the best fiction of the year. This has been won by Manu Joseph for his novel *Serious Men*. Another organization has announced DSC South Asian Prize of Rupees twenty-five lakhs for the best novel of the year. It has announced a long list of fourteen works of fiction which include Aatish Taseeer's *The Temple Goers*, Amit Chaudhuri's *The Immortals* and Pakistani writer Ali

Seth's *The Wish Maker*. Apart from these, we have Crossword award for the best literary work published in India. Sahitya Akademi has been giving the annual award to the best literary work each year.

Veteran writers have published their new books and added to the corpus of Indian literature. It is worthwhile mentioning some of these. Amit Chaudhuri, for example, has published *The Immortals* which has received great accolades. *The Immortals* is set in Bombay during the 1970s and early 1980s. It traces the history of two families, one bathed in corporate affluence and the other subsisting on its musical tradition. Amit Chaudhuri is an internationally recognised Indian English author, an academic, and an acclaimed Indian classical musician. He is the winner of the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book for *A Strange and Sublime Address* in 1991 and the 2002 winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award for *A New World*.

Upamanyu Chatterjee has published an immensely emotional novel *Way to Go*. It has been hailed as a masterpiece of modern literature that takes into account the ambiguous nature of family ties. *Way to Go* is an intensely moving examination of family ties and the redemptive power of love, however imperfect, in the midst of death and degeneration. Upamanyu Chatterjee is the author of books such as *English August: An Indian Story* (1988), *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) which won the Sahitya Akademi Award for writing in English and *Weight Loss* (2006). In 2008, he was awarded the Order of Officier des Arts et des Lettres by the French government for his contribution to literature.

Manju Kapur, an academic from University of Delhi and an established novelist, has published her new novel *The Immigrant*. The story is quite absorbing. When Nina, a 30-year-old lecturer based in Delhi goes in for an arranged marriage with Ananda and relocates to Canada, she realises that the changes in her life are far greater than she ever could have imagined. Manju Kapur is author of *Difficult Daughters*, which won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for First Book (Eurasia Section).

Amongst women writers, Kaveri Nambisan is one of those who have despite their busy occupation contributed significantly to the annals of Indian fiction. By profession a surgeon, she has deeply in-

teracted with the people and life around her. In her recently-published novel, *The Story Must Not be Told*, she graphically depicts a Chennai slum. It is the story of one Simon who is an old widower, who wants to publish the story his wife had painstakingly written. His daughter Sandhya advises him to destroy her mother's story because it is a story that must not be told. Simultaneously intermingled is the story of the slum-dwellers Velu and Thatkan who are brought here from the village with a dream of stardom and glory. During the course of the narrative, the novelist focuses on the trip Simon undertakes to Satara along with her daughter Sandhya and a journalist friend. This trip is highly educative as they get to visit various small industries and feel appalled to find young children exploited and the poor workers earning their livelihood desperately. It goes to the credit of Nambisan to have portrayed such a realistic, though biting, picture of the marginalized people.

The Kerala-born and London-based Jaishree Misra, the well-known author of *Ancient Promises*, has published her fifth novel *Secrets and Lies*. It revolves around four characters Anita, Zeba, Bubbles and Sam who have a friendship that spans over long twenty years which is born out of their years at a girls' school in Delhi in the early 1990s. Coming together for a school reunion, the women must confront a secret that has haunted their adult lives—an incident that happened during the night of their school prom. With the three friends now living in London and Mumbai, the narrative switches between their hometown Delhi and their current places of residence with a quick pace and keeps the reader occupied till the last page.

Eminent novelist Khushwant Singh released his latest novel *Sunset Club*, last month, at the age of ninety-six. His popularity as a writer is evident from the fact that his last book *Absolute Khushwant*, containing his philosophy on subjects ranging from love to religion, was sold out in three days of its publication. His latest book is the story of three aging men, who meet every evening in a park. Sitting on a bench, they comment and converse, discuss and dissect and take to a journey of sorts. Friends for over forty years, they are now in their eighties. And every evening, at the sunset hour, they sit together on a bench in Lodhi Gardens to exchange news and views

on the events of the day. They discuss everything love, lust, scandal, religion, politics. The novel offers a rich commentary on contemporary Indian life.

Amongst popular fiction writers, Chetan Bhagat continues to sway the readers. Each of his novels has crossed the mark of five lakh copies, a record of sorts. Bhagat achieved success with his novel *One Night @ the Call Centre*, followed by *Five Point Someone*, a tale of three college friends. His recent novels, *Three Mistakes of Life* and *Two States*, have been a rage with the youngsters. Close on the heels of Bhagat is the US-based technocrat young Karan Bajaj. His debut novel *Keep off the Grass* was published in 2008 and his second novel *Johnny Gone Down* (Harper Collins) has been released this year. Having already reached the mark of 1,00,000, the book has generated excitement among readers who appreciate the writer's style and enthusiastically reflect on his passion of writing.

At international level, the Booker Prize remains the most prestigious, as four Indians have already won this award. This year it is a British writer Howard Jacobson who has made it. He won the prize for *The Finkler Question*, a comic novel about friendship, wisdom and anti-Semitism. Mr. Jacobson, 68, born in Manchester, England, was on the long list for the Booker Prize twice before, for *Who's Sorry Now?* in 2002 and *Kalooki Nights* in 2007. He accepted the award to unusually enthusiastic and sustained applause at an awards ceremony in London. "I'm speechless," he told the audience. "Fortunately, I prepared one earlier. It's dated 1983. That's how long the wait's been." *The Finkler Question* tells the story of Julian Treslove, an ordinary former BBC producer who meets an old philosopher friend, Sam Finkler, and their former teacher, Libor Sevcik, for dinner one night in London. Walking home, Treslove is robbed, an incident that sets him on a quest for self-discovery, wisdom and the knowledge of what it means to be Jewish.

Again, the best-known Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe has won the $ 300,000 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, which recognizes artists who have had an extraordinary impact in their field. The award, named after the silent Hollywood film stars, was delivered in October in New York. Achebe's books are among the most

widely read in African literature. His 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart* has sold eleven million copies and has won the Man Booker International Prize for fiction. Achebe is very popular in India as his writings have a great affinity with Indian ethos and culture.

A brief assessment of the literature published in India and overseas in the recent months reveals that novel is the most important popular genre today. It is mainly the novelists who have won international recognition at national and international level.

Creative Reading, Creative Writing and Creative Teaching

RAMESH K. SRIVASTAVA

Presidential Address delivered at
54th All India English Teachers' Conference
held at Amravati in December 2009

Friends,

First of all I would like to express my gratitude to the Executive Committee of the Association for English Studies of India for nominating me as the President of the 54th All-India English Teachers' Conference from among several eminent scholars. I feel really proud of this honour. At the same time, I feel happy in having been given an opportunity to come in contact with the fraternity of English teachers who have assembled here from all over the country.

After a great deal of soul-searching and with a bit of hesitation, I have decided to address this august gathering on a subject which may appear somewhat uncommon but which I consider very important for the university and college teachers of English and that is— Creative Reading, Creative Writing and Creative Teaching. Since significant questions are being raised about innovations in teaching techniques in order to make higher education more effective and meaningful to the needs of our times, I have chosen this subject. The repetition of the word Creative is on purpose to emphasize creativity in all the three areas of Reading, Writing and Teaching and, at the same time, to show the distinctive natures of each of these entities.

Creative Reading:

Creative Reading is an act of unfurling one's mind while going through the text, allowing it to spread around like the light from the filament of an electric bulb rather than like that of a glowworm which barely lights its own path. For some people reading may not be creative, because a text is read merely to grasp a predictable set of meanings. It is only on a little higher level so that the imaginative readers can see its strength and weakness as also its inherent fine points. For P.B. Shelley, the skylark was not only a bird but a highborn maiden, a poet hidden in the light of his thoughts, an unembodied joy, a golden glowworm, a hidden star, a cloud of fire, an embowered rose etc. As poets read objects creatively, people read books; for what are books but the essence of one's observations, imagination, ideas, conclusions. Ralph Waldo Emerson had said, there is creative reading as there is creative writing. When one reads creatively, one's mind is filled with thousands of ideas and each sentence, each word, even punctuation marks and blank spaces become imbued with one's knowledge and experience. Words then do not remain words alone but carry within them the crystallized essence of one's experience; they form a sort of miniature mirrors which reflect the entire culture and civilization of a nation. Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry* writes of "evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden."

Robert Frost in his poem "Road Not Taken" talks of having taken the road "less travelled by" others which had made all the difference to him. All of us at some point of time had taken paths less travelled by others with corresponding consequences. In reading a text creatively, one often takes a path less travelled by others. The more gifted and experienced a person is, the more magnetic power his mind would exercise to attract a thousand impressions. When one looks at the potential meanings in the text, he associates them to scenes, characters, and events based on his own experiences. The activities of characters, their smiles, their frowns, the way they laugh or cry—such details may occasionally get blurred but it is the essence that lingers on in the memory. Creative reading also implies

the critical evaluation of its quality, its value, its accuracy and truthfulness, including appreciative reaction of its literary beauty. When Ernest Hemingway was informed of various interpretations being given to his Nobel Prize-winning novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, he had replied, "I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things" (*Time* 84: December 13, 1954). Dr. P. Paul Torrence says that "the creative reader must be open to his experience, must reflect upon what he read, discover relationships among ideas, react to new concepts, play with the possibility that the new idea might be correct and try to imagine what the consequences might be." Creative reading, therefore, involves many things—understanding, thinking, imagining, associating, selecting and evaluating.

Unfortunately, our educational system is such that it does not promote the skills of creative reading. Contrary to it, the students these days are trained to focus on something particular, leaving out the whole—a practice that leads towards fragmentation and disintegration, like four blind men looking at various parts of an elephant and not in its entirety. If Arjun in the *Mahabharata* was credited with viewing only the eye of the bird after focusing his aim with an arrow, it has to be remembered that he had done so *only after* looking at the tree, at its branches, at the bird and finally at its eye. Instead, what is happening now is that people look only at the target—the eye of the bird—without having a proper perspective. In their specialized yet fragmented knowledge, they become merely an eye, an ear, a hand or a foot but not a wholesome man. With this fragmentary approach, King Dasarath of Ayodhya in the *Ramayana* had accidentally killed Shravan Kumar, and King Pandu of Hastinapur in the *Mahabharata* had shot the sage Kindama by their *shabdabhedi-bans*—that is, sound-directed arrows, because their recognition of the targeted animals was based *only* on their auditory organs, and this fragmented knowledge had led them inevitably to disastrous consequences.

During our long course of teaching, all of us must have come across occasionally some very fine students with excellent minds, fertile imagination and strong motivation but even they had to be advised that in the final Board or University examinations, they

must write only the established facts because the evaluators of their answer books may not necessarily be open-minded and hence any deviation from the established pattern of answers may become anathema to them. Generally the Indian students are taught not to read creatively but to grasp basic facts and to reproduce them in the examination. For them, Mahatma Gandhi's greatness, through short-answer questions, is reduced to his Salt March, his Quit-India Movement, and his principles of Truth and Non-violence. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "Few know how to read. Women read to find a hero whom they can love; men for amusement; editors for something to crib; authors for something that supports their views; and hardly one reads comprehensively and wisely."

For creative reading, one should keep in mind Gestalt psychology according to which "the response of an organism to a situation is a complete and unanalyzable whole rather than a sum of the responses to specific elements in the situation" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*). Accordingly, one must read a text in order to view an entity not merely as a sum of mechanical parts but as an organic whole which includes one's beliefs and convictions, feelings and ideas—the participation of a whole person in a total environment so that the words become concretized with various responses. To a creative reader, words then become windows opening out to many sights, sounds, smells and gradually the entire author with his personality and his environment comes in tangible form before the reader's mental screen. In reading William Wordsworth's epigrammatic sentence "The child is father of the man," one can read the poet's feelings, his convictions, his beliefs, his philosophy and his attitude to children.

One's own ideas can be better understood as they relate to the ideas of others. Creative readers imaginatively construct implicit relationships between ideas, events and contexts. They read beyond the author's explicit meaning into its implications. This is done by connecting author's ideas with different experiences, different contexts; and between many authors with reader's own experiences. In the characters of King Lear and/or of his daughters, one finds a part of each of us reflected.

Since creative reading is between texts and contexts, it helps in understanding the past and prepares for the future. The obviously

unrelated becomes invisibly related. To a creative reader, with a relaxed mind and active imagination, common links begin to emerge from the text. From one connection, the reader goes to the next and further next till a broader picture begins to emerge as happens with the placement of each piece of a jigsaw puzzle into its appropriate slot.

Reading is also not merely for the purpose of talking or for writing but also, more importantly, for thinking. Unlike in the U.S. educational system wherein even High School students, let alone collegiate ones, are encouraged to think, to react and to reflect upon a certain problem in a new way, to find something fresh, something innovative—an idea unheard of, unthought of even if crazy or whimsical, but such a thing is either non-existent or discouraged in India. The examination here is usually a memory-test; the more one can memorize and retain, the better grades is he likely to secure.

Since each human being is gifted with a head and a heart, our duty as teachers, I believe, is to equip him as a living person in various branches of knowledge and fine arts rather than treating him as a non-thinking machine stuffed with numerous facts and figures. In Sanskrit, Bhartrihari in his *Neeti Shatak* calls such a person an animal without tail and horns: *Sahitya, sangeet, kala viheenah; Sakshata pashuh puchchha vishana heenah.* (A man without love for literature, music and fine arts is like an animal without tail and horns). Man with his creative imagination establishes links and associations between things and persons where obviously none exists. The student, according to Helen M. Robinson, must be made "so competent as to judge the veracity, validity, or worth of what is read, based on sound criteria or standards developed through previous experiences." He must be able to read beyond the written lines, and draw inferences from them. As on many occasions silence is more eloquent than the spoken word, the inferences and other non-verbal entities could say much more. Kamala Das in her poems is accused of using too many empty spaces marked with three or four dots which to many readers erroneously appear a sign of her confused, unorganized state of mind. In my view, she articulates the unsayable through them.

Reading is a creative activity because while an author creates a character, a scene, an event, the reader re-creates in his mind a pic-

ture that is both similar to the author's in essence but different in details. Such an activity gives the creative reader the innermost pleasure. It is almost like the second creation. And that is why reading becomes an individual activity. One can then say, Willy Loman's tragedy in Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* is that of my younger brother who thrived on rosy, unrealistic visions, and paid a heavy price through eventual disillusionment and death. Shelley's outburst in dejection near Naples is that of my friend in whose stock there are more tears than smiles. The feelings of Gautama and Maya in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* are common in modern times and can be found in any neighbouring home largely because the disintegration of joint-family system has made the problems of alienation and maladjustment quite common.

Creative Writing

From creative reading, I now come to creative writing. This is an area to which our conference assigns one evening for poetry or fiction reading session. Traditionally, creative writing has been used exclusively for any writing, such as, short story, novel, novella, epic, poetry, drama, screen writing, playwriting, autobiography, etc.—which was not professional, such as, journalistic, academic and technical. But creative writing cannot be confined to these categories alone; writing which allows a free play of imagination and is not courier of systematic utilitarian or scientific information can also be called creative. It may be innovative and may take a departure from the traditional genres, though a forceful or whimsical departure may also not be innovative or original creative writing. Edgar Allen Poe called such writing "peculiar, not original."

There is growing realization among academics that in addition to making the students study literature, they should also be given an opportunity to express their feelings and emotions, their flights of imagination and expression of their pent-up feelings. An expression of such feelings in the form of creative writing regulates and disciplines man's behaviour and his emotions. Among some universities abroad, it is being done at several levels with excellent results. It can be even in the form of response papers in addition to creative writing. For those who do opt for creative writing, the guidelines for writing small poems or short stories are given and the students are

encouraged to write them as a part of their regular academic coursework. To consider creative writing as one of the untouchable academic courses for regular degrees is something typical only of India. If a large number of Indian writers in English, such as, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and so on, have made their mark in the world, it is not because of *but in spite of* our academics in the universities.

Even response papers of the students written on various themes are a sort of creative writing. The topics or themes given are such that no guide book would have ready-made material on them. To give topics like A Cricket Match or Deepavali Festival for themes in General English course or A Critical Appreciation of any poem for literature paper is to send open invitation to the students to copy them from easily-available guide books. The topics which invite the students to flex the muscles of their imagination could be apparently meaningless but otherwise fertile themes, such as, a dry stump of a tree, a pile of used plastic bags, a safety pin, a banana peel on the road, a hot morsel in mouth and a garbage bin for General English course, and a short unfamiliar poem or a prose passage, for literature paper. Since the material on such topics is not easily available, the students are inclined to relate them then to some of their known experiences. In the same way, students read a text creatively, associate the characters, incidents or situations with those they had come across during their life time and as such begin to do an indirect exercise in creative writing. Such topics, facts or characters become a launching pad for imaginative writing. Charles Lamb's essays on Poor Relations, on Bachelor's Complaint, on Christ's Hospital and on Convalescence, among others, must have originated in a similar way. As a one-time teacher of English in the U.S.A., I had come across some excellent response papers of students which appeared to be short flights of imagination like that of a fledgling with tiny feathers encouraged by its mother bird.

It was Francis Bacon who had written: "Writing maketh an exact man." Unfortunately, there is virtually no writing work—creative or otherwise—in Indian educational system whether it be in schools, colleges or in universities. There is no incentive too for either teachers or students. A teacher already has so much of work with so little pay that any more addition is likely to break his back.

while the students are already overburdened with the examination-oriented course work

Wikipedia maintains that "creative writing can technically be considered any writing of original composition that is in no way guilty of plagiarism." Even professional, didactic and moralistic writing can be creative depending upon the writer himself. Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* gave a new definition of morality and sin; while Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* prescribed possible remedies for the disease of untouchability. Initially, these novels were disparagingly termed moralistic and propagandistic, though they are now universally accepted as excellent specimens of creative writing. The basic difference between the academic and creative writing is that whereas the former concerns itself with functional writing whether relating to literature, science, philosophy or any branch of learning, the latter is mainly for self-expression, and not a part of academic assignment.

In the U.S.A., creative writing is encouraged among students at various stages beginning with High School. It is like tapping the imagination at its source itself. Over a period of several decades, creative writing has gradually gained recognition and has been introduced in most of the universities for various academic degrees. But there too it had met with a stiff opposition from academics in the seats of power. When creative writing was introduced for the first time in the academic programmes of some universities in the U.S.A., it was felt that for once in the history, the creative writer was "welcome in the academic place. If the mind could be honoured there, why not imagination?"

Most of the creative writing programmes were associated initially with the English Departments, but now some universities have started separate departments for creative writing programmes or have associated them with the Departments of Fine Arts. The degrees which are being awarded on completion of requirements are: Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) and Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing. Now even Ph.D. degree is being awarded in Creative Writing programme but its course work also includes some of the traditional courses of literature as a compromise between academic study and artistic pursuit. The main genres of study in creative writing are fiction, poetry, screenwriting and playwriting. The

course requirements of screen writing and playwriting are completed in close association with film and theatre programmes. The students also associate themselves with other programmes like magazines and newspapers. Their active participation in extra-curricular activities enriches their knowledge so that a creative writer has not only the writing skill but is also well-equipped in social, economic and other conditions without which he would not have a proper perspective.

The position of creative writing in India is no better than what it was in the U.S. over one hundred years ago. Even though creative writers in English and various regional languages are being rewarded by foreign countries and sometimes by Sahitya Akademi, they are not being encouraged by universities. No courses in creative writing are being introduced by Indian universities. As far as I know, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) certainly has introduced certificate and diploma courses in creative writing, particularly in writing short stories and poems. There may probably be two or three more universities in India which have started courses in creative writing but not much could be said about them. In many western universities there are posts of Writers-in-Residence who are picked up from amongst internationally or nationally celebrated writers to inspire and direct the budding creative writers. In Indian universities, such a post would be considered redundant because no fixed teaching load of undergraduate and postgraduate classes could be shown, and if at all it is created, it may most likely be given to some minister's prodigal son. In one Indian university a newly-created Subramanyam Bharati Chair was given to a teacher who was reportedly learning Tamil alphabets. It is like giving the Shakespeare Chair to someone learning English alphabets!

Creative Teaching

After creative reading and creative writing, I come to creative teaching which is all the more important because as teachers of English, our aim is and should be not only to do our teaching work but to do it in the best possible way. By creative teaching, I mean the use of creative ways to encourage reluctant learners. With the progress of civilization and innovations in science and technology, our teaching methods cannot remain static. In advanced countries, eve-

ryday innovative methods of teaching are being adopted with a high degree of success. For convenience sake, one can call it "creative teaching." Once the importance of creativity has been recognized for reading and writing, it could be applied to teaching as well. These days teaching at most levels from primary school to the university has been reduced to a mechanical exercise more or less like a robot doing its well-programmed assignment. Whether in science or arts subjects, the teacher merely supplies the prescribed information and the students swallow it only to reproduce it in undigested form in the examination. This is so much in contrast to teaching in advanced countries where creative teaching techniques are being evolved everyday with the purpose not only of feeding the students with required facts and information but to help them in shaping their personality. I cannot go into details of creative teaching techniques here but would like to touch upon only some vital points relating to it.

One cannot help but remember that teaching too is a mission and an art. In ancient time, we had Gurukuls where the students used to live with their Gurus for a number of years, learning almost everything expected and desirable on earth—the principles of good administration and governance, the intricacies of moral and philosophical questions, the use of arms as well as the knowledge of rules and practices governing war. It was only when the education of the pupils became complete, they would return home, whether they be princes or commoners.

The position of Gurus or teachers in those times was considered next only to or even superior to God. Kabirdas had written: *"Guru Govind donon khare, kake lagen paon: Balihari guru apane jin Govind diyo batayė."* (Both the teacher and god stand before me; whose feet should I touch? Thanks to the teacher who made me recognize god.) The teachers commanded so much respect that the kings and queens would wash their feet and give them the highest seats in their court. It was also the need of the times because the success of the kings and their princes depended on how well they were trained by their Gurus.

In my view, teaching in ancient time was fairly creative. There were no fixed syllabi or course work, no Board of Studies or Faculties, no Research Degree Committees or Boards. It was the Guru—

and Guru alone—who was all in all. He framed the course work, prescribed readings, assigned the pupils different duties, and put them to multiple rigorous tests, and it was he—the Guru—who finally gave a green signal of the completion of their studies, what now is called graduation. All our historical and mythic heroes had their education at Gurukuls. The Guru was a man skilled in various arts and sciences and he gave everything he had to his students. The greater his knowledge, the greater became the capability of his students. The names of Kripacharya and Dronacharya, Sandipan and Parasuram can never be forgotten. The fact that the poor and the rich, the princes and their adversaries were educated at the same place is seen in the examples of Krishna and Sudama, Yudhishthir and Duryodhan.

What better example of creative teaching can be found than the composition of Vishnu Sarma's *Panchatantra?* The fables in the book were created to help a king who had three dull and ignorant sons opposed to learning anything. The king was worried as to what would happen to his kingdom if his successors happened to remain incompetent. His Prime Minister suggested that he appoint Vishnu Sarma who, being a great teacher, would find ways and means of educating his sons. The king agreed and gave the responsibility of teaching the princes to Vishnu Sarma.

On finding out that the king's sons were fond of only one thing—listening to stories, Vishnu Sarma resorted to creative teaching through creative writing by composing about 82 fables using animals as characters. The princes were taught lessons in morality, polity, philosophy, statesmanship, etc. through these fables. Consequently, the princes became well-educated and the King was happy. This, I feel, is the first well-known example of creative teaching. The fables are so good that they are being used for children's pleasure reading and moral lessons even today.

Another ancient work which has remained popular among children for a number of centuries is *Baital Pachisi* or *Vetala Panchvimshati* ("Twenty-five tales of Baital") which is a collection of interesting tales and legends. Originally written in Sanskrit, it was translated into English by Sir Richard Burton. According to Isabel Burton, the *Baital Pachisi* "is the germ which culminated in the *Arabian Nights*, and which inspired the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius,

Boccacio's *Decamerone*, the *Pentamerone*, and all that class of facetious fictitious literature." Bhavbhuti, an eighth century Sanskrit sage, writes about King Vikram (Vikramaditya of 1st century B.C.) who promises a sorcerer that he will capture a *Vetala*—a vampire spirit—who hangs from a tree. Each time King Vikram tries to capture the *Vetala*, the latter tells a story that ends in a riddle. The king is required to speak if he knew the answer or else his head will burst. The question or the riddle given at the end of each story put by Betal before Vikramaditya has to be answered very thoughtfully after exercising a great deal of circumspection, keeping in mind moral, philosophical, social and familial circumstances, the duties and responsibilities of the characters concerned before giving the judgment or decision. The reasons too have to be specified why a particular reward or punishment is appropriate and what circumstances justify it. While the stories may look simplistic like those meant for children, the questions put by Betal are very complex and do not have an easy answer. The riddle at the end of each story and Vikram's answer to it are very good examples of creative teaching by making the students think of all circumstances before reaching any conclusion.

In addition to these works, there are many celebrated classics in Sanskrit, Hindi and other regional languages such as, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, Munshi Prem Chand's and Sharat Chandra Chatterji's novels and short stories, and so on which have been translated into English. The question that I pose is: why such books or even excerpts from them are not being prescribed in Primary, Middle, High Schools and Intermediate Colleges? Isn't it a pity that the translated version of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* has been prescribed for High School students in many schools in the U.S. but not in India? If the main purpose of the English teacher is to make the students learn English—at least initially, why give them foreign literatures with exotic names of persons and places, unfamiliar foreign surroundings, and outlandish plants and flowers, birds and beasts when India can supply them in abundance from its own familiar soil? The energy that the High School and Intermediate College students devote in remembering foreign names, their spellings, their pronunciations, can profitably be employed for

be employed for learning English from Indian literature—original or translated—abundantly available in English.

There is another point too—very important and equally sensitive. In place of creative teaching and research, a few unscrupulous teachers are spoiling the name of the teaching community as a whole by reportedly going in opposite direction. Rather than honestly guiding students for degrees of M.Phil. and Ph.D., some short-sighted teachers of English—as also of other subjects—are allegedly indulging in result-oriented shortcuts and money-making exercises. Even if they don't do such things directly, they, as evaluators, succumb either to persuasions or to temptations by turning a blind eye to unfair practices being adopted by so-called researchers even though they might not have visited any library even once! The word 'plagiarism,' which was—and still is—considered to be an unpardonable sin in the academic circles, has become a great unacknowledged virtue in this country and all the negative connotations attached with this word have evaporated. The candidates, supervisors and even examiners turn their blind eye to this phenomenon in the name of expediency, employment and humanitarian concern, though oblivious to the larger questions of the researcher's competence, morality and of providing role-model for others. As a result of this attitude, now for M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees, candidates do not *plagiarize* material—that would be like stealthily using nuts and bolts belonging to others—but they smuggle it wholesale. Rather than being academics, some of them are becoming academic porters—guiding students and researchers not how to do creative reading, creative writing or creative teaching and research but to physically lift the entire thesis or dissertation from a remote institution, an obscure source, from an outdated book or from the internet, get it typed and have the research degree. Once R.K. Narayan had ironically written about "A Library without Books;" we have now research degrees without any research. The fears which make an academic shudder with apprehension are that such a practice may become a trend setter for the succeeding generations! And, worse than that, what would such incompetent and unscrupulous teachers do in their class rooms? Luckily, the University Grants Commission has shaken itself from its long slumber and is formulating stringent rules, regulations and guidelines so that it would not be very easy

for students to have fake research degrees. While UGC-NET is doing a good job in testing potential teachers for colleges and universities, now it is taking a right step in ensuring research aptitude among potential researchers.

Professor Yashpal Committee's recommendations regarding higher education raise some important points which are relevant to the subject under discussion. Some of the shortcuts being adopted by the teachers, students and researchers are producing an increasing number of educated unemployables. They are coming out of universities and colleges with good degrees but without corresponding skills, because most institutions are without competent teachers and without well-equipped labs and libraries. Prof. Yashpal also talks of "cubicling knowledge" and of "steel walls" existing between universities and disciplines. Interdisciplinary studies in the matter of teaching and research need to be encouraged so that "students' curiosity and creativity—can be harnessed." It is here that teaching and research can really be creative.

The interdisciplinary studies are of paramount importance in the modern times as complexity of modern life makes it imperative that teachers move out of their pre-set grooves and begin to show familiarity with allied branches of learning. This way the steel walls between the universities and disciplines can be broken down facilitating either marriage or at least friendship among various disciplines. There are fertile grounds for interdisciplinary research in fields, such as, poetry and music, poetry and painting, drama and theatre, novel and cinema, novel and screenwriting, literature and psychology, literature and social studies, literature and journalism, science and fiction, and so on. A few senior teachers, strongly believing in the purity and inviolability of their own disciplines, may oppose such ventures, not realizing that in view of modern trends, interdisciplinary approach may inject fresh blood in teaching and research than has been possible in water-tight compartmentalized disciplines. But it demands that the senior faculty members of various disciplines, who are at the helm of affairs, shed their ego and come out of their ivory towers, to plough new virgin fields of interdisciplinary teaching and research in cooperation with others. When such a thing happens, teaching and research would open new vistas beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplines. This would also meet the

Yashpal Committee's recommendation of building strong bridges between different fields of education and the disciplines of sciences, social sciences and humanities. When such a thing begins to take place, teaching and research would really be functional and creative.

I do hope the teachers of English in this august conference would think afresh by shedding their prejudices, if there are any – against creativity in reading, writing, teaching and research, and that along with intelligence, imagination would also find a place in the academic disciplines so that the learning and teaching become more meaningful and humanized.

I wish all of you a very happy and purposeful participation in the deliberations of the conference.

Thank you very much.

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Human Predicament in the Poems of Robert Frost

NIDHI SHUKLA

Robert Frost is one of America's most celebrated poets. He writes moral and deceptively simple poems in a pastoral style. Beneath the surface meaning of his poems there is unceasing pursuit of the nature and meaning of life. The answers that he wrestled to find out and did find out are different from others. He is a 'spiritual drifter' and a poet, that's why for him, "Earth's the right place for love." His philosophy is an integral part of his poems and he holds into things with heart and reveals the bleak and gloomy aspects inseparable from life which he has done in such a way that the reader realises the eternal nature of basic truths.

In the twentieth century literature, the theory of 'existentialism' plays very important role and leads some of the authors in Europe as well as America to present in their works the human predicament ('predicamentum'—a Latin word meaning 'something declared') implying "a difficult situation" or "an unpleasant situation that is difficult to get out of." To get out of the situation, one must make a difficult choice.

The study of some selected poems of Robert Frost from almost all his volumes of poetry reveals his persistent concern with existentialism. But I would like to mention here that Frost is not an existentialist philosopher. He studied human life and picked up his impressions of it, some of which are similar to certain existential ideas evolved and established by him in his lifetime.

The painter of the New England region was attracted by Charles Darwin. Naturally, Darwinism made Frost a rebel against religious authority. Schopenhauer influenced him to be a poet of the human predicament (and he turned from romantic idealism to modern realism). This influence may be seen in many of his notebooks and particularly in the context of his poems, "Two Tramps in Mud Time," "The Trial by Existence" or "The White-Tailed Hornet" which re-

veal the basic truth of this world that an individual's life is "a ceaseless struggle for existence" for at every step it was threatened with elimination. We may also take an example of his poem "For Once, Then Something" which conveys a desire to find a reality beyond the narcissism of human self-reflection, while satirizing the futility of that pursuit and the way it is framed.

The casual reader of Frost is likely to think of him as a nature poet. Though he has written on the natural scenes and sights, flora and fauna, hills and dales of the region which lie in north of Boston. But unlike Wordsworth, he does not see in Nature the source of union with God. He loves paradoxical aspects—pleasant and unpleasant thoughts and takes interest in nature only as for as it affects human life.

In his view it is futile to search love and friendship in the external world. He constantly emphasises the differences (between man and nature) rather than similarities. For instance the poem "An Old Man's Winter Night" presents awful face of nature in all its darkness. It is hostile and waiting for a vulnerable point to attack its victim i.e. mankind.

Frost's poetry emanates from his farmer's world. He is a working farmer and no working farmer can be romantic. He realises the importance of reality and explains, "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows." Frost proposes for himself in "The Lesson for Today": "I had a lover's quarrel with the world." This lover's quarrel is Frost's poetic subject and throughout in his poetry there are evidences of this view of man's existence in the natural world.

Frost is a poet of the human predicament. He has selected to sing of this or that side of life including the persistent predicament in human life. This is the effort of emotional and intellectual alienating of human beings in modern time. The husband and wife of "Home Burial" cannot share their grief about the death of their first born—the event bares out the deep emotional gulf and makes their life a predicament, for faith and trust instead of love, has to come to bring reconciliation in married life.

He presents man as a stranger in an indifferent inimical world. Isolated and alienated people abound in his books. Insurmountable and unyielding barriers separate man from God and his fellow men. The result is emotional segregation and forlornness resulting in se-

vere anxiety and trauma, neurosis and mental instability verging on insanity as well as emotional and physical deprivation. The poems like "Waiting," "The Fear," "Acquainted with the Night," "The Wood-Pile" show the loneliness and the fear of loneliness entrenched in the human heart.

Frost gives psychological analysis in his verse with a keen insight into the workings of human mind. There is the confused woman's story in "A Servant to Servants" who does not know that she will first die or go to a lunatic asylum or the psycho-sexual problem of unsuccessful marriage of "The Housekeeper" or "The Witch of Coos." He handles his people, his characters with all sympathy.

Frost is at his best when he writes about human problems and experiences. The character that refuses to suffer quietly becomes heroic in dimensions as they try to make their own world. They do not bother that their chosen purpose is not supported by an absolute standard of validity or religious and universal concept.

Frost's statements about his religious belief are often enigmatic. His God is different from Milton's God. His poems allow us to peep deep into the bleak landscape of Frost and his view of the human predicament and man's relationship with his Creator. For example, "The Masque of Reason" (1945), the sequel volume to "The Masque of Mercy" (1947) is central to his philosophical dualism of spirit and matter, the conflict between justice and mercy.

He presents in his poems those moments and experiences of our life (fear of darkness, frustration, fear of death) which we confront in their baseness as we observe some natural events or places with a pure sense of the dynamics of reception.

He also confronts the basic human problems, which has always puzzled man and his puzzlement is also his predicament. The stuff of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "The Night Light," "Away" or "West-Running Brook" illuminate the human condition; if it expresses a sense of horror at the "universal cataract of death." But the poet does not offer in his poem either security or solace. Because life is an endless struggle against the decaying flux which having no intellect, is perpetually a victim too. This battle is unending for the flux exists as long as life exists.

Frost's best poetry brings to us the wisdom which is the wisdom of a mind confessing its nakedness, caught in its seclusion. He shares in the loss of firm assumption and seeks to give some tentative foundation for our existence which he has termed as "momentary stay against confusion."

His great popularity is due to the love of life and of man, imperfect as they are. All readers can share in varying ways with his sympathy and this human understanding.

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Discourse of Subversion: The Poetry of Eunice de Souza

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Eunice de Souza is one of the most well-known contemporary women poets of India, writing in English. Like Kamala Das's bold confessions and Imtiaz Dharker's rebellion against purdah system, Eunice de Souza's subtle subversion of androcentric canons is evidence of powerful female voices involved in the power struggle to dislodge patriarchy in the postcolonial period. But unlike other poets, de Souza happens to be a Mumbai based Goan who represents a major section of society based on Catholic religion. Her poems published in four volumes titled *Fix* (1979), *Women in Dutch Painting* (1988), *Ways of Belonging* (1990) and *Selected and New Poems* (1994) deal with contemporary issues directly or indirectly related to the female world. The present essay attempts a feminist reading of her poetry to identify her subtle strategies of grabbing the male space.

As a feminist poet, de Souza was well aware of the Indian situation in which women have no liberty and freedom like their male counterparts. In her first collection of poems *Fix*, she depicts the real picture of the Goan Catholic community, to which she belongs. She vigorously narrates the hidden secrets of the female body without losing control over her diction. In the poem "Sweet Sixteen," for instance, she points out sarcastically the inferior position of women as considered by men:

> Mamas never mentioned menses.
> A nun screamed: You vulgar girl
> don't say brassieres
> say bracelets. (*Selected Poems* 39)

The Catholic characters she portrays in her poems are, as Veronica Brady observes, "an embodiment of the complacency, the closed heart and mind which constitutes evil in de Souza's world because it entails the refusal of freedom, the passion for the possi-

possible" (Brady: 113). Sharing Dharker's sensibility, the poet brilliantly describes certain restrictions imposed on young girls in the Christian society:

> Never go with a man alone
> Never alone
> and even if you're engaged
> only passionless kisses. (*Selected Poems* 39)

Like Meena Alexander, de Souza shows a sense of alienation and a struggle for identity in most of her poetical outpourings. It is the poet's search for her identity lost somewhere in the middle of race, culture, nationality, language, colour, sex and gender. It takes up her relentless quest for her true self, regardless of her socio-cultural ambience. In the poem "de Souza Prabhu," turning against the patriarchal compulsions, she comes forward to counter male chauvinism in search of self-esteem:

> No matter that
> my name is Greek
> my surname Portuguese
> my language alien. (*Selected Poems* 17)

However, in the concluding lines of the poem "de Souza Prabhu," she honestly brings out the indifference that is shown towards a girl child in a patriarchal society. A daughter is treated as an inauspicious and unwanted thing in our Indian family even today. Being a woman, de Souza cannot forget her bitter experiences of life that she has been a victim of indifference and how she did every effort to please her parents by acting in a foolish tomboyish manner, holding back her female feelings and urges. As a consequence, she fell into a trench of identity crisis in the male-dominated society:

> my parents wanted a boy.
> I've done my best to qualify
> I hid the bloodstains
> on my clothes
> and let my breasts sag.
> Words the weapon
> to crucify. (*Selected Poems* 17)

These lines voice the anguish and agitation of her mind which could not tolerate the discrimination meted out by her parents. Realisation dawned on her that if she had to change the scenario and march to-

wards freedom she had to "wrest from men what they do not want to give: control, power and privilege," (Terri 27).

De Souza was influenced by theorists like Derrida and Lacan as well, and refuses to accept the masculine authority in her day-to-day life. As a poet, she aims at grabbing power because in "modern times strength is all powerful which can be achieved by intellect rather than through physical strength" (Sharma 201). Therefore, feminine sensibility which informs her poetry is a natural outcome of her experiences as a woman. Like a sensitive artist, she tries to articulate her suffering as a matter of human experience:

> All I have learnt from pain
> I always know
> But could not do. (*Selected Poems* 39)

In one of her central poems, de Souza's advice to women to cope with the 'otherness of lovers' is not merely a revolt at all but a sort of reconciliation which she has learnt from her own religion and culture. For example, in the opening lines of the poem "Advice to Women," one can observe:

> Keep cats
> if you want to learn to cope with
> the otherness of lovers.
> Otherness is not always neglect—
> Cats return to their litter trays
> When they need to. (*Selected Poems* 34)

It is obvious that her rebellious attitude subsides under the impact of bourgeois feelings and hence her poetry fails to project a definite stand of a feminist artist as her fellow contemporary poets invariably do. Although she seems to be serious in raising the woman's problems strongly but sometimes her casual approach to this cause becomes explicit in her poems on Tukaram where she admires the Marathi saint poet, unmindful of Tukaram's indifference to his wife. However her attempt is to construct identity through difference:

> You made life hard for your wife
> And I am not sure I approve of that. (*Selected Poems* 44)

In other poems like "He speaks," de Souza perceptively narrates the superiority of a lover who boldly asserts himself to rule over his beloved. As a perceptive lady, the poet was well aware of the mentality of men belonging to either Christian or Hindu community who always dwarf the personality of women to marginalize them from

the mainstream of life. She tries to explain the social structure from the gender perspective, where as a consequence women are gullible, vulnerable and always available to men for their sexual satisfaction. The following lines present the pride of a lover who hypnotizes and victimizes women for the fulfilment of his sensual pleasures:

> I have such a hypnotic effect on women
> Everywhere I go they fall into my arms. (*Selected Poems* 12)

What Foucault aptly remarks about power is true that it is "an institution and not structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with, it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society" (Foucault: 93).

Unlike Dharker and Kalia, de Souza has an ambivalent sensibility which makes her women poetry obscure and dubious. Sometimes like Kamala Das, she seems to be confessional which is a Christian virtue that peripherally informs some of her poems. Except de Souza, other confessional poets failed to stand up to general acceptance even within the feminist context mainly because these confessions are negative. But de Souza's poems are not negative in the sense that they affirm the centrality of human experience without remaining marginalised to the female experience. In the poem "Autobiographical," what she speaks without hesitation about her unpleasant experiences as a woman in the male world is remarkable:

> I have muddled through several affairs and always come out badly.
> I've learned almost nothing from experience. (Selected Poems: 19)

Nevertheless rejecting the old canons of poetry to counter phallocentric mode of patriarchy, she never gives an opportunity to merge her independent voice with the institutionalised ethos. What she feels is true that "the rage is almost done/ my soul is almost my own," and shows her sense of autonomy and liberty from the personal point of view. Therefore, her attack against the Catholic ways of life shows her sense of determination and obstinacy to establish her viewpoint in respect of the gender issue. Taking a stand, she criticises the marriage of her cousin where some Catholic formalities have been performed:

> Her family history examined
> for T.B. and madness
> Her father declared solvent,
> her eyes examined for squints,
> her teeth for cavities,

her stools for the possible
non-Brahmin worms. (*Selected Poems* 4)

In another significant volume titled *Women in Dutch Painting*, de Souza's feminist tone has become milder as a mature poet. She no more criticises the social customs and trivialities of her own community but involves herself in a soul-searching passage within. According to her, *Women in Dutch Painting* is "varied in its landscapes and effects, though existential search, meshed with social concern dominates" (de Souza, 1988: 38). Armed with Christian mythology, the poet comes to terms with Catholic prudery in the Kamasutra heartland. In Christian theology, Eve was supposed to have been created from Adam's rib. The poet brings in a complex imagery of innocence in the Garden of Eden, and the not-so-innocent aspect of duality merged into a singular pronoun. In the first movement, the pronoun is the 'I' of the poet as a woman and the resulting nausea she feels, as she fights against her prison. Looking back into the past, the poet claims about her present situation.

I am a rib again. (*Women in Dutch Painting* 22)

Here de Souza's patriarchal treatment of her mythic consciousness is obvious and the consequent use of 'I' is the 'I' of Adam, the original man, the originator of patriarchal destruction in the world, where "stars turn black holes."

De Souza's feminist approach in poetry is obviously reflected in her use of mythic dimensions. In the famous poem "Advice to Women," one can observe the post-feminist depiction of power acquisition and sustenance, suggested with mythological references. Cat, the symbol of the mysterious 'aloneness' revered in Egypt during the time of the Pharaohs, is associated with the 'otherness' of nature. It is this magic and mystery of the protagonist, the cat, whose life-style should be closely observed and followed by women. Cats teach us the bare essentials of destiny, they are majestic, as they walk arrogantly towards their destiny. Above all else, they are supremely alone creatures, content to remain on their own, within themselves, seeking neither refuge nor craving for love, they take what is proffered, and when the offerings are stopped, they just carelessly and stubbornly walk away, alone. The following lines metaphorically depict the miserable condition of women who like cats depend on others living a secluded life:

That stare perpetual surprise

in those great green eyes
Will teach you
to die alone. (*Selected Poems* 34)

The post-feminist writers are antagonistic to the Postmodernist use of myth learning to inhabit a world, not creating it. Each writer invents myth from the conviction that the production and maintenance of traditional myths about woman are simply untrue to her experience, and that the readily available cultural forms that woman may be tempted to use are an evasion. Therefore, all writers reimagine quest patterns from a woman's perspective, an act of cultural displacement.

It is the reason that a woman must take a critical stance towards her social, historical and cultural position in order to pursue her own personal quest for survival. The following stanza from the poem "Autobiographical" reveals the value of a subjective experience where the whole world is against the poet: She is ready to sacrifice her life for her own sake:

I thought the whole world
Was trying to rip me up
Cut me down, go through me
With a razor blade. (*Selected Poems* 18)

The poet's redemption of the past is an act of recovery, the transcendent opening that alone provides human consciousness with the necessary solidity within and through which to recharge a new myth, a new value and to construct a self identity in the male dominated world. The poignant communion with the past is alleviated through perception of the structure of self hood in the unique poem" Remember Medusa":

Each life—line of words
Years in the making. (*Women in Dutch Painting* 18)

Like de Souza, other women poets, Suniti Namjoshi and Sujata Bhatt have also used Medusean myth from feminist perspective and believe that Medusa represents a complexity of contradictory attributes, as well as a disturbing rebellious and turbulent persona. She can be made to signify the unity of life and death in some sort of eternal immanence, but she herself is mortal. Hence to look down upon woman is dangerous. Medusa's gaze is deadly. It is "the gaze of the other which is necessarily threatening because of its different viewpoint" (Irigaray 81).

Thus, the foregoing analysis reveals that de Souza's poetry is symbolic of the quest for self, and for the determination to seek out new answers to old patterns. As a feminist poet, she has evolved the ability and courage to voice dissatisfaction of a woman's psyche. Challenging the old tradition in her own way, de Souza is part of a tradition which she cannot readily accept and the value of her poetry lies in its uninhibited exposure of an inherited faith full of prejudices against women.

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The Humanistic Perspective in Poetry: A Study of Jayanta Mahapatra and Nissim Ezekiel

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The primary function of poetry is to enlighten the readers about the complexity of human nature and deepen the awareness of life which is a multi-coloured glass. A true poet is a man speaking to men. He is the unacknowledged legislator of mankind. Viewed in this light, Jayanta Mahapatra and Nissim Ezekiel prove to be the great poets among the galaxy of Indian English writers. Keki N. Daruwalla rightly quotes Mahapatra, "My poems are just attempts to hold a handful of earth to my face and let it speak." (118) His poetic volumes: *A Rain of Rites, Waiting, The False Start, Relationship, Life Signs* amply translate his words into reality. He is down-to-earth; he doesn't prefer to live in the ivory tower. Whatever he pictures—the temple, the priest, the beggar, the fisherman, the crowd and so on, seems real; his voice is authentic—authenticity is the hallmark of his poetry. Ezekiel is no way less authentic: he is as much popular as Mahapatra but there are subtle distinctions between the two. His *Hymns in Darkness, Latter-Day Psalms* contain poetry which reflects humanistic vision; he is adept in exploring the grass-root reality. He uses irony dexterously to depict the tragic awareness of life. But when one reads Mahapatra in a meditative mood, he feels that Mahapatra listens to the sad music of humanity passionately. As a result, Mahapatra does have Wordsworthian cadences and nuances but Ezekiel would have the ironic mode of expression as practised by W.H. Auden. Mahapatra is inimitable because he focuses on any human issue—hunger, love, sex, God or rituals—in order to digress into different arenas of human relationships which lend complexity to his poetry. The beauty of his poetry lies in his ability to digress in order to focus and the vice versa. Ezekiel's mode of expression is different. In the core of his heart he feels that T.S. Eliot is the trend-setter of modern English

English poetry. His poetic expression is very often precise, lucid and packed with suggestions. His poetry is as memorable as that of Eliot, compressed as that of modern Yeats and ironic as that of W.H. Auden.

Both Mahapatra and Ezekiel deserve attention because they are the trend-setters of modern Indian poetry in English—poetry that proudly proclaims the beauty and marvel of humanity. Whenever poetry becomes the subject of literary criticism, the basic question arises about its humanistic concern because but for humanistic vision poetry is unreadable. If poetry is written for the sake of poetry (art for art's sake theory) that poetry will die a natural death; it won't be classic. Whatever touches heart is memorable and the lines of expression that do not embody humanistic concerns are easily forgotten. The poet is abnormally sensitive and he is a painter in words; if the word pictures he gives in his poems do not stir the emotions nor titillate the intellect nor provide food to the senses that poetry will not last long. Poetry is, after all, a thing of beauty and beauty lies in symphony of sounds, colours and ideas. The primary objective of this paper is to locate the position of Mahapatra and Ezekiel among the humanistic poets and point out their unique ways of expressing hopes and fears, doubts and faiths, love and sex, God and rituals, death and life, nature and society which have baffled the ordinary mortals.

Hunger is a powerful poem of Jayanta Mahapatra. The opening stanza of the poem reads:

> It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back,
> The fisherman said: will you have her, carelessly,
> trailing his nets and his nerves, as though his words
> sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself.
> I saw his white bone thrash his eyes. (MIPE 112)

The poet pictures the poverty of the fisherman which compels him to force her daughter into prostitution; man is a hungry creature; he has hunger for food for survival and also hunger for sex for the gratification of the sense organs. However the fisherman's attitude to life and his daughter is not liked by the sensitive poet. Hence he rightly says that the flesh was heavy on his back. The poet echoes the existential philosophy that the existence precedes essence; hence the fisherman in the poem does not hesitate to compel his daughter

to be a whore. The very expression 'his words sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself' raises the basic question about the art of survival and the value system in which the fisherman and his daughter live. The concluding stanza is as poignant and meaningful as the opening one. The poet writes:

> I heard him say: my daughter, she's just turned fifteen . . .
> Feel her, I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.
> The sky fell on me, and father's exhausted wife.
> Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.
> She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,
> the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside. (MIPE)

This stanza is inimitable; it pictures the hunger of man—the sexual hunger and the hunger to live in adverse situations. The wide wormy legs are suggestive of the emaciated body of the fisherman's daughter. The fisherman's love to catch fish which is used for delicious dishes is also indicated here. 'Her years cold as rubber' suggests the cold attitude of the fisherman's daughter towards life, love and sex. The passage beautifully delineates humanistic concerns.

This poem of Mahapatra can be befittingly compared with *Ganga* by Nissim Ezekiel. The protagonist of this poem is a maid servant named *Ganga*. The portrait of Ganga is realistic; Ezekiel deals with the character with dexterous care. The mode of expression is ironic. The poet writes:

> We pride ourselves
> on generosity
> to servants. The woman
> who washes up, suspected
> of prostitution,
> is not dismissed. (MIPE 66)

Here Ezekiel focuses on people's attitude towards maid servants. We may boast of generosity but in heart of hearts we do not treat them with the sympathy and care they deserve. Such a woman is suspected of prostitution even if there is no visual evidence. Towards the concluding part of the poem, Ezekiel writes:

> She brings a smell with her
> or a sweet for her child.
> but we are used to it.
> These people never learn. (MIPE 66)

The smell that emanates from the body of Ganga, the maid-servant, is unpleasant because she does not use cosmetics. Bossism is a part of man's mental make-up. Hence such servants are scolded very often.

Ezekiel's Ganga deserves sympathy as Mahapatra's fisherman's daughter does but the former is suspected of prostitution whereas the latter is forced to do it. The former gets minimum necessities of life for her survival through her service to the master but fisherman's daughter is to sell her body for her basic necessities of life. Both the cases are pitiable. Both the poets give humanistic touch in the portrayal of their characters. Mahapatra is the observer of the situation as Ezekiel is but his diction, rhythm and images are tougher and more profound than those of Ezekiel. Mahapatra is more difficult to understand than Ezekiel.

Mahapatra has the observant eye, retentive memory for the details of the scene. Here he seems to imitate Chaucer and Eliot in the use of narrative technique. His *Lost Children of America* opens as follows:

> Here
> in the dusty malarial lanes of Cuttack
> where years have slowly lost their secrets
> they wander
> in these lanes nicked by intrigue and rain and the unseen
> hands of gods
> in front of a garish temple of the simian Hanuman
> along river banks splattered with excreta and dung
> in the crowded market square among rotting tomatoes
> fish scales and the moist warm odour of bananas and piss
> passing by the big-breasted, hard-eyed young whores
> who frequent the empty space behind the local cinema
> by the Town Hall where corrupt politicians still
> go on delivering their pre-election speeches
> and on the high road above the town's burning ground
> from which gluttonous tan smoke floats up
> in the breeze, smacking of scorched marrow and doubt. (MIPE 115)

When a passionate reader reads in between these lines, he gets reminded of Chaucer's *Prologue to Canterbury Tales* or Eliot's *Preludes*. Like Eliot, Mahapatra gives a detailed description of temple, crowded market, dusty malarial lane, hard-eyed whores, corrupt

politicians and so on. His images are visual and striking. Ezekiel imitates Eliot in a different way. He strives to write lines and expressions pregnant with meaning. Here are some passages from *Hymns in Darkness* which reflect man's compulsion to live:

He said:
'In a single day
I'm forced to listen
to a dozen film songs,
to see
a score of beggars,
to tough
uncounted strangers,
to smell unsmellable smells,
to taste
my biter native city.'
He said:
'I'm forced by the five senses
to fear the five senses.'
I heard him out
in black wordlessness. (MIPE 64-65)

Life is a burden, a compulsion; it is not colourful. The protagonist of the poem doesn't enjoy what he sees or listens or smells or perceives. The world around him is dark; hence his imagination is morbid; he gropes for words just to picture the stark reality.

Both Mahapatra and Ezekiel are disgusted with reality that bites. Mahapatra has a flair for minute description; his sense organs are quite active. But Ezekiel fails to narrate the scene like Mahapatra. The images that strike Mahapatra can go unnoticed by Ezekiel because the latter is not fond of details; his sense organs are not acute and agile enough to grasp the reality but both of them are preoccupied with humanistic concerns. Hence both of them can see the presence of beggars, prostitutes, corrupt people, disease, decay and death.

Ezekiel's mode of narration is witty and ironic. *Guru* is a famous poem where he tries to expose the human weaknesses of Guru who parades to overcome them:

the saint is still a faithless friend,
obstinate in argument,
ungrateful for favours done.

hard with servants and poor,
discourteous to disciples, especially men,
condescending, even rude
to visitors (except the foreigners)
and overscrupulous in checking
the accounts of the *ashram*.
He is also rather fat. (MIPE 67)

When one reads these lines, one gets reminded of Iyengar's comment that Ezekiel's poetry is 'splendidly evocative' (657). Guru has lust for woman and wealth which he conceals. He is not above the common run of humanity though he poses to be different.

Meena Alexander goes through the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra and perceptively remarks that Mahapatra shows us 'the quivering movement out of darkness' (138). In the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, a befitting statement is made about the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: "a powerful, haunting image of the world made and remade through the visionary instinct." (Vol. XVIII, No.1, 1983)

To sum up, if we compare the poetry of Mahapatra with Ezekiel we would view that both of them, in Yeatsian language, exhibit 'enterprise in walking naked.' They explore the grassroot reality. S.N. Prasad writes that Mahapatra has widened the range of Indian English poetry particularly where his poems become rites and his 'naked knowledge becomes our naked knowledge.' (32) Ezekiel in *The Heritage of India: A Personal Statement* states that "the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* to my eyes moved closer to the ultimate truth and the spiritual paradoxes of *Bhagawat Gita* acquired a profound meaning" (72). But his treatment of Indian Guru in *Guru* is so ironic that the reader has the impression that such Guru does not translate the principles of our scriptures into reality. In this sense Ezekiel like Mahapatra delineates the naked truth. So far as technique is concerned Mahapatra's use of poetic diction and images is more masterly than Ezekiel's though he is tougher. All the great poets of humanity—Dante, Homer, Shakespeare, Donne, Eliot and Yeats—are humanists. Mahapatra and Ezekiel follow them in the core of their hearts and strive to picture what they perceive in striking images and symbolic language. Hence they are the trend-setters of Indian English poetry in postcolonial and postmodern period. The end of poetry is to make the readers aware of reality—temporal and the transcendental; these poets make a modest attempt to explore the re-

ality—reality that bites. They are strikingly modern in the sense they outpour emotions without any pretension, delineate experience felt in the marrow-bone and project humanistic vision—a vision which is essential for amendment of human vices and horizontal progress of human civilization.

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Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetics of Confessions

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To write anything about Jayanta Mahapatra may appear absurd, as he is a big name. A number of books by reputed scholars are available, yet I would like to trace his poetic contours that determine his self-imposed frontiers and find him a muddled poet, as he himself admits, "I'm so muddled up now with English and Oriya. I'm neither here nor there. . . . We change with the times; we change with the years. It's difficult for me to say now what made me write them." (Panja 26)

It is not the question of language only that he goes for; rather it is visible in his options and his anxieties: "I was in two minds when I wrote it. I would like to leave it that way." (30) "I admit there are tensions. Part of me wants to merge into the ancient Hindu culture while another part. . . . It is their tensions that urge me to write poetry. I can't do anything else." (32-33)

His is a life that is torn and wretched and that appears in his poetry as he tells us, "Poetry, like life, is reminiscence. I cannot separate life from poetry" (32) and "I'm shaped by factors beyond my control. . . . I'm not deliberately holding on to tensions. . . . There is a charm inside which can never be bridged." (31) "Physics taught me that all observation is uncertain, ambiguous. The ambivalent nature of intrinsic nature haunts me." (31)

From a close survey of his works *Close the Sky Ten by Ten* (1971), *Svaymvara and Other Poems* (1971), *A Father's Hours* (1976), *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start* (1980), *Relationship* (1980), *Life Signs* (1983), *Dispossessed Nests* (1986), *Selected Poems* (1987), *Burdens of Waves and Fruits* (1988), *Temple* (1989), *A Whiteness of Bone* (1992), we find his real self that defines himself. There is something in his heart that irks him and he says, "Poetry makes me write poems with a bad heart. I don't know what that exactly means, but it is the heart that makes

one furry secretly into someone . . . pushing to choose values, attitudes and to do the not-so-obvious; this heart, as it keeps on trying to hide the wounded walls of its house, and at the same time asking itself for a meaning to our lives." (Panja 15)

Mahapatra's making is different and consequently the upbringing of his poetry is altogether different and this difference may be gauged as both his specialty and his frontiers; it is his options and preferences, concept and understanding, observations and record, suffering and realization, outcry and response, grabbing and manifestation that matters the most. Most of us fail to categorize him, "unlike Ezekiel and Ramanujan, Mahapatra is difficult to read for obscurity, complexity and allusiveness is his poetry. He is rather in the company of Shiv K. Kumar and K.N. Daruwalla . . . to acclimatize an indigenous tradition to English language and create a new Indian English." (Das 1)

Niranjan Mohanty is of the view, "Mahapatra discovers in culture another metaphor for identity. Mahapatra consciously and conscientiously perpetuates his journey within and towards the deposits of culture sedimented in the self." (58)

My contention moves contrary to those established by John Barnie who confirms Mahapatra "not a nihilist like Philip Larkin, where in the end, nothing is of value," compares him with Wordsworth in working "the still sad music of humanity" so movingly and at another existence to present, "a powerful, haunting image of the world made and remade through the visionary existent" (*Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. XVIII, No. I, 1983).

Let us take, for instance, *A Rain of Rites* (1976) and the first word is 'sometimes' followed by 'malignant purpose,' 'numbly,' 'quivers,' 'stale,' concluding with 'hard to overcome.' His observation is inconclusive and frequently pauses at 'who,' 'whom,' 'where,' 'which' and 'what.' The poet is assailed by doubt, anxiety and inquisitive sensibility and all remains unanswered till the end of the poem and fails 'before it reaches its objective.' His mission of life is forfeited and "thrown like kelp on the beach/ like some shape of conscience I cannot look at/ a malignant purpose in a nun's eye" (7); thereafter he proceeds to questions:

> Who was the last man on earth, to whom the cold cloud brought?
> the blood to his face?

Numbly I climb the mountain
top of airs
Where my own soul quivers on the
edge of answers (Mahapatra, 1987, 7)

And then,

Which still, stale air sits on an angel's wings?
What holds my rain so it's hard to overcome? (7)

The poet's problems remains unsolved; he doesn't find any answers; he believes in some negative force which holds back the rain and this disbelief amounts to his further misgivings, which others call it a realistic approach and I call a half-hearted endeavour. Coming to 'A summer Poem,' we again find negative impulse: the chanting of priests 'Louder than ever,' the movement of crocodiles, 'Smoke under fire' and the good wife 'Unexhausted by the deep roar of funeral pyres.' The imaginary of 'funeral pyre' particularly is striking as it stands alone signifying nothing and Mahapatra deliberately drags the summer heat to crematorium; the common reader fails to decipher the connotation. The words 'sombre,' 'louder,' 'middens,' 'smoke,' 'long,' 'still' and 'deep' ascertain his ambivalence, trauma and psychoses. As Mahapatra himself explains in *Contemporary Author Autobiography Series*, "I found myself once again at the border between two separate regions of mind—between what perhaps, I understood and what I did not . . . which makes up my life, those blurs of vague light that pulsate with the days. . . . Today, the same questions bother me although I see no specific cause or rationale for such things. But such searching moves me and I am unable to resist it in my poetry. For poetry is voice 'vaak' and it is a voice forged from those elements which constitute the world both within and without: a voice which carries with it its unused power of survival." (148)

Mahapatra takes his poetry as 'the creation of a mind in despair' (Panja 74) 'Suffering with triumph and disaster' 'my romance with my own land and with my innermost self.' (*Contemporary Author*, 147). In 'The Lines of My Poems' Mahapatra writes,

Today a line of this poem
Has lost the use of its healthy legs,
Trapped like a sparrow
Which has strayed inside?

Beating its wings against the
bars of world's conscience.
It slumps pitifully
On the floor of the present.

Mahapatra places his poetry at the juncture of postcolonialism, in focusing the non-West or its cultural other, somehow interdisciplinary, incorporating the antagonistic theories of Darwin, Freud and Marx, which refused to be contained within the binaries of 'us' and 'them' and the insistence on questioning stereotypes like the oppressor/ oppressed. It may be the reflection of inadequacies of anti-colonial and socio-historical pressures created by an awareness about the new imperialistic strategies operating in the political, economic and cultural sites, discernible as a process of interrogating social obligations as anti-colonial resistance; consequently poetry as seminal or instrumental exercise, shifting from Commonwealth to postcolonialism, a literary exercise to erase the inferiority instilled in the native minds of values caused by the psychological damage to colonized people, an aesthetic device where the writers' connections with their Third World homes become metaphorical, a sort of cultural metamorphosis, evident in transplantation of names, collation of language and the diversification of tastes, amplified by a coming to the polyglot metropolis. Interestingly uncompromising textual or cultural inversion has its root in old binaries of colonial ideology influencing cultural vocabulary, plagued by neo-colonial maladies like economic disorder, social malaise, state repression, power hierarchies all pointing to strategic move, securing positive reception towards creativity or urge to poetry. Mahapatra's poetry is the kind of literature as stated by Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands*, "Literature is interim report from the consciousness of the artist, and so it can never be 'finished' or 'perfect.' Nothing so inexact so easily and frequently misconceived deserves the protections of being declared sacrosanct. . . .The only privilege literature deserves . . . is the privilege of being the arena of where the struggle of languages can be acted out." (427)

Like Arun Kolatkar, Mahapatra is a bilingual poet and has "taste for the bizarre perspective and oblique entry point into situations . . . wry irony underpins the miracle of things seen and touched, people met and sized up . . . the epic alternates with the intimates, the self

weaves through the other . . . tempted into cynicism but mandated to bear witness to history . . . addressed mythic themes that still resonate in India's public life." (*The Hindu*, Sept. 27, 2004)

Interestingly, he eludes the vigilant squads of linguistic absolutism, to a great extent demotic rather than classical in his emphasis, sculpted with the chisels of awe and understanding of a commune. Yet negation follows; interrogation follows, and the poet seems helpless, 'looks at the girl he had once married,' the moon showering 'ghost light' that floats upon the consciousness; he maintains his curiosity:

> Is it the earth that catches its breath?
> Or is one there?
> Only a shredded prayer . . . flag keeps twisting in the wind. (9)

We cannot make out why Mahapatra thinks of the unfulfilled, unattended and unfathomed side of the world; all his queries lead to abstainism. Mahapatra is aware of his limitations and he accepts it in his own essay 'The Absence of Absolutes,' "An ingrained sadness never left me. . . . It seemed natural to me that I would shy away from the ostentatious community of human relationship. . . . I began to write in the manner I experienced living; feeling the wrong, the lie, the nastiness and the injustice I perceived around me; and could go on to question the existence of God whom my parents had taught me scrupulously to believe in . . . only there was a strange agency in me I couldn't put aside . . . slowly there emerged from my life an intriguing, melancholy poetry . . . discontent helped me to write . . . in a way we are all participating in the catastrophes of the would."

Obviously, Mahapatra is a fragmented soul—sad, elusive, amazed—and all these find place in his poetry. His search of his own self in 'Somewhere My Man' discloses the secret in a better way; he searches himself by the riverbank seclusions, in his daily routine, in the happenings of the world and finally concludes with "Nothing matters." He finds his man,

> Here sits my man
> in the doorway of a dunged street,
> beside his ailing mother
> her pinched aged face
> proudly bearing
> the irrelevance of movement. (11)

He raises questions but cannot answer; for him 'A man does not mean anything' because he presumes place more significant, 'a man becomes the place' and 'Here is the hour that will not move' and then. 'What use is there, tearing a country to bits?' and finally 'nothing matters.' This journey of man from riverbank to daily life and subsequently to the concern of country signifies Shakespeare's design: 'sound and fury signifying nothing.' We fail to understand the poet's intention: does he think me is static?; does he calculate man always as 'ailing,' 'irrelevance' and likewise? Why Mahapatra prefers to nullify man? Why Mahapatra has made a man non-entity? He is deep in pain and his suffering is endless—that is why 'Dhauli' concludes

> The measure of Asoka's suffering
> does not appear enough.
> The place of his pain peers lamentably
> from among the pains of the dead. (22)

All of a sudden, we are compelled to infer the preordained place of the individual within this world is to be found in the trivial terms of a modern Western quest for identity and the poet transplants into his contemporary Indian social milieu; however the stubborn nomadic existence of the individual resists dreams and alternatives and ends up doing whatever it has been ordained to. This is the most distinct trend of Indian English poetry which started with 'mimicry,' adopted 'hybridity' and finally culminated in 'identity' (quest); this is structure of our own epistemological make up as of dialectically creative historical process. *Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start* (1980), *Relationship* (1980), *Life Signs* (1983) and *Burden of Waves and Fruit* (1986) constitute the gist of Mahapatra's poetry. He rushes to 'the rain' for most of his expressions and creativity. The rain refreshes him; it stirs his inside, it purgates him, helps him in his confessions and 'nothing matters' as he proceeds towards nothingness with rain for sheer fulfillment. From 'Summer,' to 'My Man,' 'Puri' to 'Mythology,' from 'Sunburst' to 'Hunger,' from 'Faith' to 'Future,' from 'Indian Way' to 'Country Festival' he feels 'Pain' of the 'Dark' 'Ash' and 'Moon.' The taboos of the Indian Way ('I could not touch you, like that'), the anxiety of the future (The world's the same/ It's the future's face he would not offend), the superstition of a country festival (a priest's butting

nose. . . like wild water snakes/ left loose from the yearly floods), the interrogations of the pain (when will my eye return/ that has been swallowed by the sky/ what ceremony veils its world?), the unknown world of the dark (Just the sound of something vague/ slipping away from the old mind's grasp/ of something hatching alone on the unknown leaf), the aftermath of a rainy day (who knows/ what's dying underneath/ a growing blade of grass/ Or what habit palpitates), the futile rigidity of the mountain (it gives clear proof that one might reconstruct one's life. Rigid/ yet strongly impotent), the substance of the ash (the dumb order of the myth . . . bodiless grains) question of the moon moment (How can I stop the life I lead within myself?) and the disturbing "Godly and Great" (what use is history if it gives sanction to creation of things?)—all goes in the creation of 'Waiting' and 'The False Start.' Most probably 'Waiting' intends to wait for a better future of our culture and civilization and 'The False Start' wanders in the mysterious hazards of nature. In *Relationship*, he analyzes himself in relationship with the vicinity:

> We have come as dreams
> disguised that pinned us down.
> Only that the stones were my very own
> Waiting as mother or goddess or witch
> as my birth feeds on them
> as though on the empty dugs of
> sorcerous thought. . . .
> Where cranes found into the surrounding silence
> and the clouds shift with the tears
> of wounded pools of our living . . . going nowhere
> It is my own life
> That has concerned me beneath the stones
> of the temple in ruins, in a blaze of sun. (38-46)

And concludes:

> This must be the myth of every happiness. . .
> where only ideas, like brooms,
> wait oddly on their unstable heads (47)

In *Life Sign*, his endeavour is to extract meaning out of our movements, our actions and our reactions; 'So we drag meanings/ from what we see'; he express his inability most often: 'I am unable to

force an answer out of you/ wherever I try to live' and 'It is not simple to share love/with those who live in us.' and 'In this time of darkness the lost ones and I/ will dim like lamps and go back to the movements/ we caught once in the uncertain light of dawns.' (64) He struggles to find, 'My silence here gives off no light/ a slow mist still fights the eyes/ for life's present symmetry' (65) and 'Thanking to escape his beliefs/ I go to meet the spectre of belief' (66) and then he calls, 'There is a dawn waiting beside us, whose signs/ are a hundred-odd years away from you.' (68) He is awestruck at his own ignorance: 'I wonder where the day goes/ even in the bright seen/ this was a world I did not know' (69) and 'I try to make myself more than what I am' (70). He merges with nature 'Haunted by birds of prey' where strange trees grow/ deep in the hills of my blood, that river flows.' (71) In a summer afternoon his mind visits hospital and finds pain, 'And time drawn like a thin wind/ to the shape of pain' (72) and he confesses 'I answer from no clear place I am in' (73). The twilight appears to be curse, 'Its cry/ a plea to share in its curse' (74) and the event that attracts is, 'A rape penetrates the periphery of the jungle/ And thought looks up/ dumbly at the toes of words' (75). Mahapatra questions himself, 'Do we have to be uncertain of ourselves' (76) and the reason he finds, 'Because everyone believes that it moves with us/ and yet no one believes it until we find ourselves' (78).

We are surprised to find such a great poet leaning towards nothingness, but he admits:

> As a poet, I think I am both an observer and a participant in life. Many apparently unnoticed events too, make fleeting contacts with the mind, and the impression left behind provided substance and device for what I want to write. . . . My purpose in writing has to share with the reader the hearts, soul and daily lives of my people including myself (113)

So is Mahapatra, confined in his own world of observation, that of Orissa and his 'rain' fails to devour his 'darkness,' 'nothingness' and 'death' and he remains,

> like a lone rain,
> no more eager for answers
> Just pure flies
> keeps on breathing from
> Our open eyes. ('Dance of the Fire Flies')

And Mahapatra's ritual of exploring his own self is yet incomplete, as he admits in an interview to S.K. Banerjee, "Maybe my poems are a ritual towards finding myself, finding the other one inside me . . . ambiguities still remain. . . . No, I don't think I have still found 'the other one' inside me" (*Journal of Literature and Aesthetics*, 85)

Mahapatra answers his own yearnings in his essay 'The Voice in the Ink': "my poetry suffers from such endless questioning, and also from the clichéd subjects of time, death, and the quest which man is after." (12) He is "an ignorant man, almost a poet" as confessed by a great philosopher, Santayana.

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Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: An Interpretation in the Light of Indian Idea of Kingship

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Shakespeare's famous love-tragedy *Antony and Cleopatra* has been subjected to critical analysis by a number of critics in a number of ways. These critics have frequently disputed the moral meaning of the play. If on one hand, S.T. Coleridge regards it as "the most wonderful" play of Shakespeare because of its "happy valiancy of style" and its "insight" into the "depth and energy" of the lover's passion (97-98); on the other hand for G.B. Shaw the play has "no moral value whatever." He says that the audience cannot feel any sympathy for Antony after he runs away disgracefully from the battle of Actium because of Cleopatra. He objects to the play even on the technical grounds for making sexual infatuation a tragic theme (749). John Dryden too objects to it on a similar ground. In his 'Preface to *All for Love*' he says, "That which is wanting to work up the pity to a greater height, was not afforded me by the story: for the crimes of love which they both committed, were not occasioned by any necessity, fatal ignorance, but were wholly voluntary, since our passions are, or ought to be, within our power" (32). While according to David Bevington, *Antony and Cleopatra* is one of the most ironic of the major tragedies (17); and to L.C. Knights it is a tragedy of very different kind that embodies different and apparently irreconcilable evaluation of the central experience, in which Shakespeare infuses into the love story an immense energy, a sense of life so heightened that it can claim to represent an absolute value, and in which he evokes the passion of lovers with the greatest possible intensity and invest it with the maximum of positive significance (345-49). For A.C. Bradley the play cannot be categorized with Shakespeare's pure-tragedies because there is something "half-hearted," even "ironical," in Shakespeare's

portrayal of the conflict and it does not stir the tragic emotions fully or attain the "terrifying power" necessary for the greatest tragedy (52-75). Earnest Schanzer, instead of considering the play a tragedy, describes *Antony and Cleopatra* as a problem play which makes us "unsure of our moral bearings" (6). According to L.R. Sharma, the play defies categorization. For him, its problematic content and structural pattern are quite untraditional and they break the traditional genres and create the new genre of dramatic epic. He considers it to be an Epic in Drama (66-99).

The play has also been subjected to archetypal and linguistic criticism. John Coates reads the play as a statement of pleasure reconciled to virtue and tries to search a connection between the choice of the play and "Choice of Hercules"; and finds the figure of Antony between Octavia and Cleopatra closely parallel to the classical account of Hercules between Virtue and Pleasure (45-52). Harold Fisch reveals a myth-ritual pattern that is central not only as the structural principle but also as the actual subject of the play. He discovers two mythical patterns in the play, the first is connected with the name of Mars and Venus and the second with the name of Isis, Osiris, and Set; and says that in the fifth act of the play Shakespeare presents a ritual of apotheosis but he does this within a framework of irony and in this way transcends the old mythical pattern by making a development on old archetypes (59-67). Commenting on the linguistic qualities of the play, Frank Kermode says that the life of Shakespeare's plays is "in linguistic detail" and for the purpose he draws out interesting points from a register of word frequency (149-61). In her essay on the imagery of the play, Katherine Vance Macmullan concentrates on certain conventional methods of evoking the subject of death that were common to Elizabethans; on vivid images of death used by the playwright such as the ideas of marriage with death, sleep with death, and opposition of light with darkness; and shows how these images are an integral part of the dramatic situation (399-410). S. Viswanathan in his article on the play discusses Shakespeare's tactics, as a playwright, of involving the audience to identify the theatrical techniques by maintaining a delicate balance between engagement and detachment, between sympathy and judgment (194-205). Thus, David Bevington is correct in saying that the history of critical reactions suggests that the

play is a kind of Rorschach test for us and for those who have written about the play (16). The fact remains that the play has been and is still a big challenge for its interpreters. John Wilders holds that the play embodies very different and apparently irreconcilable evaluation of the central experience and never allows its audience or reader a secure and stable moral vantage-point from which to judge the action or characters; it gives one instead multiple perspectives and invites constant reassessment of one's responses (121). So it is in this light that the present paper endeavours to look at the play from quite a different point of view. An attempt has been made to read the play as a statement on kingship, and to analyse the kingly characters in the play viz. Mark Antony, Octavius Caesar, Lepidus, Sextus Pompeius, and Cleopatra in the light of Indian idea of kingship.

I

The Indian idea of kingship gives a vivid description about a king's status, category, virtues, education, appointment, duties and assistants. According to it, a king has to please and protect the people (*Shukranitisara* 1. 11; *Shantiparva* 57. 11).[1] He is regarded divine but he is not conferred with the divine right of kingship as was the case in Europe. The Indian conception of the power of a king is unlike the divine right of Stuarts, the divinely ordained duty to afford protection to his subjects. Instead, it is said that all beings stay in order (*dharma*) and that the order resides in king, hence, only he, who protects order in the best manner, is the lord of the earth (*Shantiparva* 59. 28 and 90. 30; *Shukranitisara* 1. 57-62). Indian polity makes three categories of kings viz. Divine (*Satvika*), Passionate (*Rajasika*), and Demonic (*Tamasika*) based on the inherent nature of '*sata*,' '*raja*,' and '*tama*.' It is firmly stated that only the kings of the first category are divine kings (*Shukranitisara* 1. 21-26; *Shantiparva* 90. 4). Moreover, the doctrine of king's accountability to God alone is completely alien to Indian sensibility. In India a king does not enjoy an absolute authority. He is governed by the divine law of order (*dharma*) (*Shantiparva* 32. 2-7; Kautilya I, ii).

The polity also provides a catalogue of external (*Bahirang*) and internal (*Antarang*) virtues essential for a king. As per the external

qualities, a king has to be of noble birth, physically and mentally fit, good looking, firm, and skilful in selection of assistants (*Shukranitisara* 2. 11-14). As per the internal qualities, he should have the qualities of inviting nature viz. gratefulness, magnanimity, discipline and resolution; the qualities of intellect and intuition viz. intelligence, curiosity, expertise in discovering the weak points of his adversaries, attention, assimilation, memory, discernment, discretion and passion for truth; the qualities of enthusiasm viz. courage, energy, heroism, pride, promptness and skill; and the qualities of self-restraint viz. wisdom, prudence, self-control, justice and freedom from passion, irritability, greed, arrogance, indolence, inconsistency, impotence and cruelty (Kautilya III, ii). Moreover, it is very emphatically stated that avarice is the root cause of evils. Therefore, a king should not be avaricious (*Manusmriti* 7. 49).

In Indian tradition princes are taught philosophy (*anvikshiki*), history and tradition (*trayi*), economics (*varta*) and administrative and military sciences (*dandniti*) by the learned and the noble scholars and, thereafter, are trained by the honest and the efficient officials (Kautilya III, i). On completion of their education and training one of them, generally the elder son of the king, is appointed as the crown prince to help the king in administration. He becomes the successive king on resignation or death of the king (Kautilya III, vi; *Shukranitisara* 1. 185). In absence of any issue from the king a suitable candidate is appointed on the post. But in every case the candidate should be fit for the post and must possess the aforementioned kingly graces (Kautilya III, vi; *Shukranitisara* 1. 86-87).

Indians believe that king's duties (*rajdharma*), both personal as well as public, protect the rest and thus are vital for the stability of the society (*Shantiparva* 68. 8-9). His personal duties include all sorts of renunciation, initiation, learning and self-protection. He has to shun ten evils of sensuality (*kama*) viz. hunting, gambling, sleeping in day, speaking ill of others, sexual indulgence, spirituous, dancing, music, illness, and liquor; and eight evils of wrath (*krodha*) viz. back-biting, criminal violence, hatred, envy, jealousy, wasteful expenditure, reprimand, and reproach (*Manusmriti* 7. 44-49). He should be efficient and enterprising (*Shukranitisara* 1. 137-47 & 3. 57; Kautilya III, iii). He should take lessons and counsel from the

aged and learned people (*Shantiparva* 57. 20; *Manusmriti* 7. 39). He should be cautious about self-protection. He should keep his wives, relatives, friends, councillors, and dependents under control with all means (*Shukranitisara* 1. 150). He should not place much faith in others and with the help of spies should know their hearts. He should check the usurpation of the authority and must be respected by the people (*Manusmriti* 7. 62-66; Kautilya III, iv & v; *Shukranitisara* 3. 62 & 64). His public duties are collective incarnation of protection and welfare of the people (*Shantiparva* 56. 45-46). He should protect and promote the material interest of the people, regulate the social-cum-moral order of the society, and punish the ill-doers (Kautilya I, ii & VIII). He should make good relations with the neighbouring states and should only make righteous victory (*Manusmriti* 7. 206; *Shantiparva* 69. 23-24 & 103). He has to ensure that taxation should be just and collected money should be invested in public welfare (*Manusmriti* 7. 129; *Shukranitisara* 4. 2-10). It is believed that if this task of preservation and maintenance of order is accomplished, the result is the advent of Golden age (*Shantiparva* 69. 103-4).

Though a king enjoys all the authorities of the state yet it is also believed that this heavy responsibility cannot be discharged by him single-handedly. Thus he should select his ministers to get help in administration and check the misuse of the authority (*Manusmriti* 7. 58; *Shukranitisara* 2. 1-4). It is said that a person who achieves celebrity, who observes all restraints, who never feels jealous to others, who never does any evil act, who is never overcome by lust or fear or covetousness or wrath, who never abandons righteousness, who is clever in translation of business, and who is possessed of wise and weighty speech, should be the foremost of ministers. Persons well born and possessed of good behaviour, who are liberal and never indulge in bragging, who are brave, respectable, learned and full of resources, should be appointed subordinate ministers in charge of different departments (*Manusmriti* 7. 54; *Shantiparva* 83. 2 & 20). But covetous men should not be appointed to any affair (*Manusmriti* 7. 124; *Shukranitisara* 2. 5-8).

Cleopatra evokes an image of Antony as an emperor, one whose legs "bestrid the ocean" and whose arm "[c]rested the world," whose voice was "as rattling thunder" to his enemies and whose livery "walked crowns and crownets" (5.2.81-91).[2] But the real picture of Antony of the play does not match with this and there is a big chasm between this portrait, made by Cleopatra in her oblivion of Antony, and the real Antony of the play, one of the triple pillars of "the Mediterranean world" (Wells and Orlin. 232) who has been rendered "a strumpet's fool" and has become "the bellows and the fan/ [t]o cool a gipsy's lust" (1.1.1-13). Commenting on this, L.C. Knights says that the image that Cleopatra evokes may not be a fancy but it is not the Antony that the play gives us, it is something disengaged from, or glimpsed through that Antony (345-49). J. Leeds Barroll mentions that despite his attractive qualities, Antony is often condemned by many critics, for base, sensual, and adulterous nature of his passion, as the embodiment of gluttony, lechery, and sloth ('Antony' 708-20); and this dichotomy has given a plenty of space to the critics to comment on it from various points of view. This is knit even in the consciousness of the characters of the play; while the dying Antony speaks of himself as "a Roman by Roman/ [v]aliantly vanquished" (4.15.59-60), that is, one whom no one could conquer but himself; Caesar reports how Antony in his excessive revelry "is not more manlike/ [t]han Cleopatra, nor the Queen of Ptolemy/ [m]ore womanly than he" (1.4.5-7). Barroll further mentions that although he enjoys both expertise and reputation in his military role, and is both physically courageous and capable at times of great leadership; his imperfections are also exposed by Shakespeare. He has lost at Modena, loses Actium, and loses his last battle; he has only one land victory to the credit ('Shakespeare' 159-235). Commenting on this, Harold Andrew Mason says that it is told several times in the play that Antony was a supreme specimen of humanity but in fact "the Antony who is presented dramatically never makes to believe in this report" (269). But despite all his evils J. Dover Wilson sees in Antony majesty, affability, benevolence, liberality, amity, justice, fortitude and patience in sustaining wrong a "portrait of true greatness" (i-xlvii); and Harold Bloom finds him a charismatic politician who, though certainly is past his earlier glo-

ries almost throughout the play, is the grandest of Shakespeare's captains because his personality dominates every aspect of his world, even the consciousness of his enemy Octavius Caesar (546-74).

In reality, as he is figured not in the consciousness of the characters of the play but in details and events of the play, Antony is a mixture of greatness with a disabling self-hatred, erratic judgment in times of crisis, and obsessed with a sexual attraction and enslavement to an "enchanting queen" (1.2.133-35). At the very beginning of the play, he is found at the court of Cleopatra indulging in voluptuousness and luxury; and throughout the play he is lost in the delirium of love. On evaluating his character on the basis of aforesaid Indian ideals, it is found that he is courageous, energetic, heroic, proud, prompt, and skilful (1.1.1-10). Almost every character of the play speaks loudly of his warlike past. If Cleopatra considers him "the greatest soldier of the world" (1.3.39), and "Herculean Roman" (1.3.85); Pompey believes that "[h]is soldiership/ [i]s twice the other twain" (2.1.35-36). Even his adversary Caesar too appreciates his soldiership and heroic endurance of hunger and want after his defeat at Modena (1.4.56-72). He is also generous (4.2.9-45), magnanimous, grateful (2.2.162-66), and loves the truth (1.2.100-15; 2.2.90-93).

But Antony suffers from certain evils that are quite fatal for a king. He lacks the virtues of piety, sincerity, discipline and resolution (2.2.86-95). He knows that his unrestrained attachment to pleasures is quite harmful to him and therefore he tries to overcome his love-sickness (1.2.120-35) but is not successful. It is apparent that he lacks the virtues of self-restraint and is a slave of passions, indolence, irritability, impatience and inconsistency. He also lacks intelligence, curiosity, attention, assimilation, discernment, discretion, and is weak in discovering the weak points of the adversaries (2.2.76-9). For the most part of the play he acts not with reason but merely with passion. Enobarbus rightly observes that his captain has made his "will/ [l]ord of his reason" (3.13.3-4). While Caesar prudently declines his challenge for single combat, he recklessly accepts his challenge to sea-fight in which he is not experienced enough, and from which, all skilful warriors endeavoured to dis-

suade him (3.7.1-81). This indifference to their counsels (3.7.34-40; 41-48; 61-66) gives them ample reason to conclude that their "leader's led,/ [a]nd [they] are women's men" (3.7.69-70) and ultimately to desert him. Like in war, as Terence Eagleton rightly mentions, in love too he is ultimately unable to resolve the potential absurdity of his self-defending actions (qtd. Bavington 20). He promises to be faithful to Octavia (3.2.34-6) but soon returns to Cleopatra abandoning his lawful spouse and this, according to G.G. Gervinus, makes him guilty of deceit, perjury, and adultery. Gervinus considers it as the tragic turning point of his fortune because in this act Antony becomes guilty of both moral and political profligacy (722-46).

As a king also Antony fails in discharging his personal duties of renunciation and learning. Being a king he is not expected to deprive himself of all pleasures but excessive indulgence in them is strictly prohibited. He has to make a delicate balance between action and pleasure. But quite contrary to this he "[o]'erflows the measure" (1.1.2) lets "Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch/ [o]f the ranged empire fall!" (1.1.34-5) just to seek sensual pleasures:

> Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours,
> Let's not confound the time with conference harsh.
> There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
> Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight? (1.1.45-48)

Being a king he has to subdue his senses and discipline himself. But he is a victim of the evils of sensuality such as gambling, dancing, music, spirituous, sexual indulgence, and liquor (1.1, 2 & 4); as well as the evils of envy, wasteful expenditure, reprimand, and reproach (4.1.1-6). Along with all these, he is prone to losing his mental equilibrium in difficult situations. Oscillating like a pendulum at one moment of the play, he is found self-pitying (4.2.11-36), while hysterically self-confident at the next (4.2.37-45; 4.8.29-39).

Thus, on analysing his character in the light of Indian idea of kingship it can be said that though Antony has the virtues of enthusiasm, he lacks in the virtues of inviting nature; virtues of intellect and intuition; and virtues of self-restraint. He is indifferent and rather careless to his personal as well as public duties and for the most part of the play he acts like a private man rather than a public

persona. Due to all these evils and weaknesses, he has become, as Caesar comments, "[a] man who is the abstract of all faults" (1.4.9) and is obliged to humiliate himself (2.2; 3.12) and ultimately has to commit suicide.

While his adversary Caesar is sincere, disciplined, firm in resolution, intelligent, attentive, well-informed, curious, expert in discovering the weak point of the adversaries, realistically aware of what is possible, good in memory, assimilation, discretion and discernment, and consistent (3.6.62-63). Thidias rightly praises him for he is both "the fullest man, and worthiest/ [t]o have command obeyed" (3.13.92-93). Though he lacks the qualities of courage and heroism, he is prompt, skilful, firm, well-briefed, able to move swiftly, never taking unnecessary chance, and single-minded (3.7.20-23). He also takes counsel with his ministers. He is conscious regarding his personal duties of renunciation, initiation, learning and self-protection. He is forever ready to take an initiative:

> [F]or't cannot be
> We shall remain in friendship, our conditions
> So differing in their acts. Yet, if I knew
> What hoop should hold us staunch, from edge to edge
> O'th' world I would pursue it. (2.2.119-23)

Though he is often praised by critics like Hamilton Wright Mabie for his discipline and foresight (235-38), J. Leeds Barroll condemns him as remote and cold, remorseless, and rather Machiavellian ('Characterization' 231-88). Contrary to his own statement, "[i]t is not Caesar's natural vice to hate/ [o]ur great competitor," he suffers from evil of wrath viz. hatred. While Antony fights the battle of Actium entirely on Caesar's terms he laughs at Antony's challenge for single combat: "Let the old ruffian know/ I have many other ways to die" (4.1.4-5), and when Antony's soldiers desert him because of his unpredictability and caprice, he places them "in the van,/ [t]hat Antony may seem to spend his fury/ [u]pon himself" (4.6.9-11). His treatment of Lepidus is heartless and his approach to morality is utilitarian. In the matters of resources he is very careful and only rarely consents to the "waste" of feasting his soldiers (4.1.17).

Analysing his character on the basis of Indian idea of kingship, it can be concluded that Caesar possesses the virtues of inviting na-

ture, the virtues of intellect and intuition, and the virtues of self-restraint. He has a full command over his own heart and is careful about his personal as well as public duties. But he is rather weak in the virtues of enthusiasm and is victim to the evil of hatred. Though he may be sincere in his dislike of Antony's disregard of duty but his reactions towards Antony as well as Lepidus clearly indicate that he is war-loving to the extent of being evil and desires demonic victory over other states.

The third triumvir Lepidus, in comparison to the other two, is rather a weak character. There are only a few descriptions about him in the play. These descriptions reveal that he has the qualities of piety, assimilation, and taking counsel (2.2). Though he seems to be a man of foresight who tries to reconcile the dispute between Antony and Caesar saying that it is not the time for private stomaching (2.2), in reality, he lacks the virtues of intelligence, expertise, attention, curiosity, memory, courage, energy, promptitude, skill, discretion, discernment and self-restraint (1.4; 2.7) and Caesar condemns him as "too indulgent" (1.4.16). He is magnanimous but indolent (1.4.77-80). He also lacks the qualities of discipline and resolution. He has no passion for truth. He is also careless about his personal duties of self-protection. He is a victim to the evils of sensuality namely of liquor and illness. He is a drunkard (2.7.1-7; 30-50), and a glutton (2.7.52) who prefers wine more than policy matters for which he depends on the other two. He is not physically fit to be a king as he himself as well as the others repeatedly mention his sickness (2.2.180; 2.7.30; 3.2.4-6). Moreover, he also lacks in efficiency and enterprise (2.4.5-9).

On studying his character in the light of Indian idea of kingship, it can be said that Lepidus lacks almost every internal virtue essential for a king i.e. the virtues of inviting nature, the virtues of enthusiasm, virtues of intelligence and intuition, and the virtues of self-restraint. He is indifferent towards his personal as well as public duties. Due to these weaknesses, his authority is misused by Caesar and he is captivated and subjected to death.

The fourth character Sextus Pompeius is a republican idealist avenging the cause of his father and Brutus (2.6.10-23). On judging him in the light of Indian idea of kingship, it is found that Pompeius

has the virtues of piety, sincerity, generosity, gratefulness, magnanimity, and discipline (2.6.42-46). He is courageous, energetic, heroic, proud, prompt, and skilful (2.1.36-39). He dares to challenge Caesar and commands the empire of the sea. He also has the qualities of self-control, justice, and freedom from passion, inconsistency, irritability, greed, arrogance, indolence, impatience, and cruelty; and denies killing the triumvirs in his own hospitality even for the whole world (2.7.73-80).

But he is weak in discovering the weak points of his adversaries, and on the matters of rivalry between his adversaries he is hopelessly unaware of the ground reality (2.1.43-50). He also lacks in attention, discernment, and discretion; and is weak in getting information. When Menas tells him that Caesar and Lepidus are in the battlefield, he startles and astonishes on the report of Antony's arrival in Rome (2.1.16-35). Moreover, most ironical to his republican idealism on behalf of the Senate and its anti-tyrannical traditions, he is in league with pirates and other discontented elements (1.4.34-40). Though he enjoys his father's dignity (1.2.188-97), his strength lies not so much in republican devotion to the public zeal but in the discontentedness "of such as have not thrived/ [u]pon the present state" (1.3.50-55). Along with these, he is also weak in resolution. In making the peace treaty with the triumvirs, he accepts the conditions that are quite against him. He agrees to uproot the rebels and pirates (2.6.34-39), with whom he is in pact to rebel against the triumvirs. Thus, he himself defeats his own interests on which his own assistant remarks that his father would never have made this treaty (2.6.83-84), and prophecies that he has laughed away his fortune (2.6.104-5). Because of these weaknesses, he is defeated and murdered by joint endeavour of Caesar and Lepidus (3.5.19).

Cleopatra, the fifth character to be analysed in the paper, is the queen of Egypt. She is the counterpart of Antony, Caesar, and Lepidus and is the sole authority of the Egyptian world. William Hazlitt regards her character as a "masterpiece," a triumph of the voluptuous, of the love of pleasure and the power of giving it, over every other consideration (78-84). Harold Bloom also regards her to be the most vital and the most subtle and formidable amongst all female characters of Shakespeare and says that even Antony does

not understand her (546-74). Though her devotional love for Antony is proved by her suicide, yet according to the Indian idea of kingship, as a queen her character is rather an emblem of the qualities quite opposite to the royal graces. Though Charmian calls her the most royal queen, in her behaviour she is rather a slave to her passions and greed as she herself asserts that even her age has not given her freedom from folly (1.3.58-9). Antony considers her as idleness itself: "But that your royalty/ [h]olds idleness your subject, I should take you/ [f]or idleness itself" (1.3.93-95). She lacks in intelligence, curiosity, expertness, attention, assimilation, discernment, discretion. She also lacks in courage, energy, heroism, pride, promptitude and skill. She is fatally governed with her passions, greed, indolence, and impatience and has no control over herself. All through the play she is in the state of oblivion: "Oh, my oblivion is very Antony,/ [a]nd I am all forgotten!" (1.3.92-93). In the whole play she is deeply occupied with her personal affairs and is least curious about the stately matters. She is also a victim of the evils of sensuality viz. gambling, sleeping in day, speaking ill to others, sexual indulgence, dancing, music and liquor; as well as evils of wrath viz. jealous and wasteful expenditure. Though according to Bloom, as a politician and as a dynastic ruler, she has a strong concern for Egypt and for her children (546-574), yet the arguments in her favour are very feeble. Moreover, she herself sets aside her concern for her country and her children when she ponders over the consequences.

On analysing her character in the light of Indian idea of kingship it is found that she lacks almost every virtue essential for a ruler of the state viz. virtues of inviting nature; virtues of enthusiasm; virtues of intuition and intelligence; and virtues of self-restraint. She neither practises the personal duties of renunciation, initiation, learning; nor the public duties of protection and welfare of the people. Because of her weaknesses she contributes in bringing the final catastrophe in the play and succumbs to death.

Thus, on judging these kingly characters of the play in the light of Indian idea of kingship, it becomes clear that these kings, the queen and the republican, because of their weaknesses and indifferent attitude are the cause of the chaos and sufferings in their respective lands. None of them possesses the virtues essential to be a di-

vine ruler and they all are passionate beings. Because of their passions for pleasure and war, and imperial attitude they overshadow the whole action of the play with perpetual wars that bring havoc on them and the people. At the end of the play in all the kingly figures only Octavius Caesar survives because, as the study shows, he has more kingly virtues and is comparatively better trained in kingly matters than the others. Therefore, by his survival Shakespeare hints at the necessity of kingly virtues for a royal person. However, the fact remains that the play does not depict even one kingly figure with divine attributes as mentioned by Indian polity thinkers.

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Nissim Ezekiel's *Three Plays*: A Study

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Nissim Ezekiel occupies a position of great importance in post-Independence Indian English literature. The friendship with Alkazi in 1947-48 seemed to be a turning point in his life. He took interest in Alkazi's work and started attending rehearsals. In 1948 Ezekiel went to England where he stayed till mid-52. In England there was a large scale exposure to plays, poetry readings, lectures in philosophy which might have inspired him to write his first play. He was not satisfied with his writing as no complete texts emerged from this period. He joined *The Illustrated Weekly* after returning from England. After two years, he switched over to advertising. He then went to New York for giving poetry readings, attending plays. In the Sixties, he wrote first *Marriage Poem*, then *Nalini*, and then *The Sleepwalkers*.

It is clear that Ezekiel wrote plays as he wanted to promote healthy social criticism through the medium of the stage. *Three Plays* was published in 1969 by Writer's Workshop. Of these *Nalini* is a full-length play which comes out from Ezekiel's personal experience. He worked as an art critic for the *Times of India* and later on as a manager in Shilpi Advertising. He knew how painting exhibitions were engineered. He became entangled in the world of business executives, while working with 'Shilpi.'

There are only three characters in the play. Bharat and Raj are two advertising executives while Nalini is a painter. The wonderful characteristic of the play is its dialogue. They are effectively organized taking into consideration the major theme of the play.

Raj: Hello, am I disturbing you?

Bharat: You are.

Raj: I have a reason to. What are you doing at the moment?

Bharat: I am listening to music.

Raj: What are you doing, apart from listening to music?
Bharat: I am sitting still.
Raj: What are you doing, apart from sitting still?
Bharat: Pascal says that some of evil in the world would be much diminished if men could only learn to sit quietly in their rooms. (Sitting back and stretching out his legs.) I am busy diminishing the sum of evil in the world.[1]

The dialogue is necessarily judicious and concrete. The first act is the presentation of the strong desires of Bharat and Raj. Raj is highly professional in his behaviour. His concepts are very clear. His dominance is seen everywhere in the play. He makes very clear the procedure of advertising to his friend Bharat in the following words. "You have some influence with the journalists, contacts in the right places. I don't know them personally. You have to know them personally to get the best out of them. You dine with them, you drink with them. That's important" (11)

The world of Bharat and Raj is a shallow world of business. Bharat can't stand people who 'don't dress well.' Through Bharat, Ezekiel effectively and vividly portrays the world of executives. "We are the busy active men of the city. We are all in good jobs. Our homes are well furnished. We read good books—foreign books of course. We are not slaves of caste. We are not superstitious. We don't make loud gurgling sounds when we drink our tea or soup. Our marriages are not arranged for us. We don't dream about dowries." (16)

The above dialogue shows that Bharat is quick and sharp enough to explain his background. He is optimistic. He carefully scans the situation. The dialogues in the play are transparent enough to make the readers restless. In the first act there is discussion between Bharat and Raj about Nalini's painting. Act one is an account of the lifestyle of these two executives who cooperate with each other. There is a planning that Bharat should arrange the publicity for the painting exhibition of Nalini, a modest young painter. Nalini is a very straightforward and simple girl who escapes from the advances of the two advertising executives. "Nalini herself has the double-personality of the artist, half-woman half-omniscient with the eyes of God, and thus isolated from humanity"[2]

The entire play is about the central character Nalini, who is reluctant to express her attitude clearly. Raj treats painting as a medium for getting closer to Nalini. The motive becomes clear when Bharat enquires about the paintings of Nalini. Bharat is curious to know the standard of Nalini's painting. Raj's prompt reply is: "Does this matter? They are paintings, canvases with colour on them, plenty of colours in various forms" (11)

Act II opens with Nalini, a dream-character, smart, very attractive and possessing no genius for painting.

Nalini: (Sweetly, drawing it out) Hel-lo!
Bharat: Come in, come in. I was expecting you.
Nalini: What a lovely room this is. Did you do it up yourself?
Bharat: (Modestly) Well, not entirely, I consulted a friend. I'm glad you like it. Won't you sit down?
Nalini: (Moving round the room appreciating various features of it. He follows her with eyes and body) I will in a moment. (Pause) So you're going to help me with the publicity for my exhibition? I am so grateful.
Bharat: Don't be grateful so early. I haven't done anything yet. (25-26)

Very soon real Nalini, a devoted artist extracts the confession from Bharat: "I'm sincere enough to tell you now that I don't understand painting, least of all modern painting." (32) The words of Bharat show that he is a hypocrite promoter of arts. Nalini is really interested in art while Bharat's love for art is not true or genuine. His love for modern art and painting is not real. Nalini is innocent. She asks him: "Why choose art?" He says that there is no other alternative. He is not that sort of person who wishes to uplift the masses.

The first Nalini is a pretty girl while the second Nalini appears a genuine artist who exposes Bharat's worthless nihilism. In the third act Raj and Bharat understand that both Nalinis are the products of their imagination.

The play presents a true picture of the current art scene in India. If there is no publicity, nobody can give guarantee of the success of painting exhibition. Bharat explains the tricks of the trade in the following words: "You have to do exactly what the others do. You'll have a note written about yourself, you'll make copies of it and send

them around . . . you'll invite some big shot to open the exhibition. He'll make a speech praising your paintings. You'll arrange to have him garlanded. You'll socialise with the journalists who attend." (21)

Bharat is a representative of a lost generation of sophisticated Indians who is puzzled and lost about his identity. He is also a symbol of aimless society. The bitter truth is explained by Bharat in the above lines. It is through the portrait of Nalini that we are shown the 'real art world.' It narrates the struggle of a genuine artist like Nalini who wants to be successful. Bharat calls himself an intellectual but it is a false idea which should not be taken very seriously. The play ends with an international whimper. The play is a realistic satire which depicts the art world of India. As far as structure is concerned, the play is well-knit.

Ezekiel's second play *Marriage Poem* is a one-act tragi-comedy which is more like a comedy than tragedy. It has irony as well as sympathy as its undertone. Undercurrent of discontent is narrated in the play. Naresh is tired of his wife Mala. He tries to seek solace in the arms of other women. The result of this extra-marital affair is a constant source of sorrow for Mala. Mrs. Lall comes forward to help her. Mala ask Mrs. Lall: "What would you do if your husband became attached to another woman?" Mrs. Lall replies quickly: "I would make a terrible fuss. I would harass my husband night and day till he gave her up. I'll complain to the Home Minister." (65)

The advice of Mrs. Lall is of no use to Mala. She does not want to lose her husband while her husband wants to continue his extra-marital affairs. The gap between the husband and wife further widens. Naresh cannot discontinue his weekly meetings with Leela, who equally loves Naresh. She says: "I'm happy when I'm with you. I'm happy to be loved by you." (69)

Ezekiel mocks at the institution of marriage where such loveless lovemaking is seen. Mala is shown as a possessive wife of Naresh whose ironic statement about her husband expresses the bitter truth. "He is happy with me but he doesn't know it." (76) Mala loves Naresh desperately though he says: "Men run away from women who know them too well." (79) Naresh is running away from his wife Mala, though she loves him wholeheartedly.

Gesture language is an important component of the play. Mala's disappointment is seen when Mala is seen "eating slices of bread which she dips into her cup of tea." When she picks up a magazine and flips over its pages nervously, it is just to release the tension. The play has its visual effects. It is to be seen rather than read. "In the brilliant combination of dream and reality, Naresh looks like the married version of Bharat. While his wife, Mala, appears to be the typical suffering, nagging sort of wife who just don't know what to do with her husband"[3] Interplay of dream and reality is again used by Ezekiel.

> Naresh raises his arms slowly in the crucifixion pose against the door. Leela enters slowly, dream-walks towards him, wipes his face lightly with a handkerchief.
>
> Naresh: (Opening his eyes) You! I thought you would never come back.
>
> Leela: I'll always come back whenever you need me. (80)

This dream is interrupted by the children's knock at the door. Naresh and Mala wake up to reality. Naresh makes his reunion with Mala finally. Both the sides of marriage are depicted in the play. Mutual love and sympathy between couples is a must for the cheerfulness in married life. Distrust and dishonesty can make the matter worse for the couple.

The third play in the volume *The Sleepwalkers* is a farce, which creates an impression of a study in the contrast of Indian and American attitudes. Mr. Edward Morris, an American magazine publisher, literally drops in from the air. He is interested in social life of Indians. The characters wear masks because, symbolically, they are not authentic Indians. "Nissim Ezekiel tries another device, one possibly borrowed from Absurd Theatre and the plays of Jean Genet, the use of masks to suggest stereotypes or hypocritical posing, in *The Sleepwalkers*, the third and last play in the volume"[4]

Mrs. Morris is a typical American woman who is eager to know the details of Sari and how to wear it.

> Mrs. Morris: (To Mrs. Raman) My dear, how do you wear that delightful thing? Doesn't it ever fall off?
>
> Mrs. Raman: It falls off only when I want it to fall off. (89)

The most hilarious episode in the farce is the theme of Miss Ganguli's plays. She writes on family planning. She tells Mr. Morris that the villagers are convinced of the family planning programme but 'there's no entertainment in the villages or anything like that' (93). Mr. Morris suggests that a night club is necessary for every Indian village for entertainment. "The similarity of the vulgar American idiots and their Indian toadies is cleverly suggested in a farcical scene in which Mrs. Morris and Mrs. Kapur exchange clothes and both look silly. Satire of this kind tends to degenerate into vicious caricature."[5]

This play deals with the self-deception employed by the educated elite. Ezekiel's decision to tackle the normal, everyday experience of living in urban India is certainly remarkable. His plays did not receive much critical attention. Ezekiel never claimed any joint exploration of his plays, by his audience and himself, instead he wished to turn his plays into statements. Ezekiel's contribution to the dramatic form is considerable.

NOTES

1. Nissim Ezekiel, *Three Plays* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop 1969), p. 9.
2. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1984), p. 732.
3. Chetan Karnani, *Nissim Ezekiel* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974), p.121
4. H.M. Williams, *Indo-Anglian Literature: 1800-1970: A Survey.* (Madras: Orient Longman, 1976) p.124.
5. *Ibid.*, p.125

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Death, Old Age and Celebration of Life in Girish Karnad's *Yayati*

MUKESH RANJAN VERMA

Yayati is the first play of Girish Karnad that he wrote in 1960, and it is the most recent play to be translated by him into English, which he did after forty seven years in 2007. All his plays, with the exception of *Anjumallige*, have been translated into English from their original Kannada version by the dramatist himself. About *Yayati* he says in his 'Preface' to the English version:

> But I have not, so far, allowed *Yayati* to be published in English, although an excellent translation was produced by Priya Adarkar as early as the mid-sixties. For some reason I felt uncomfortable with the work and decided to treat it as part of my juvenilia. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008, vii)

Karnad does not explain what it was about the play that made him uncomfortable, but it certainly does not deserve to be dismissed as part of his juvenilia. He may have gone on maturing as a dramatist with each play but *Yayati* contains all the features that mark his successive plays—use of myth as an 'objective correlative' of some contemporary situation or crisis, a blend of classical Sanskrit and contemporary European dramatic forms, a complex weaving of multiple themes in one plot, a sympathetic insight into the weaknesses of human nature and an excellent sense of dialogue.

In his paper, "In Search of a New Theatre" which was published in *Contemporary India* edited by Carla M. Borden, and which has been used as a revised extract as the 'Afterword' of the English translation of *Yayati*, Karnad describes how he came to write this play. In 1960, he got Rhodes scholarship to go to Oxford for further

studies. It was a momentous occasion in his life. Recalling it, he writes:

> It is difficult to describe to a modern Indian audience the traumas created by this event. Going abroad was a much rarer occurrence in those days; besides, I came from a large, close-knit family, and was the first member of the family ever to go abroad. My parents were worried lest I decide to settle down outside India, and even for me, though there was no need for an immediate decision, the terrible choice was implicit in the very act of going away. (73)

He was faced with a crisis—should he submit to the expectations of his parents from him or should he, ignoring those expectations, look only to live his own life, exploring its potentiality to the full. It was this stressful situation that led to his writing *Yayati*. The outcome surprised, as he says, Karnad himself. He had always wanted to be a poet but here he was writing a play, that too not in English, the language of his literary aspirations, but in Kannada, the language he grew up with. What surprised him more was the choice of the subject which he had taken from ancient Indian mythology 'from which I had believed myself alienated.' (73) The story of King Yayati in the *Mahabharata* also presented a situation in which the expectations of the father put the son in a crisis of choices. The story, somehow, struck a chord in Karnad. He writes:

> While I was writing the play, I saw it only as an escape from my stressful situation. But looking back, I am amazed at how precisely the myth reflected my anxieties at the moment, my resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future. By the time I had finished working on *Yayati*—during the three weeks it took the ship to reach England and in the lonely cloisters of the university—the myth enabled me to articulate to myself a set of values that I had been unable to arrive at rationally. (73-74)

Karnad has never used a myth merely to present a story from the past. He weaves a complex pattern of themes in that myth. This feature of his dramatic writing is evident from his very first play. His *Yayati* is not the story of a son's great sacrifice for his father as narrated in the original story from the *Mahabharata*. While it reveals the various shades of basic human passions like love, lust, jealousy and hatred, it leaves us face to face with the bigger issues of death,

old age and celebration of life in its different forms. Though, unlike the original story of the *Mahabharata*, the story in the play does not revolve around the 'sanjeevani vidya' of the sage Shukracharya which had the power to bring back the dead to life and for the acquisition of which both the gods and the demons were vying, yet it has a strong presence in the background of the story of the play. The focus, however, of Girish Karnad's play is not on the urge for everlasting life but on what life means to different persons and how a person's urge to lead a life of his or her own choice impinges on another person's right to live as per his or her own dreams.

In the *Prologue* to the play the dramatist underlines the dialectics of life and death. The Sutradhara says:

> Our play . . . deals with death. A key element in its plot is the 'sanjeevani' vidya—the art of reviving the dead, which promises release from the limitations of the fleeting life this self is trapped in. The gods and the rakshasas have been killing each other from the beginning of time for the possession of this art. Humans have been struggling to master it. Sadly we aspire to become immortal but cannot achieve the lucidity necessary to understand eternity. Death eludes definition. Time coils into a loop, reversing the order of youth and old age. (6)

In the play, Karnad keeps it ambiguous whether Yayati, the great Aryan king of the Bharat clan, married Devayani, the daughter of Shukracharya, the chief priest at the court of the king of the rakshasas, for the sake of the sanjeevani vidya or because he fell in love, as he claims, with her when he rescued her from the well in which she had been thrown by Sharmishtha, the princess of the rakshasas. Sharmishtha, who is now living as Devayani's slave in her palace, provokingly but convincingly, says to Devayani that it was indeed Yayati's hankering after immortality that made him so readily accept her as his wife:

> Yayati. The scion of the Bharat dynasty. He is not short of women, is he? Women of his own kind. Sensuous Kshatriya maidens. Virgins reared for him. But he chooses you. Why? You know the answer. You, only you, could lead him to the ultimate goal: a sanctuary beyond the reach of death. Ah! The joy of turning the funeral pyres of one's kinsmen into altars for one's own fire sacrifice. The timeless thrill of it. (11)

Devayani tries to snub her by referring to her father who fawned on the sage to win his favours. Sharmishtha turns this jab into an example to buttress her argument:

> Precisely. Like my father. So I know that kind intimately, you see. From the inside. Those crowds there. To have the power to look upon them from a distance, supreme and untouched by the fear of mortality, to sigh wearily and wait as they crumble into dust and the next generation takes their place. I have seen my father drugged on that ambition, panting for that supreme privilege. And now I see him in Yayati, who has the world in his palm. And your father, the great Shukracharya, has the means to keep it there. For eternity. That is what he lusts for. (12)

Though Sharmishtha claims that Yayati is moved by an irresistible desire for immortality—and if one keeps the mythical story of Yayati in mind as well as the words of the Sutradhara in the beginning of the play, it sounds convincing—the play does not support this premise. Neither by his actions nor by his words does Yayati at any time in the play suggest that it is indeed the sanjeevani vidya that he is hankering after. In fact, when Shukracharya puts a curse on him for his decision to marry Sharmishtha after having fallen for her charm, Yayati is not anguished at having lost the opportunity of acquiring the sanjeevani vidya and thus the chance to escape death. He is desperate that he has been hurled into old age and decrepitude before time. This will deprive him of the celebrations of life which he loves so much. He is not bothered about death. Earlier, when Sharmishtha says to him that he is talking about death as if it was another woman ready to succumb to his charm and that one cannot flirt with one death and then pass on to taste the next one, Yayati does not respond to her in the way a person desperate to overcome death might have done. He says to Sharmishtha that she need not talk to him about death as he deals with death everyday. At her retort that it is other people's death that he is referring to, he says, "The only death real to me is that of someone else. Not mine. I never think of my own death. That is not for me a possibility at all." (24) Death for him is thus not an issue.

If we pay a close attention to what Yayati says to Sharmishtha, Pooru and Chitralekha, it becomes evident that he is interested in

the present and not in a distant future. His concern is to enjoy what life offers. "Women, music, dance, celebrations, my subjects. I love life" (24), he says to Sharmishtha. At first, he does not pay much attention to Sharmishtha. He has heard complaints about her and has not been very happy about the situation but has not so far given any personal attention to her. Even when he talks to her on the eve of his son's arrival in the palace after a long absence, it is merely with a wish to forbid her to behave in an abominable manner and create nasty scenes on that happy occasion. It is only when he listens to her version of her story –so far he had seen everything from Devayani's point of view– that he realizes the force of her personality. He falls to her charm. His sleeping with her is not merely a momentary affair. He feels that he cannot let her go out of his life and for this he is ready to marry her. An infuriated Devayani asks Sharmishtha to leave the palace but Yayati will not listen to it. When Devayani asks him why he wants to marry Sharmishtha, he says:

> Because I feel bewitched by her. Even now, at this moment, I want her. I have never felt so entranced by a woman. What is it? Is it some spell she has cast? Some sorcery? I can feel youth bursting out within me again. Her beauty, her intelligence, her wit, her abandon in love. Not to marry her is to lose her, don't you see? I must have her. (30)

Karnad has presented Yayati as a man who lives on a physical plane. For such a man youth – the age which can enable him to live life to the full – is the most important thing in life. That is why old age and decrepitude, and not death, frightens him the most. The severest blow for him is Shukracharya's curse that he will become old and decrepit that very night, much before he could even think of such a possibility.

One of the strengths of this play is Girish Karnad's forceful dramatization of Yayati's anger, desperation, fear, hope and final submission when he is faced with Shukracharya's curse. At first he cannot believe it. He does not think that he has done anything wrong to deserve it. In his eyes, he had a right to have a relation with Sharmishtha. The kings were supposed to have many wives. He had also made it clear to Devayani that her own position as the queen would not be affected by this marriage and that she would continue

to be by his side in all public functions and religious ceremonies. He had either not understood or chosen not to pay any attention to Devayani's hurt pride. She had told him that she would accept any other woman as his wife but not Sharmishtha. Yayati, however, in his own royal pride, had refused to listen to her. So he becomes angry when he hears about Shukracharya's curse that he will lose his youth and become decrepit by nightfall. His first outburst is against the sage. He calls him 'wizened old fool,' 'a desiccated fool . . . who can't see beyond his silly offspring' and 'shrivelled mendicant.' (42) He is also angry with Sharmishtha and accuses her of being responsible for all this. He is restless and raving. Sharmishtha tells him to have patience and accept the situation with fortitude: "No one can escape old age. You have just hastened its arrival. Let us accept it. Let us go away from the city. I'll come with you. I'll share the wilderness with you." (42) She tells him that everything has so far been a game for him, but life has more important things in store and they should seek them in solitude. But Yayati is not yet ready to accept that there can possibly be any other life for him than the one chosen by him:

> Solitude? What are you talking about? I don't want solitude. I can't bear it. I want people around me. Queens, ministers, armies, enemies, the populace. I love them all. Solitude? The very thought is repulsive. If I have to know myself, Sharmishtha, I have to be young. I must have my youth. (43)

Thus for Yayati, youth is synonymous with life. The very thought of decrepitude is unbearable for him. When Pooru, who has been sent to appease Shukracharya, does not return soon enough for a restless Yayati, his father does not hesitate in casting doubts on him: "Why isn't he back? He must be celebrating his youth, his chance to rule the world." (43) Pooru returns with the news that Shukracharya had relented to the extent of granting a conditional release from his curse. The curse will have no immediate effect if a young man agrees to take upon himself the curse and exchange his youth with Yayati's old age. Yayati is relieved and happy as he has no doubt that there can be any difficulty in finding such a man. There must be several young men in his kingdom who would be happy to take the curse of their king upon themselves. He says: "That is good news

indeed. So I don't lose my youth, thank god. What a relief! So you see Sharmishtha. You were asking me to accept the curse as though that was the end of everything. You wanted me to turn my back on life." (45-46) When he comes to know that there is no one who will take his curse, he is once again overcome with gloom. He tries to defend himself against what might seem a fear of old age: "I am not trying to shun old age, Pooru. I am not that foolish. I know it is inevitable. Let me have my normal term of youth. I shall take back the curse and whatever comes with it after a few years." (47)

This is not the statement of a man hankering after eternal life. He does not even pray for an eternal youth. What he wants is to prolong his youth till he is satiated with its physical enjoyments. Karnad presents Yayati as a mighty king who enjoys his victories both in and outside the battlefield, as a man who celebrates life in all its youthful activities. So for him, old age and not death is the antithesis of life. He is desperate to retain his youth but it is to his credit that he, unlike the Yayati of the *Mahabharta*, does not ask his son to take upon himself the curse of his father. In the mythical story, Yayati has five sons. He goes to each of them asking them to take his old age. While the elder four refuse to do so, the youngest son, Pooru, agrees to it. In the play, Pooru is the only son and it is he who says to his father, and not vice versa, that he will take upon himself the curse, and Yayati is not ready even to listen to him: "Shut up, fool. I . . . I refuse to talk to you." (49) To Chitralekha, he says 'genuinely anguished':

> I swear to you it never occurred to me that he would accept the curse. I was dumbfounded when he told me. Even now I am willing to take it back on my shoulders. What father would wish such a fate on his son? Pooru took it on of his own free will. Without a word from me. Without saying a word to me. (63)

Though Yayati says that he is willing to take back his curse, he does not make any effort to do so until Chitralekha's suicide rudely forces him to accept his fate. It takes the abrupt end of an innocent life to make him realize the true meaning of life:

> I thought there were two options—life and death. No, it is living and dying we have to choose between. And you have shown me that dying

> can go on for all eternity. Suddenly, I see myself, my animal body frozen in youth, decaying, deliquescing, turning rancid. You are lying on your pyre, child, burning for life, while I sink slowly in the quagmire, my body, wrinkleless and grasping, but unable to grasp anything. (68)

Yayati now takes back his curse from his son and as an old man leaves for forest accompanied by Sharmishtha. The most remarkable feature of the play is the dramatist's success in bringing out the lust, the pride, the frustration, the desperation and the final submission of Yayati very effectively. It is this very thing that takes Yayati out of a myth and makes him alive with the aspirations and weaknesses of a man. Thus Karnad's Yayati becomes a symbol of man's hankering after youth and celebrations of life.

In the case of Pooru also, Karnad does not adhere to his image presented in the myth in the *Mahabharta*. He does not present Pooru's acceptance of old age and decrepitude as a glorious act of sacrifice of a son for his father. In the myth, Pooru remains merely a symbol of an ideal son without having any personality of his own apart from it. Karnad's Pooru is a gentle and loving person who does not have any big ambition in life. He, in fact, feels stifled under the glorious deeds of his forefathers up to which he is expected to live. The hermitage where he was sent to study 'resonated,' as he says, with the wonderful deeds that his ancestors had performed when they were even younger than him. These tales made him feel 'stunted' (35). He says to Yayati:

> I had not the slightest inclination to follow in the steps of my illustrious forefathers. I found their deeds pompous. I was bored by the hermitage, unembarrassedly. I wanted to run away from all that it represented: that history, those triumphs, those glorious ideals. (35)

The story in the *Mahabharata* holds that Pooru, when he came to rule, turned out to be a great king. Karnad does not go that far. He presents Pooru as a sensitive, dreaming young man more interested in the mysteries of life than craving for its successes and thrills. He says, "I just want to go somewhere where I can sit quietly and ask myself questions. Just ask questions. Not seek answers." (38) The glorious heights achieved by his ancestors do not inspire him. To the disappointment of Yayati, he says that he 'shall seek to be a

worm.' (37) However, when he finds that nobody is ready to take the curse of Yayati on himself, not even for all the riches in the world, he sees this as an opportunity to establish himself in the glorious tradition of his ancestors, albeit in his own way. To Sharmishtha's outburst that "the desire for self-sacrifice is a rank perversion," he responds: "I want to root myself back in my family. I want to realize the vision that drove my ancestors." (50) Even Chitralekha, his young bride, is thrilled to hear about it:

> Cry? Why should I cry? I should laugh. I should cheer . . . except that I have been so unfair to him. So cruelly unjust. I thought he was an ordinary man. What a fool I have been! How utterly blind! I am the chosen one and I . . . Which other woman has been so blessed? (56)

So for both Pooru and Chitralekha, Pooru's decision to take Yayati's curse upon himself is a glorious deed. It is Pooru's own way of giving a meaning to life. Thus life has altogether a different value for the father and the son. For Yayati it is an assertion of the self, while for Pooru it is a negation of the self. Karnad, however, does not succeed in making the character of Pooru as convincing as he makes the character of Yayati. The transition in the character of Pooru is rather sudden. The man who claimed to be uninterested in the achievements of his ancestors suddenly grabs the opportunity of 'rooting' himself in his family.

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Back to the Culture of One's Own: A Study of Chinua Achebe and Alex Haley

PASHUPATI JHA

Contrary to modern individualistic ways, the past history of mankind was conditioned by group/clan behaviour manifested in customs, religious beliefs, social attitudes, rites and rituals, commonly called the culture of that community. Culture becomes a cementing force within that clan to neutralize unruly individualistic urges that may disrupt the peace of that place. This clan culture of the past influences the present too. As Horace Porter says: "Past are never really past" (19). But with the rapid advancements of the West, it was assumed that the cultures of Asia and Africa are backward looking and inferior, in dire need of Western enlightenment. This affected the literary mindset of the Westerners to the extent of distorting reality of those regions.

It was quite difficult to undermine this deep-rooted elitist attitude in literature, coloured and conditioned by the European modes and models. It is particularly difficult when a writer of African birth or origin wants to depict the dark continent in a different light by probing the depth of things with compassion, commitment and concern. This daunting challenge is taken up by Chinua Achebe from Nigeria and Alex Haley from USA, with cool and confident artistic skill and aplomb.

Albert Chinua Achebe started his career with the mission of pointing to the Western critics that there was another side of the story than the ones narrated by the likes of Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*) and Joyce Cary (*Mister Johnson*) which not only the Europeans but the Africans too must know, if they want to have a better understanding and appreciation of the African society and culture. As pointed out by Peter T. Simatei: "Eurocentric norms and practices get promoted in the guise of universal and eternal values assigned to western literatures" (230). Achebe's stance was to repudiate this wrongly entrenched idea, but his task was not easy because he had to operate within colonial condition: that too, in a co-

lonial language. But such was his zeal that he turned the table against his opponents, though few others had already tried to attempt the same:

> Most first-generation African novelists who were writing in English found themselves in a double-bind situation. As product of a colonial system of mission education in English, they had to re-assert their own unique African sensibility in a borrowed tongue. Paradoxically, they appropriated the English language as a counter weapon to perform a psychologically affirmative function and to inscribe new meanings. (Pandurang 17)

Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe, is a folk-hero, who rises from rags to riches by a rigid adherence to Igbo values of tough labour, physical might at times verging on violence, and age-old rituals. For the sake and survival of clan ideals, he does not hesitate to kill his surrogate son Ikemefuna, disinherit his eldest son Nwoye, and accept exile for himself and his family for years for a mere accidental killing. He goes to the extent of hacking the court messenger of the Whites to avenge his humiliation, but finally ends his own life when things totter around him in total disarray, leaving hardly any alternative before him.

Haley's *Roots* deals with Kunta Kinte of Mandinka tribe of the Gambia. Kunte's struggle to cling to African roots and culture is set in a more sprawling and intense narrative that spills over to seven generations of slaves striving for freedom from the White subjugation of their lives and souls. Kinte's attachment to African culture and rituals is transferred on to his daughter Kizzy, who constantly pours in the ears of her children and grandchildren that they are Africans first, and they ought to remain so, despite their forced geographical location in a different continent. In a way, Haley carries forward the aim of Achebe through the help of a more poignant and moving story-line. He has, furthermore, no constraint of language or ideology, because he was living in USA as its citizen. This paper makes a modest attempt to analyze that the salvation for Africans lies not in the intellectual and rational comprehension of things around them, but in the emotional attachment to their custom and culture.

Things Fall Apart centres round the village of Umuofia in Nigeria where people of the Igbo clan have been living peacefully since generations. Their life has all the idyllic and pastoral bliss; here is the depiction of the first rain and the resultant rejoicing all around:

> The earth quickly came to life and the birds in the forests fluttered around and chirped merrily. A vague scent of life and green vegetation was diffused in the air. As the rain began to fall more soberly and in smaller liquid drops, children sought for shelter, and all were happy, refreshed and thankful. (Achebe 92)

Okonkwo lives in such a pastoral clan where the status of a man is measured by the titles won by him, by the number of his wives and children, and the size and mounds of yam in his barn. Born of a lazy father, he has risen in his clan by the sheer virtue of consistently slogging many hours in his fields for years on end. Physically very strong, he has beaten the most famous wrestler of all the nine villages around. In addition, he has won many important titles of his tribe. Living rigidly and rigorously by the dictates of old customs and rituals, a real crisis comes his way when he is expected to participate in the killing of his surrogate son, Ikemefuna. A weaker man than Okonkwo might have faltered or withdrawn, but he is so much conditioned by his cultural codes that he himself administers the finishing blow; but he becomes restless and deeply troubled for many a day and fails to sleep for many months. But the same clan culture boomerangs on him when he kills, by sheer chance, the young son of Ezeudu. He has to stealthily leave his home and hearth behind and hurriedly run away with his family to his mother's village:

> His life had been ruled by a great passion—to become one of the lords of the clan. That had been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting. (92)

These two events show that Okonkwo can pay any price to cling to the demands of his cultural mores. Yet, things turn much more difficult when the Western missionaries and colonizers invade his idyllic Eden. He has to face the shocking and sudden conversion of his eldest son, Nwoye, to Christianity. He beats his son brutally and is about to kill him when some kin intervenes and saves the young boy. Because of the rational Christian religion, the pagan gods of Igbo clan are ridiculed as "pieces of wood and stone" (103). Gradually a lot of Igbo people feel drawn towards the new religion making Okonkwo pale with fear about the future of his dead ancestors:

> Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his father crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacri-

> fice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children all the while praying to the white man's god. If such a thing were ever to happen, he, Okonkwo, would wipe them off from the face of the earth. (108)

Yet in this effort to restore the pristine glory of his religion, it is finally Okonkwo who is wiped off. When he is humiliated by men of the District Commissioner, he kills the court messenger just outside the village meeting, hoping that the entire clan will rise against the White men. But when nothing like that happens, he is stricken with agonizing grief: "He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women" (129). Finding no way out to save his cultural beliefs, Okonkwo finally hangs himself to death, a tragic and poignant end for this tribal hero.

While the fight for cultural roots ends tragically in *Things Fall Apart*, in Haley's *Roots*, written some two decades later, the struggle is finally successful. It is a monumental work both in shape and substance and its publication is heralded as "a kind of cultural episode" (Scott 319). The novel has sprawling narrative, a kind of gigantic struggle spread over several generations of black slaves clinging to their past codes and conventions to sustain themselves in their heroic struggle for freedom from their white masters. Thus while Achebe deals with pre-colonial encounter, Haley is presenting the epic struggle that was begun many decades earlier when the blacks were already captured, tortured, traumatized and bastarded.

The plot of the novel begins in 1750 with Kunta Kinte of the village of Jaffure in the country Gambia, West Africa. The initial pages outline the idyllic life of the Mandinka tribe where all individual and social actions are regulated by tribal codes and conventions coming since generations. Mandinkan men are expected to grow groundnut while their women are assigned the cultivation of rice and the weaving of dundiko, the African dress. These people are so proud of their blackness that they even measure up the beauty of a woman in that way—the more black the woman, the more beautiful she is declared to be. All social customs, from family to community level, are pre-codified and pre-assigned. Every tribal is taught that there are two selves of each individual—one within and the other, larger self, in all those whose blood and lives he shares. All youths are rigorously trained for physical and mental stamina

and strength, to face any challenge from the alien and inimical elements. They are also subjected to special training in the art of smelling danger, the danger from forest animals and white slave-catchers, the latter a "worse danger than lions and panthers" (Haley 28).

But Kunta, just out of his manhood training and full of dreams, unfortunately forgets to smell the danger for a fraction of a second and is trapped by a slave-catcher in the forest and transported to America. Sold to John Waller of Virginia for eight hundred and fifty dollars, Kunta tries many a time to run away, but all his attempts turn futile. Yet, with each sunrise in an alien land, he fondly recollects that the same sun rises in his native Africa too, which he considers "the navel of the earth" (212). The recollection of his cultural roots in Africa inspires him again to make another attempt at freedom, but this time, he is not only recaptured and beaten to pulp and pushed to the brink of death, but half of his right foot is also chopped off so that he would not run away again.

Finally accepting his fate, his stay in America, what Kunta can do to extend the African blood in a foreign country! If he cannot return to his family in Jaffure, he can very well raise another family of blacks by marrying Bell, a slave woman of the same plantation. When he is blessed with a daughter, he goes through an elaborate naming ritual befitting the Mandinka tribe back home and calls her Kizzy, meaning "stay put." For the first time after many years of his captivity, he experiences a sense of fulfilment, a feeling of satisfaction, of "deep pride and serenity in the knowledge that the blood of the Kintes, which has coursed down through the centuries like a mighty river, would continue to flow for still another generation" (340).

A daughter's gift results into a fresh beginning for Kunta Kinte: he has something now to implant the seed of African culture and see the same growing by the day before his bright, black eyes. With a refreshed zeal verging on a rejuvenating ritual, he whispers essential African words, very much like Indian *mantras*, in the eager ears of Kizzy—he wants to mould her as a true African, proud of her ancestors, their culture and past glory. When she grows up fast into a black beauty, Kinte again thinks of his native village where he could have demanded a hefty bride-price from her suitors. But in America, he can think of Noah, a black slave boy, healthy, honest and hard-working. Kunta has an instant sense of identification with him when Noah confides in him his urge to escape from the White plantation.

When Kizzy's hand is detected in the forged travel-documents used by Noah, she is sold and bundled to another plantation, leaving her dazed dad behind.

From this point onward, the story-line takes up the never-ending ordeal of Kizzy in the difficult task of saving her honour and finally grooming her children as true Africans, not ashamed of their black colour, but proud of their cultural heritage. Her new master, Tom Lea of North Carolina, is a ruthless man who repeatedly rapes her despite her equally repeated requests to spare her from further defilements. Yet every time the inevitable happens, she heaves a sigh of relief that her proud parents are not there "to see—and share—her shame" (435). But her humiliation makes her tougher inside and she takes a determined vow: "Before she fell asleep, Kizzy decided that however base her baby's origin, however light his colour, whatever name the massa forced upon him, she would never regard him as other than the grandson of an African" (438).

Kizzy gives birth to Chicken George, who eventually marries another black woman, Matilda, and their family grows further from generation to generation. Because of the economic crisis, a time comes when this entire family is to be separated. Although very old now, Kizzy is conscious of the mission entrusted to her by her father Kunta Kinte, to cling to African cultural roots at all costs. So she tells Matilda to remind the African saga to all the coming children:

> don't forgit to tell'em 'bout my folks, my mammy Bell, an' my African pappy name Kunta Kinte, what be yo' chillun's great-great gran' pappy.' *Hear* me, now! Tell'em 'bout me, 'bout my George, 'bout yo 'selves, too.' An' 'bout what we been through 'midst differen' massas. Tell de chilluns all de res' about who we is! (583)

They go on struggling to sustain their Black beliefs and finally their freedom from the Whites comes through the Emancipation Edict of Abraham Lincoln in 1863. Thus, the long struggle and strife of the many generations of Kunta Kinte is over; they do get freedom without sacrificing their African culture, and they enjoy it all the more:

> The *jubilation* in the slave row was *beyond any measure* now as they *poured* out across the big-house front yard and up the entry lane to reach the big road to join the hundreds already there, *milling about, leaping and springing up and down, whooping, shouting, singing, preaching, praying. "Free, Lawd, free . . ."* (643, Italics mine)

In this way, while political forces finally come to help the cultural urge of the Blacks to be free from slavery in *Roots*, in *Things Fall Apart* the political elements work against them, resulting into the tragic suicide of Okonkwo. Yet the common concern is quite clear in both the novels that a sustained cultural resurgence is a pre-condition for achieving freedom from bondage. In this process, both Achebe and Haley widened the scope and the meaning of the novel as such that art is less cerebral and more emotional. Even if you tell your story without much polish and restructuring, the sheer poignancy of the situation and event will automatically shape it into a moving piece of literature.

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Expiation and Redemption in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* (Bloomsbury, London, 2004) has made a major contribution to the world of fiction. The author, an émigré from strife-ridden Afghanistan and a doctor by profession, lives in the United States. It is his native country that forms the background of this heart-rending novel. This is his debut novel, his second being *A Thousand Splendid Suns* which is equally popular. *The Kite Runner*, first published in 2003, is the winner of many awards, including the Penguin/Orange Reader's Group Prize, 2006 and 2007. It has now been adapted into a successful feature film. It is perhaps the first novel by a member of the Afghan Diaspora which is written in the aftermath of nine-eleven and does not project a dismal picture of Afghanistan, as most of the books and films on the country do, talking of the atrocities against women and religious fundamentalism. Instead, it gives us a heart-warming picture of a people and culture who have suffered greatly at the hands of countries with vested self-interests.

The Kite Runner has a variety of themes. It is a story of sacrifice, of friendship, of the relation between father and son, of sin, redemption, atonement and love. It is also about the ethnic turmoil, fanaticism and religious intolerance, war and forgiveness. We also come to know of the immense capacity of man to mete out cruelty on his fellow beings and the story gives a graphic picture of Afghanistan during Taliban rule, a rule which turned the beautiful country upside down, dragging it all the way to its primitive past and in the process, breaking the backbone of a bold and brave people.

However, it is the resonant theme of expiation and redemption that stands out of the whole assortment of issues that the novel deals with. *Expiation* in Islam is called *kaffarah*. The novel is a story of the expiation and redemption of Amir, the protagonist and narrator,

the expiation and redemption of Amir, the protagonist and narrator, and it is through him that we come to know of the immense impact that a wrong deed leaves on the psyche of man and to the limitless extent he can go for the atonement of his misdeeds. The novel ends on a note of hope not only for the central character but also for the reader because it seems that all that is noble in human nature is not yet totally dead and 'all's well' with the world.

The book begins with the metaphor of two kites, floating in the air side by side. Amir is reminded of Hassan, and the date is December 2001, which is nearly twenty-six years after the unfettered innocence in his twelve-year old life came to an abrupt halt following an incident in the winter of 1975. Amir has carried the burden of guilt all these years though he himself was never a party to any crime. But the witnessing of the rape of Hassan, his best friend and ally, and his inaction in the whole incident leaves Amir burdened with remorse and a sense of inadequacy. The incident becomes the albatross around his neck and leaves a revolting mark on his memory. He tries to forget but realizes that the past, however much one tries, can never be obliterated from human memory, because 'the past claws its way out.' (1) Therefore, when Amir receives a phone call from Rahim Khan in Pakistan, he realizes that it is not just his uncle on the line but his 'past of unatoned sins,' (1) a past that is laced with guilt and remorse.

Amir's guilt with which he has lived all these years is magnified due to many reasons. First, being a motherless child he is emotionally dependent on his only parent's approval and the possessiveness that he nurtures for his father is quite natural. But Amir knows that his father, or *Baba* as he calls him, likes Hassan more because the latter shows more 'manly' behaviour and often takes up cudgels on Amir's behalf in fights and skirmishes that is the normal part of a boy's growing up. He also feels that the non-assertive stance taken by his son is not normal and Amir overhears this when his father mentions this to his best friend and business-partner Rahim Khan. Amir even fears that his father might be blaming him for his mother's death during childbirth. Amir's interest in books and his disinclination for the 'manly' things disappoints his father who himself is a splendid specimen of Pashtun manhood. Nearly six and a half feet tall, known for his courage in hunting, having wrestled with a bear bare-handed and the thrower of lavish parties, he is im-

mensely popular in elite Afghan society as an upright man. Therefore, it is quite natural for him to desire something similar in his son. Amir lives in shadow of his father's personality and craves for some approval but it is Hassan, the hare-lipped son of a Hazara servant Ali, who always wins hands down. Ali is an old servant who is polio-stricken and has been associated with Amir's father for the last forty years. His wife Sanauber deserted him just five days after Hassan's birth. The only solace in his life now is his son who is a year younger than Amir. They have been brought up together and even drunk the milk from the same breast of a foster mother as both had been rendered motherless soon after birth; Amir's mother died of hemorrhage while giving birth and Hassan's mother ran away, repulsed by the sight of the cleft-lipped baby. According to Afghan culture, there is brotherhood between people who have fed from the same breast, a 'kinship that not even time could break,' (10) even though there is a vast disparity in their respective status. Hassan is a Hazara boy, belonging to a race considered inferior by Pashtuns (to which Amir belongs) mainly because of Hazaras were Shi'a Muslims amongst the majority of Sunni Muslims. Their Mongolian origin is evident in their physical features, in their slanting eyes and flat noses. But Baba seems to shower his love on Hassan and loves him like his own son. It is much later, long after the death of his father that Amir comes to know why Hassan received so much care and affection from his father. Baba's carefully chosen presents and getting Hassan's hare-lip remedied through plastic surgery were all for the assuagement of his guilt. Hassan was in reality Amir's half-brother, begotten in a fit of passion. Ali, Amir learns later, had been rendered sterile by polio much before he married Hassan's mother.

Another reason for Amir's guilt is Hassan's love and adulation for the former. The author mentions that the first word uttered by Amir was 'Baba' and the first word by Hassan was 'Amir,' thereby implying that as Amir would look up to his father, Hassan would to Amir. In spite of the difference in their social status, and in spite of Amir not considering Hassan a friend in the 'usual sense,' the latter is an inseparable part of his idyllic childhood:. "we were kids who had learnt to crawl together, and no history, ethnicity, society, or religion was going to change that either. I spent most of twelve years of my life playing with Hassan. Sometimes, my entire childhood seems like one long summer day with Hassan, chasing each other

with tangles of trees in my father's yard, playing hide and seek, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, insect torture---with our crowning achievement undeniably the time we plucked the stinger off the bee and tied a string around the poor thing to yank it back every time it took flight." (22)

Hassan is not only a serving boy to Amir, but also the first critic of his literary pursuits. It is Hassan's unstinted admiration for Amir's first story that encourages him to wander into the art of story-telling. Amir's love for books and his writing capabilities infuriate his father who considers this to be an inferior occupation, but Rahim Khan, his father's associate encourages him, leading Amir to believe that it is his uncle who understands him better. But it is Hassan who is more aware of the weaknesses and strengths of his childhood friend. When they confront Assef, a Pashtun Boy with sadistic tendencies and the great bully of the neighbourhood, Amir takes a passive stance and it is Hassan who threatens to hit him in the eye and make him the 'One Eyed Assef' (63) with a shot from his slingshot, a promise that is to be fulfilled many years later by his son. When Amir decides to participate in the local kite-flying tournament and also win it, in order to redeem himself in his father's eyes, it is Hassan who brings him out of his nervousness and encourages him. He is also to be the 'kite runner,' the person who collects the last cut kite, considered a great trophy without which the victory is incomplete. Hassan has the ability to know where the kite will fall even without looking at the direction of the kite. When Amir wins the tournament Hassan runs off to collect the blue kite for his master.

Hassan seems to be more capable than Amir, though it is the latter that has the benefit of education. He can also uncannily read Amir's mind which to him is "a little unsettling, but also sort of comfortable to have someone who always knew what you needed." (54) Hassan's stance with Amir is one of unquestioning love and devotion and he would go to any extent, "for you a thousand times over," (168) as he says, at Amir's bidding. Amir, on the other hand, is often not very nice to Hassan and enjoys deriding him. Hassan's last errand for his idol and master proves to be a crucial point in the novel destroying the peculiar relationship between the two boys. When Hassan goes to collect the blue kite for Amir, he comes face to face with Assef and his two henchmen who are intent upon revenge refusing to let him take away the kite. When Hassan refuses

to part with the precious kite, Assef says that nothing in the world comes without a price. But Hassan is determined to have it and he does pay a heavy price. He is assaulted and raped by Assef and Amir remains hidden behind the rocks, a mute spectator. Amir does not have the courage to come to Hassan's defence and realizes that it is not only the fear of getting hurt but something much deeper that prevented him. "I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself when I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself to believe. I actually *aspired* to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. . . . He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?" (68)

The 'sacrifice' or the 'price' of a mere Hazara servant was of no consequence in Amir's world in which Hazaras were treated with contempt. Jealous of Baba's love for Hassan, and afraid that he will incur the derision of his father when he learns of his act of cowardice Amir, no doubt takes the path of least resistance, hiding behind the superiority of his class, but the betrayal cuts through his soul and never heals. He too pays a price and even decades later, the inner dialogue with his conscience persists. Afterwards, Amir feigns indifference and is afraid to meet the gaze of Hassan. What he fears most is not blame or indignation but "guileless devotion" (91) in his friend's eyes. Things change rapidly after this incident, both on personal and also the political fronts. Amir decides that to live with Hassan is no longer possible because he constantly reminded him of his guilt. So right after his extravagant thirteenth birthday bash, he frames him for stealing some of his birthday presents. Baba, of course, is not ready to believe any of it, refusing to let Ali and Hassan leave. He even forgives Hassan for stealing, an act which he had always preached as an 'unforgivable sin.' Both Amir and Hassan know that if Hassan ever denied the accusation, Baba will believe him, because 'Hassan never lied' (91) and if Baba believed him Amir's true disposition would be revealed. Baba would then never forgive him. So Hassan makes the final sacrifice for Amir, he accepts his 'crime': "This was Hassan's final sacrifice for me. . . . Hassan knew. He knew I'd seen everything in the alley, and I'd stood there and done nothing. He knew I had betrayed him and yet

he was rescuing me once again, for the last time. I loved him in that moment, loved him more than I had ever loved anyone and I wanted to tell them all that. . . . And I *would* have told, except that a part of me was glad. Glad that this would be over soon. Baba would dismiss them, there would be some pain, but life would move on." (92)

Ali and Hassan leave the house in ignominy, much to the sorrow of Baba, who is reluctant to let them go even till the last moment, but Amir is relieved because he intends to start living again with a clean slate. Life in the house is never the same without Hassan and Ali. Within the next five years, after the Russians take over Afghanistan, Amir and Baba have to flee from Kabul to Pakistan. From there they immigrate to America, considered a safe haven, while their country continues to be decimated by constant warfare.

Amir and his father's life in America is a desperate battle to preserve the cultural heritage of their native country and Amir comes to witness the various facets of his father's personality, hitherto unrevealed. Adversity, it is said, is a great leveller and in America the rigid class distinctions, an integral part of Afghan society, are erased. Baba works at a gas station, and they live in an apartment, with weekends spent in flea markets selling second-hand goods in order to make some extra money and also to interact with other Afghan immigrants. But Amir does get his education and becomes a successful writer. His marriage to Soraya, another Afghan émigré, is a happy one, albeit a childless one. Baba succumbs to cancer of the lungs and it seems as if an era has come to an end.

The tentacles of the past reach out to him with a phone call from Pakistan. His uncle Rahim Khan, requests him to visit him in Pakistan and adds: 'There is a way to be good again,' (168) and Amir realizes that his uncle had known of his guilt all along. He reveals to him how Hassan and his wife were killed and their only child Sohrab is in Afghanistan, languishing in some orphanage. He beseeches Amir to bring him out of the living hell that the country has become under the Taliban regime. Amir is at first reluctant to take the perilous journey but realizes that this is his chance of personal redemption. He also realizes what Hassan was to him and how much he really loved him. It is at this juncture that he learns from Rahim Khan that Hassan is his half-brother and Sohrab his nephew. But more than being bound to the task by blood ties, he yearns to atone for his earlier sins.

His journey into his native country is fraught with many obstacles but with the help of some friends he finds out where Sohrab is. He is in the clutches of a Taliban official who is no other than his childhood nemesis Assef. Sohrab has undergone what his father had undergone three decades back. His innocence is gone and he is scarred for life. But Amir does not give up hope and after a terrible and bloody confrontation with Assef, in which Sohrab fulfills his father's old promise to make Assef one-eyed with his sling shot, they flee from Afghanistan. Sohrab is an emotional wreck, and even attempts suicide and Amir sustains serious wounds requiring hospitalization. But all problems are surmounted, even emigration problems, and at last Sohrab comes to America to become the son that Amir and Soraya never had. However, much to their disappointment, Sohrab withdraws into a silent world. The tortures that he has undergone, the sexual assaults are perhaps too much for the five year old to bear.

Amir's final act of expiation is that when he becomes the kite runner for his adopted son, Hassan's son, just the way Hassan had been his. He runs after the last cut kite, a 'grown man running with a swarm of screaming children.' (324) because he had seen a shadow of a smile in Sohrab's face, a smile that had long been absent.

Amir's expiation and redemption now comes full circle and with this the novel ends on a note of optimism. Amir feels the little smile of Sohrab is the coming of spring, "Because when the spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I had witnessed the first flake melting." (324)

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Scheherzade Lives! Duty and Deliverance in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*

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Since the appearance of the French savant, Jacques Derrida, on the campus of Johns Hopkins University in the U.S. in the late 1960s, it will be no exaggeration to say that the Anglo-American world of literary studies and criticism and publishing has witnessed a revolution. As in all revolutions this one too is responsible for unwanted debris—intellectual, moral, aesthetic and literary. Well, if New York and London have felt the ideological convulsions of it all, can Bombay, Delhi, Hyderabad and Madras be far behind? Far from it. Our postgraduate departments of English, especially those in the so-called "metropolitan" universities, under the influence of our young scholars who have had doctoral or post-doctoral sojourn at English or American universities, quickly in a spirit of "bandwagonism" have jumped on to the practice, the ideology, the jargon and indeed the fundamentalism of the New Theories—to which I will return. But there is one outcome I will now deal with, namely, the increasingly changing face of the American novel in the last three to four decades.

Thanks to John Barth, Donald Barthelme, E.L. Doctorow, John Hawkes, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and even Toni Morrison, there is now the visible presence of the anti-novel. Has this new sub-genre, this new "baby," put the earlier versions of the novel out of business? Not quite. Using Marilynne Robinson's one lone example of a Pulitzer Prize winner, I wish to stake the claim that the spirit of Scheherzade lives. Through seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, through novels of manners and morals, through satires and utopias, through experiments with time and chronology, through the tides of naturalism, graphic documentary realism, clas-

sic realism, surrealism, symbolism, through the absurd and the silly, through the new exponents and their advocates of this anti-novel, readers continue to be connoisseurs of novels that tell stories, create characters, weave dialogue and even enclose a vision of life with varying degrees and forms of realism. Robinson in her *Gilead* is an exponent of the traditional Anglo-American novel, a tradition, from both sides of the Atlantic, that stretches roughly from Fielding and Austen to Golding and Amis on the one hand and on the other from Hawthorne and Melville to Bellow and Baldwin.

Even a cursory look at the publishers' catalogues and the statistics of the trade will clarify sufficiently as to whose novels written and published in twentieth-century USA are reprinted repeatedly? As a corollary, whose novels are read substantially more often? Is it the likes of Bellow, Cather, Cooper, Dreiser, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Mailer, Roth, Salinger, Steinbeck and Wharton, or the other kind which practises more froth and puff? With this background, now on to Marilyne Robinson's *Gilead* (2004).

A rave review in *The New York Times*. Proclaimed one of the finest novels of the year. Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award. Then crowned by the most prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. For these reasons alone, Robinson's second novel *Gilead* (2004) must be welcomed. Her first, *Housekeeping* (1981), was given the PEN-Hemingway Award. She has an academic role too, teaching at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her credentials are thus established. Furthermore, keeping in mind that Robinson was born in 1947, she as a creative writer and an intellectual is clearly a product of the post-World War II era. Considering that she has published only two novels and she has risen in the ranks quickly and fast in the last quarter of a century, questions must be posited: Does she subscribe and adhere to, does she swear by the recent, post-Derridean theories about the function of literature and criticism? An indirect response to this query will form the substance of this essay.

It is easy to state the substance of *Gilead*. It depicts rural, middle western America. It deals with a small agricultural town, simple and pastoral, untouched by modern technology. It exists as it did over fifty years earlier. It breathes the spirit of an eerie, essentially conservative, poor, pious, Bible-believing age. While often enough,

the novel is weighed down by Christian theology, by frequent references to and reliance upon the Old and the New Testaments, and the superstition-bound ways of the Iowan town called Gilead (and hence the title), it is not fundamentalist. It may speak about sin and transgression, grace and redemption and the commandments and the lessons of the Scriptures. It is in fact a narrative about moral goodness. It is a parable intent on teaching all about a life of uprightness. Its humanism is incandescent. It is also suffused with a laconic, self-deprecating humour and wisdom which shine because of its innate, abiding concerns reminiscent of St. Augustine and early Christianity. All this, John Ames, the protagonist, the seventy-six-year old pastor of Gilead is anxious (as he is suffering from a failing heart) to impart to his son who is scarcely seven years of age. "I, John Ames," he introduces himself rather grandly, "was born in the Year of Our Lord 1880 in the state of Kansas, the son of John Ames and Martha Turner Ames, grandson of John Ames and Margaret Todd Ames. At this writing I have lived seventy-six years, seventy-four of them here in Gilead, Iowa, excepting studying at the college and at seminary."

It is also autobiographical (John's) replete with anecdotes and episodic interruptions which mesh with the novel's plot. Its ideas and sub-plots tend to be repetitive—as the Bible itself is. This autobiography, one may say, is his long farewell-letter in which he reminisces about his family and life, his hardships, his regret that he has not provided enough to his wife and son. "[My] purpose in writing this . . . is to tell you," he explains to his son, "things which I would have told you if you had grown up with me, things . . . it becomes as a father to teach you. . . . I meant to leave you a reasonably candid testament." There, in essence, is his purpose and his dilemma. Knowing the clear path before him in order to fulfil the Lord's mandate, he is forever beset with doubts about his own mortal insufficiency, human limitations in general and the attending guilt. As a pastor and as a man he is besieged by challenges he must face. Some readers may look upon *Gilead* as an illustrated lecture on the Bible or a clergyman's long sermon. However, it deals with matters mundane as well as those other-worldly. It deals with crises created by the flesh. His heart seems as "parched and sun-stricken"

as often are the American middle-western states of Iowa and Kansas in this narrative.

John recounts his father's search for his father's grave in a bleak landscape ("their desert wanderings"), a journey for expiation. John recalls his friend's son's wayward ways for which the latter has caused his family much heartbreak. From one generation to the next there are acts of disobedience, disloyalty, violations of the codes of conduct (philosophic on the one hand and earthly on the other). To John, the friend's son is like his own who at times may be unbearable, straining his patience, tolerance and his Christian charity to the limit. But John's loyalty to father and son and to posterity always prevails. He is "kindly intended" as well as "considerate" taking into account the harsh realities the world has imposed on him. With "proper worship" which institutionalized Christianity has taught him, he knows and practises "right conduct." If his religion values a moral duty like "Honor Thy Father," he not only sermonizes about it, he has put it into practice. Such is *Gilead*'s protagonist: a good and virtuous man, lives in poverty, believes in giving, a good listener, values writing, does not write as he speaks, makes himself useful and throws away nothing! A genuine catalogue of the attributes of a traditional, moral and genuine Christian. However, a reader cannot help thinking that, at the same time, this man is truly modern.

Through intertwining tales of his family and friends, through recurring references to nature's seasons and the religious observances of the pastors and their flocks, through incidents recollected from a long time ago (in fact, the words "Old, unhappy far-off things and battles long ago" are remembered at the right moment) and through baptisms, weddings and funerals, this seemingly ordinary tale of a modest Reverend John Ames in circumstances none too exciting or inspiring, becomes an epic felt-narrative. By holding up eternal verities as faith, love and conscience, by noting the destructiveness of anger and of thwarted passions and pent griefs, by holding to scrutiny a common man moved by uncommon and unworldly compulsions, Robinson has crafted this exceptional novel. A known critic, James Wood, has reflected that *Gilead* is "demanding, grave and lu-

cid." I wish to conclude by adding that it is also an engaging, provocative and aesthetically rewarding novel.

We know E.M. Forster as a humane, humanistic and a liberal intellectual to the core. His output as a novelist and short-story writer was small but distinguished. In his book *Aspects of the Novel* he felt uneasy that the novel tended to be so atavistic or primitive insofar as it relied so much on telling a story ("the fundamental aspect of the novel is its story-telling"). Isn't the urge to find out how a tale ends a cave man's craving? But after much consideration and soul-searching, Forster grudgingly but with finality conceded that a novel has to tell a story. Those like John Hawkes, who need not be given prominence, have made untenable, immodest and startling claims such as, "the true enemies of the novel [are] plot, character, setting and theme," ought to remember Forster's wise counsel eight decades ago. They should read Robinson's novel *Gilead* published as recently as 2004. In fact the battlegrounds are well demarcated. Does one pursue literature for its own sake, as an end in itself without ulterior, extraneous and ideological expectations brought in by politically motivated readers, critics, academics, historians of literature and a few practising men and women of letters too? If what is happening now to creative literature of late, first in the West and now with us too, won't it happen to classical music, dance, painting or opera? Can we really deny the possibility of universal and eternal verities? Are there always conflicting, indeed opposed, ways of reading great lines and passages from classic literature? Consider:

"The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide."

"A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings."

"And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor."

"What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

"Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.
(That all the quotations are from a single poet need not diminish the effect of what is being argued here.)

So, then, literature in verse or prose, literature from the hoary past or of the contemporary variety and literature whatever its national, ethnic or cultural source, should be read for its own sake and the way it is presented by its creator comprising its language, style, manner, form, structure and his or her purpose explicitly stated or not. Hence, one must congratulate the author of *Gilead* for her courage in resuscitating the more traditional ideas, values and modes in a way they fully deserve.

Dharwad

The Aesthetics of Marginality in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

MONIKA GUPTA and SANGEETA KAINTURA

'Literature of Marginalized' is the term used for literature written by a minority class residing within a nation but distinguished from the other privileged classes in terms of lifestyle and the basic rights, thus causing the uneven status, feeling of inferiority complex and exploitation of the underprivileged ones. With the revolutionary theories such as Marxism, Postcolonialism etc. coming into existence, literature has acquired the title of propagator. Today this genre of literature is flourishing as a separate branch of literature where it is often stated that its aesthetic values lie in the political strifes within the communities. The aesthetics of the marginalized writers is not only a matter of art and its abstract features but it is essential for survival. The inspiration for such works is the real life experience of the subjugated classes who struggle along with the members of the community to benefit the basic needs of life– sense of identity, freedom and feeling.

African-American literature is the literature produced in United States by the writers of African origin. The genre traces its origins to the works of late 18th century where the focus was only on the issues of slavery. But today it deals with variety of themes such as economy, politics, Black Nationalism, racist attitude of America and also the female perspectives in the Black society. The works of these writers always keep their experiences as the background of their work to provide intensity of emotions. This expresses their inner need to develop an original style for their unique experiences.

The major purpose behind writing for these marginalized classes is the claim to create self, the 'self' that is lost under the double oppression of racism and capitalism. The literature in this phase has more of self revealing and moves like a journey towards the search for identity. It is not concerned with any usefulness or morality. It is merely a record of survival of these neglected classes

casting not a single character but giving the collective voice to that character. No story is individual in nature; every character represents the community and its proceedings. Literature provides the medium where these subjugated people can present their problems before the other liberated classes.

Toni Morrison recreated the history of slavery in 1987 with the publication of her fifth novel *Beloved* which grabbed the prestigious award of Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. She came out with a story which made the reader re-live the traumatic experiences of the slave age. *Beloved* is based on a real life incident of a slave woman, Margaret Garner, who attempts to escape the bondage of slavery with her children but finding no hope of freedom she attempts to kill her children and succeeds in killing one of her daughters by slashing her throat with a butcher knife. The act was her resistance towards the entire system of slavery. The story of *Beloved* is based on the same lines where the mother becomes the killer of her own blood. Sethe, the character inspired by her real life counterpart, is a black slave who dares to think beyond the spaces provided for Blacks and dreams of a better future for her own children. Herself a victim of slavery, she is reluctant to see her daughter in the same place and therefore attempts the most unnatural act of killing her daughter, Beloved. But her guilt haunts her all life long as Beloved appears as a girl in flesh to revenge her death. With the dead daughter coming to life, Sethe is haunted by the guilt of her past. Beloved torments Sethe almost to death till the community comes to rescue the mother. The story unfolds with the series of flashbacks initiated by the conversation of Sethe and Paul D, another victim of slavery. Morrison gives a detailed account of the mistreatment suffered by the blacks during the era of slavery and its harsh consequences even after the slave age.

The common characteristic between Dalit and African American genre of literature is pain of segregation. The characters are isolated and discriminated on the basis of caste, colour, occupation and gender. This sense of isolation leads to disastrous consequences. Sethe and all other Black characters in the novel are treated no better than animals. Sethe is treasured only for her reproducing qualities so that she could produce generations of slaves to enhance the economy of the whites. They are assigned the most degraded tasks at the owner's place. The slaves were deprived of forming a family and their young ones where traded as a material of utility. Sethe was

robbed of her identity, her freedom and above all she was robbed of her maternal milk. The white schoolteacher and his nephews made the psychological assault on Sethe when they milked her like a cow. The incident resulted in an act of violence where the poor mother killed her daughter to save her from the evils of slavery.

Toni Morrison has a conscience towards the reality and this makes "poverty, slavery, oppression immediate even to those readers who have never experienced them, even to those readers who would choose to forget" (Rigney 77). She has brought the true picture of the African American set-up where black men and women were rented, mortgaged, bought, sold and even stolen. They were moved like "checkers" (29). The human values were neglected and they were exploited till every drop of their black blood was utilized by the slave owner. Death for the oppressed class "was anything but forgetfulness" (4). It was the only solution to the agonies of their present birth. For Sethe it was the only way out. "Why I did it. How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (200). She clarifies that she "took her babies where they'd be safe" (201). The statement itself reveals the horror of being a second class citizen of a country. Toni Morrison has presented a deep insight to the terrible consequences of slavery. The humiliation comes in various forms to the oppressed class. It is physical for some characters and psychological for the others. If we go back and turn the pages of Black tradition, males were always oppressive in dealing with black females but *Beloved* unfolds the plight of black males as well as black females in the African American set-up. For Sethe the milk-stealing act becomes the horror of slavery and its psychological effect is seen in her decision of killing her own daughter. Her husband Halle Suggs turns mad. Paul D is the only character whose sufferings are described by the writer in detail. "Paul D's story is like a case history of how far the degradation of slave could go" (Carmen 92). He symbolizes the sufferings of entire black class under the institution of slavery. The dehumanized treatment of Paul D crosses the limits of physical torment one can inflict. He is beaten like an animal and his tongue held down by iron where "the need to spit is so deep you cry for it" (87)Resistance towards the racial segregation has caused these oppressed classes to develop into a rebel. Sethe is declared an outcast and imprisoned for the act of violence. But the infanticide she committed was not out of will but it was her reluctance towards the

oppressors. The circumstances made her hard-hearted and she preferred to send her daughter to an unknown world rather than returning to her slave masters. Similar resistance is seen in the character of Sethe's mother who throws all her babies born out of whites. The sufferance of the Black community is depicted in the words of Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, where she declares that "there is no bad luck in the world but white folks" (109).

Community plays a vital role in shaping the characters in the novel. *Beloved* is the story which hits on the tension between the community and the individual. "In *Beloved* life is hell, but togetherness, shared experiences, and brotherly/ sisterly love help the characters to survive, if not to forge better lives for themselves" (Mbalia 91). There is a unique style of writing of these writers, that is, the 'call and response technique.' In this style the community responds when called for help forgetting all grudges and holding the feeling of solidarity above all. It also points to the communal nature of the text.

In the chronicles of human history, no other group has ever suffered from such a socio-economic, physical, cultural and sexual torment and agonies like the African-American women and the Dalit women of India. Both are victims of the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism and classism. In literature they have been portrayed as a being without voice or self. Sethe is forced to submit herself to her white masters besides all mean tasks she has to perform as a slave. She is transported as an object to one place from another. Motherhood is precious to every woman. But Sethe was denied of her motherhood. She was not allowed to nurse her daughter with her milk. In fact she was beaten brutally when she was pregnant with her fourth child. The slave women were never designated as mothers. "Their infant children could be sold away from them like calves from cows" (Davis 7). Exploitation is not only from the whites, it is more from the black male counterpart. Therefore a black female becomes "the slave of the slave" (Ranveer 11). The community also tagged the black female as loose and immoral. Even the black males view her with the eyes of the white masters. Even after slavery came to an end in America, there is continued harassment of the black women. She has not gained her actual position due to her origin and colour.

One of the major reasons for the domination of the blacks by the whites is the existing standard of beauty: blue eyes, blond hair and

fair skin. This concept of ideal beauty created a "zero image" (Wilfred 10). This shame affects the lives of the slave women and it leads to self-hatred and eventually destruction. When Morrison came out with her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) she clarified that she wrote the novel because she wanted to read such a story. The idea was clear that the plight of African American women was not represented correctly in American literature. Similarly the hardships of Dalit women had no space in the works written by the males. Therefore, the females started writing their history on their own to reclaim their lost womanhood and self. "Slavery is terrible for men, but it is far more terrible for women; super-added to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and suffering and mortification peculiar to their own" (Brent 405). *Beloved* is prominently a story of a black female slave who is forced to consider her subhuman status on the Sweet Home Plantation where she worked as a slave which ultimately awakens her to search for her own self in the bondage as well as freedom. But the self-realization of Sethe is at the painful cost of killing her own daughter.

Silence is another artistic technique used in the discourse of female characters in the novel. Sethe accepts silence as the only ailment to the hardships of life. Her act of infanticide was not accompanied by words. Without any word she accepts the fate and moves to the prison. She never voiced the haunting memories of her past to her younger daughter Denver. She along with Baby Suggs, "had agreed without saying so that [the past] was unspeakable" (72). The silence was acceptable as the circumstances behind it were common to all the members of the community. It was more a question of understanding.

The harassment that slavery brought was not just limited to physical abuses; it deeply affected the psychological state of the Blacks. Therefore, the major quality of the Black writing has been its complexity arising out of the amalgam of the psychological and the supernatural. Morrison enhances this complexity by the use of African folklores in her story. *Beloved* on one hand appears to be a ghost story and on the other it deals with the psychology of a perplexed mind of a slave. The boundary between these two regions is blurred. Morrison's *Beloved* "penetrates perhaps more deeply than any historic or psychological study could, the unconscious emotional and psychic consequences of slavery" (Schapiro 194). The appearance of Beloved is mysterious for the community but for

Sethe she is her dead daughter. The pain of the physical assaults may have diminished for Sethe but the permanent scar of disgust is still visible in the feelings she has for the white society. In Sethe's words, the whites

> could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forget who you were and couldn't think it up. (308)

Morrison follows a circling or repetition around the traumatic events. The idea is to develop the picture of sufferance that the oppressors and even the oppressed prefer to ignore. The literature of marginalization always has inspiration in the past. Morrison also presents a view that past should not be forgotten. It should be accepted and understood to free oneself from the feeling of guilt or remorse. The character of Beloved is the embodiment of the past. She symbolizes Sethe's guilt and haunts her till she comes over it with the help of the community. Beloved serves as the mirror character which reveals the repressed feelings of the characters that come in contact with her. Sethe is reminded of the infanticide that she committed, Paul D of his horrific past of slavery and the community is reminded of its failure to warn Sethe on the arrival of the slave owners. The story of *Beloved* is not linear but circular. It revolves around the incident of the infanticide and within it unfolds the slave narratives. The plot is revealed by the flashbacks of Sethe and Paul D. The flashback technique re-examines the life which these slaves had in the period of their bondage. It is only by the acceptance of the past that Sethe discovers herself in the end.

Besides the natural factors of origin or birth, economic reasons are also responsible for the poor conditions of the subjugated classes. Since education had negligible role amongst these classes they were also exploited economically. The slaves under-estimated their worth in the society and therefore never aimed at better job opportunities. Morrison has also hinted this in her novel. She has also provided a solution through the character of Stamp Paid and Ella, another ex-slave couple, that feeling of collectivism is important to overcome the financial crises. The couple makes it a point to help every Black in need with money, food, clothes or any other type of help to spread an even distribution of wealth and resources. The

message of brotherhood and equality is prominent in the works of many Black writers.

The common charge levelled across the literature of the minority group is that their work lacks the aesthetic value as it is written for a social purpose and entertains only a particular section of the society. It is also argued that such literature is used only for propagation. However the list of best sellers from the minority groups refutes this claim. Toni Morrison, the recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993, proves the universal appeal of Black Literature. The real beauty of these marginal writers lies in the honesty of their emotions and the hope that it cultivates for the downtrodden and the struggling masses.

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Shifting Perspectives and the American Dilemma

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Among the basic issues which continue to occupy a prominent place in the arena of American politics is that of race-relationship. Being situated in both the superstructure and base of society, 'color-prejudice' is a personal as well as a political reality. The journey of the African American writer in confronting this experiential reality of existence began, in a serious vein, with the Harlem Renaissance and continued through Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin to Amiri Baraka, Ishmael Reed, Charles Johnson and others. Wright, Ellison and Baldwin provided, each in his own unique way, a mode of confronting the politics of racial oppression. Towards the last quarter of the twentieth century, black writers and critics experienced the need to redefine their aspirations and hopes in terms of new paradigms of apprehending the color question. The consolidation of the United States as a super power, the emergence of the concept of the Third World, the feeling of re-identification with Africa, appreciation by African-Americans of the nationalistic source of world resistance against domination, and the consciousness of the interdependence of people in modern society, necessitated a complete reorientation of assumptions that had hitherto directed Afro-American aesthetics. Works like *Afro-American Writing Today* (1985) edited by James Olney and *Afro-American Poetics*: *Revisions of Harlem and the Black Aesthetic* (1988) by Houston A. Baker, Jr. offer glimpses of the contemporary writer's urge to rewrite familiar definitions of African American expressive culture with a view to re-contextualizing earlier standpoints.

The present paper is, therefore, an attempt to explore, identify and examine the new voices and trends which have emerged in contemporary African American writings with special focus on writers, poets and critics like Charles Johnson, Ethelbert Miller, August

Wilson and Angelyn Mitchell who offer fresh insights and perspectives to confront the ambivalence of the 'American Dilemma' against the backdrop of the changing global scenario that calls for an extensive vision, both in terms of life and aesthetics, beyond the narrow constricts of race or color prejudices.

One of America's pre-eminent writers and thinkers, Dr. Charles Richard Johnson, a Ph.D. in Philosophy and a 1998 MacArthur Fellow, is the author of four novels *Faith and the Good Thing* (1974), *Oxherding Tale* (1982), *Middle Passage* (1990) and *Dreamer* (1998); two collection of short stories, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1986) and *Soulcatcher and Other Stories* (2001); a work of aesthetics, *Being and Race: Black Writing Since 1970* (1988); two collections of comic art, *Black Humor* (1970) and *Half-Past Nation Time* (1972); *Black Men Speaking* (1997), co-edited with John McCluskey Jr.; *Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery* (1998), the companion book for the influential PBS Television Series, co-authored with Patricia Smith; *King: The Photobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, (2000), co-authored with Bob Adelman; and *Turning the Wheel: Essays on Buddhism and Writing*. He received the 1990 National Book Award for *Middle Passage*, becoming the first African-American male to win this prize since Ralph Ellison in 1953. Johnson teaches creative writing at the University of Washington, Seattle, where he holds the S. Wilson and Grace M. Pollock Professorship for Excellence in English. Most recently, the American Academy of Arts and Letters has honored him with its award in Literature.

With an intense feeling of metta towards all sentient beings, Charles Johnson, reflects on America at the dawn of the New Millennium and explicitly foregrounds the imperatives of a completely new outlook toward the racial question by his statement: "half of the country is going into the 21st century with something of an identity crisis because America is very much a pluralistic society. . . . In other words, America really is the point where so many cultures are crossing. And so the large questions that will be carried into the 21st century will be questions of who are we as Americans. And who we want to be as Americans. But it won't be a black/white dialogue in that respect anymore. I think not only Americans in general but also

black Americans in particular are in a period of transition. This is indeed a significant moment of cultural transition in the early part of the twenty-first century." Through the corpus of his fictional and non-fictional writings, Johnson combines philosophy and folklore, martial art and Buddhism, for his incisive insights into the new frontiers of the African American experience that calls for an amalgamation of multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural perspectives. He not only loves to address the symptoms of change in terms of acute identity crisis but also tries to prepare the aesthetic ground for such a change.

Johnson considers the contributions of Jean Toomer, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison—uniquely black American writers who came out of the soil of American experience—to be seminal in the creation of a truly autonomous African American fiction. In the realm of poetry the name of Langston Hughes comes to him uppermost. Johnson argues that the explosions of creativity of the 1960s in America was really a continuation of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s that reached new heights of Negro eloquence with publication of works like Elain Locke's "The New Negro" and Jean Toomer's *Cane*.

For writers engaged in confronting the "American Dilemma," words are generally used as weapons. Johnson's approach is different. With the end of the period of Jim Crow segregation in the 1960s, he prefers to use words as a phenomenologist to achieve *aletheia*, or the disclosure of phenomena. As a Buddhist, he uses words to heal, not tear things apart. Johnson doesn't agree with Foucault in this regard. According to him Foucault and the privileging of power relations is not the best way to thematize black American literature either creatively or critically. Such a reduction, he says, "denies the richness of black humanity and certainly outstrips all our political and sociological explanatory models *for* black lives in which we find a surplus of meaning." Writers of color have brought a realism and complexity in their depictions of the racial *Other* to American literature, and by doing so buried many vicious stereotypes created by whites during the last 200 years, that is, made those images unacceptable and expanded our awareness of diversity and meaning *within*, say, the African American community.

At the dawn of twenty-first century, and especially after 9/11, Johnson considers that living in a parochial, limited cultural fishbowl is a liability that places on African Americans limits that they can no longer afford. He states: "Today, none of us can afford to be locked culturally in ourselves. Like all minorities, or refugees, we must all begin to live on the "edge" where one can see numerous perspectives at once; we must develop a cultural double consciousness or a cultural poly-consciousness that recognizes the racial *Other* as ourselves. Indeed, America in the year 2004 is what writer Jorge Luis Borges would call an *aleph*, which he defines as a point where all points converge, all angles and viewpoints can be viewed simultaneously, yet each remains distinct." He emphasizes through his own fictional works the need for "a fiction of increasing artistic generosity, one that enables us as a people—as a culture—to move from narrow complaint to broad celebration. In his view a literary work of art is "a gift to the reader—the finest gift an author can compose." A fine work of art for him is "a celebration of so many things—the endless possibilities of language, of thought, of spirited storytelling, of human behaviour and its possibilities, and the galaxy of fictional forms we inherit from our predecessors from all over the world." He asserts the need to protest not merely against racial discrimination and prejudice but also against human ignorance and stupidity (of which racism is a part), delusion and selfishness.

Johnson considers the Buddhist Dharma as the most revolutionary and civilized of possible human choices, as the logical extension of King's dream of the "beloved community," and Du Bois' "vision of what the world could be if it was really a beautiful world." Buddhism, for me," he states "has always been a refuge, as it was intended to be: a place to continually refresh my spirit, stay centred and at peace, which enabled me to work joyfully and without attachment even in the midst of turmoil swirling round me on all sides, through 'good' times and 'bad.' So I am thankful for the perennial wisdom in its two-millennium-old sutras; the phenomenological insights of Shakyamuni himself into the nature of suffering, craving and dualism; the astonishing beauty of Sanskrit, which I've been privileged to study now for four years; and the methods of different forms of meditational practice, the benefits of which fill

whole libraries." According to him, for the approximately two million Buddhists in America, the Eightfold Path is a map for the Way. But, like any map, it merely sketches the terrain the *bodhisattavas* have traversed for two and a half millennia, leaving open for each follower of the Dharma an adventure of discovery and service: a genuinely creative journey through the mystery of being, which with each step leads to ineffable joy.

As one of the most persuasive contemporary voices engaged in confronting the ambivalence of the "American Dilemma," Johnson is quick to state in the context of post-9/11 America: "in America our passions define our possibilities. Despite the ambivalence of the so-called American Dilemma, there is no denying that America was founded on principles, ideals, and documents (*The Declaration of Independence* and *The Constitution*) that forced it to be forever self-correcting. In this country no individual or group, white or black, could tell me *not to dream*."

Thrice, for one reason or the other, Johnson's proposed visit to India did not ultimately materialize. David Guterson, his former student at the Creative Writing Programme at the University of Washington, Seattle and author of the best-selling novel *Snow Falling on Cedars*, states: "once Johnson goes to India he would never want to return." Describing his fascination for India, Johnson states with immense feeling: "I often dream, naturally, of India—its beauty, antiquity, breath-taking art and remarkable people, the peace I feel instantly when my mind drifts to the Buddhist Dharma or Hinduism, that great democracy of Being. I have nurtured my life's long devotion to Buddhism by learning Sanskrit, not at a University but instead by studying the holy texts of Hinduism and *Advaita Vedanta* in the original Devnagari script. I am amazed by its astounding diversity where so many cultures converge in a spirit of oneness and harmony."

E. Ethelbert Miller, the founder and director of the Ascension Poetry Reading Series, has been the director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University since 1974. He is the author of the following books: *Andromeda* (1974), *The Land of Smiles and the Land of No Smiles* (1974), *Migrant Worker* (1978), *Season of Hunger/Cry of Rain* (1982), *Where are the Love Poems for Dicta-*

tors? (1986, reprinted in 2001), *First Light* (1994), *Whispers, Secrets and Promises* (1998), *Fathering Words: The Making of an African American Writer* (2000), *Buddha Weeping in Winter* (2001), *and How We Sleep on the Nights We Don't Make Love* (2004). He is the editor of the following anthologies: *Synergy: An Anthology of Washington, D.C. Black Poetry* (1975), *Women Surviving Massacres and Men* (1977), *In Search of Color Everywhere* (1994) and *Beyond the Frontier* (2002). In 1979, the Mayor of Washington, DC proclaimed September 28, 1979 as "E. Ethelbert Miller Day." Again in 2001 the Mayor of Jackson, Tennessee proclaimed May 21, 2001 as "E. Ethelbert Miller Day." Miller received the Public Humanities Award from the D.C. Humanities Council in 1988.

In a characteristic pronouncement in his memoir, *Fathering Words: The Making of an African American Writer*, Miller tells us how a person, any person, creates a life and knows it's the right choice: "One night a poem comes to me. Words. Revelations. In the beginning I was a small boy standing on a corner in the Bronx waiting for my father. The sky is gray. I start praying. Suddenly words are escorting me across the street. I reach the other side, proud of what I've done. I can write. My prayers are songs. I can make music. I can give color to the world. This is my life. This is my gift."

"Sometimes while walking alongside a river or lake I feel a little Langston in me. Suddenly I have a desire to throw all my possessions into the water and listen to my heart. I interpreted the throwing away of his books as the search for another way to live: I saw it as being the journey of the poet." This is how Miller begins his essay on Langston Hughes. He thinks much of his writing was an outgrowth of his politics and his involvement with other cultural communities. Inspired by the Black Power and Black Arts Movement, Miller realised the importance of blackness and the need to be aware of what was going on in society. Reading works by Amiri Baraka, Haki Madhubuti, and Sonia Sanchez brought him in close contact with the African American writings. Langston Hughes and Richard Wright connected him to a tradition he was not aware of while growing up in New York.

Miller has a key role to play in the relationship between Jews and Blacks in contemporary America. As one of the founders of the

"Windows and Mirrors" cultural series which is coordinated by the DC Jewish Community Center and the African American Resource Center at Howard University, Miller strives to create cultural programmes that seek to find common ground between two different communities with shared traditions. The focus is on what was accomplished during the Civil Rights Movement by Black and Jews working together and the challenges that such an association faces today with more African Americans becoming Muslims and supporting the Palestinian position in the Middle East. In urban areas around the United States, African Americans now interact more with Latinos and Koreans. With the shift in demographics, new political alliances are occurring. It's important for the Jewish community not to become too conservative while being influenced by the politics of suburbia. He is aware of the fact that the assimilation of Jews in mainstream American society, polity and economics is bound to affect the relationship of friendliness that had once existed between the two communities. He says: "The economic success of Jews living in the United States can result in class differences between Blacks and Jews. It's the responsibility of leaders within both communities to prevent certain divisions from happening." His concern motivated him to establish the Windows and Mirrors programme at the D.C. Jewish Community Center. The terms "Windows and Mirrors" metaphorical as he says: "I believe it's necessary for a person to look into a mirror and achieve a level of self-awareness as well as cultural awareness. It's also important after looking into a mirror to turn away and confront the situation outside the window. Looking out the window requires the compassion to understand others."

Like Charles Johnson, Miller too is attracted by the tenets of Buddhism. He has always been attracted to the monastic tradition. The book *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse opened a door and changed his thinking. As he states: "I think the sacrifice one has to make to become a Buddhist is what I find attractive. Discipline and patience are things I struggle with on a daily basis. Prior to my interest in Buddhism I read quite a bit about Islam. The work of Hazrat Inayat Khan and other Sufi writers began showing up on my books shelves in the 1970s. I've never been interested in belonging to a church or

religious institution. I find the calling to one's faith to be a very personal pursuit and undertaking."

He doesn't agree that the average African American citizen continues to be an "invisible man" at the dawn of the 21st Century. He finds Black people to be more visible than ever before with the world becoming a place filled with color. On the contrary he feels that white people today are becoming invisible and that with DNA research being available it might be possible to conclude that whiteness no longer exists. He emphasizes how almost everyone in the ivory tower is today connected to the Internet. He would like to see more writers (instead of movie stars) run for political office. For writers can serve the state as well as the arts. The writers he admires for their political expression include Langston Hughes, Pablo Neruda, Wole Soyinka, Salman Rushdie, June Jordan and Amiri Baraka.

Being a literary activist and being interested in documenting literary history, Miller has shown intense interest in the compilation of black poetry anthologies. *Synergy* documents Black writers living and publishing in Washington DC; *Women Surviving Massacres and Men* puts together a feminist collection of work. *In Search of Color Everywhere* is a book you would find in every Black person's home. Miller emphasizes the need for a new orientation of ideas at the dawn of the 21st century that is essentially different from whatever the African American poet has experienced hitherto. In his words: "At the dawn of the 21st century, we must discover our true beauty. Poetry is a vehicle to transport us beyond forever. Beyond the frontier, beyond this world (which once enslaved us), lies a new consciousness." According to him, "Many people of color have triple identities. I know people who will first say they are Muslims. Second, African Americans. Third, American. We have to think about "electronic skin" and how people communicate without knowing another person's color or sex on the Internet. It's ridiculous for an African American writer to be writing about only race while other people are looking at pictures coming back from Mars. African American poets need to be writing about people visiting us from other planets." Miller sees the ongoing struggle between light-

skinned and dark-skinned African American people to be an outgrowth of Western, white European values regarding beauty.

In *In Search of Color Everywhere* he presents many contemporary poets who are trying to "reject" the negative images associated with blackness"' whereas in *Beyond the Frontier* he talks of the journey of men and women "who are explorers and space travellers, embracing the blackness at the end of the universe, and bending light into new images." He cites Robert Hayden's "American Journal" from the concluding section of *In Search of Color Everywhere* to show the connection between the two books. "American Journal" deals with outer space, our next frontier. He thinks it would be sad to undertake travel to other planets and carry our human nonsense with us." "One of the beautiful things about space exploration," he says, "has been how different countries have been working together. Our Space Shuttle crews have consisted of astronauts of different cultural backgrounds. Space holds so much promise for mankind. Do you think if someone sent Amiri Baraka to the moon he would be wasting his time writing poems about Jewish conspiracy theories? New experiences should provide new images."

Miller's collected work reveals a wide variety of styles and ways of expression for he believes in experimenting quite a bit with the language. Miller is not unmindful of how the marketplace today is influencing black literature. He says, "It`s sad but we must sometimes look at books as commodities." As a result he doesn`t mind including a number of sensual/erotic poems in *Beyond the Frontier*. His rationale for such inclusion seems to be motivated by the idea that such poems "will attract a wider readership and perhaps a person will be directed to the more political and historical material."

Miller can often be intrinsically political. In his poem "Not Slavery but South Africa," he states: "the distance/ between/ oppression and freedom/ is measured by our willingness/ to fight and destroy our fears/ to understand/ the distance/ already travelled."

Captivated by the personality of Malcolm X, Miller has composed a series of poems on the life and work of the great leader that tell the sad saga of a charismatic leader`s journey from innocence to self-discovery. "In Malcolm X, August 1952," Elijah Muhammad is seen by Malcolm as an inspired prophet capable of changing Amer-

ica. In "Malcolm X, 1964" we see a disillusioned Malcolm lamenting "once i submitted to a man I believed/was divine. Now a new journey begins/with myself." Like Becket in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, your Malcolm in "Malcolm X, February 1965" visualizes his impending doom: "there are brothers/ waiting to do me harm. I will die for them/ as only I can." Miller affirms the relevance of Malcolm's life and philosophy in contemporary times. He says: "Malcolm is a force now which is unbelievable. Now we say Malcolm is a martyr okay but who did he die for? It's for black people of course. We see now how his ideas have affected an entire generation. The ultimate sacrifice that you can make is giving your life for a cause. All we have now are T.V. martyrs who are not ready for any kind of sacrifice."

In view of the post 9/11 developments, Miller feels how African Americans deal with Islam is going to have its implication for the entire Muslim world. The real thing is how Muslims handle the women's question here and in other parts of the world. He visualizes that the bigger split is going to be between Islam and Christianity. Miller sees the recent increase in religious conflicts around the world as an indication of history repeating itself in the fashion of medieval times. Contemplating on the grounds of the said conflicts, he remarks: "This might be a result of many nations existing outside the modern world. Poverty in the midst of wealth creates a terrible imbalance between people. Another major development today is a criminal international network which markets, drugs, and weaponry. The criminal element favors weak governments. There is also an Islamic fundamentalist movement which opposes Western cultural philosophy and ethics. It has its own framework and worldview. Scholars and intellectuals need to examine the influence of Bosnia on international affairs. The atrocities which took place there affected an entire generation of Muslims. One would think that with the new technology and the entrance into the electronic and information age this would be a period of Enlightenment. Unfortunately that has not been the case."

As a writer and activist, Miller is acutely concerned with the crisis in the African American family. He ascribes this mainly to the lack of respect for authority. He feels there is too much democracy:

"If you ask whether I was afraid of my father I would say sure I was. Kids today grow up with no such fear or respect."

August Wilson, the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and a giant of the contemporary American theater, celebrates the struggles and aspirations, fears and hopes, of the average black American citizen, and emerges as the unquestioned spokesman of African American theater. In the process, he has opened new avenues for other black artists, changed the way theater approaches race and changed the business of theater, too.

Born on April 27, 1945, in Pittsburgh to a white father (Frederick August Kittle) who never lived with his family and a black mother (Daisy Wilson) from North Carolina, August shared life with his mother and five siblings. He dropped out of school at the age of fifteen when a teacher falsely accused him of plagiarizing his paper on Napoleon Bonaparte, an insult he could not tolerate even in that period of adolescence. He received his education in libraries and town hubs at Pittsburgh, the city that provided him with the theme, the locale and the setting for almost all his plays. Initially his mother, whom he greatly adored, was disappointed because she had seen in his education the possibility of his bright future as a lawyer. "Perhaps," he said wistfully, "she never knew then that her 'uneducated' son would one day be honored with twenty three honorary degrees including one from the Harvard Law School." Inspired by his mother, August learned to read at the age of four and had his first library card when he was only five years old. His favorite haunt after he dropped out of school was the Carnegie Public Library where through avid reading he discovered the joy and terror of remaking the world in his own image through the act of writing. His involvement in the 1960s and 1970s with the Black Power Movement contributed immensely towards shaping his sensibility as a spokesman of the blacks in America. He acknowledged the Movement to be "the kiln in which I was fired, and has much to do with the person I am today and the ideas and attitudes that I carry as part of my consciousness." He first got involved in theatre in 1968 at the height of a social tumult as he thought he could use theatre as a tool to document black American culture and history. August Wilson lived and wrote in St. Paul from 1978 until 1990, a productive pe-

riod that saw the completion of some of his best-known plays, including *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson* which won the Pulitzer for drama in 1987 and 1990, respectively.

With his decade-by-decade cycle of African-American life in the twentieth century, beginning with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, followed by *Jitney*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Two Trains Running*, *Seven Guitars*, *King Hedley II*, *Gem of the Ocean*, and ending with *Radio Golf*, Wilson has created the most complete cultural chronicle since Balzac wrote his vast *Human Comedy*. In these ten plays that constitute what is popularly known as the "Pittsburgh Cycle," Wilson celebrates the struggles and aspirations, fears and hopes, of the average black American citizen, and emerges as the unquestioned spokesman of African American theatre. Intuitively endowed with a strong sense of history, Wilson's plays on black history originate in "the blood's memory." He says that the motivation for the plays comes from his desire to document and illuminate the historical context both of the period in which a play is set and the continuum of black life in America that stretches back to the early 17th century: "My generation of blacks knew very little about the past of our parents who shielded us from the indignities they suffered, the hardships they had endured. My purpose is to illuminate that shadowy past whose impact can be felt even in the present."

He displays his fondness for Amiri Baraka, Romare Bearden and the Blues. But unlike Bearden for whom art is a collage of western, African, and Asian art, as well as literature and music, Wilson firmly believes that only black experience inspires black artists and that black actors should only perform black roles authored by black playwrights. He remarks with great emphasis: "I believe that race matters—that is the largest, most identifiable and most important part of our personality. Race is also an important part of the American landscape. We cannot allow others to have authority over our cultural and spiritual products. We will not deny our history, and we will not allow it to be of little consequence, to be ignored or misinterpreted. We are unique, and we are specific. We have an honorable history in the world of men. We reject any attempt to blot

us out, to reinvent history and ignore our presence. We are black and beautiful."

Wilson refers to the great Migration from the South to the North as 'a transplant that did not take,' a theme that runs through most of his plays. He laments how after being uprooted from Africa, the black community spent 200 years developing its culture as black Americans. And then they left the South in an attempt to transplant their culture to the pavements of the industrialized North. And it was a transplant that did not take. People left for the North in search for jobs and were disillusioned.

Wilson resents the idea of colourblind casting because he sees it as nothing but a tool of the Cultural Imperialists who cannot conceive that life could be lived and enriched without knowing Shakespeare or Mozart. He emphasizes the need for black theatres because "of the sixty-six LORT theaters, there is just one that can be considered black." According to him, "Black theater in America is alive, it is vibrant, it is vital . . . but it just isn't funded. . . . We need black theatres to promote art that feeds the spirit and celebrates the life of black America by designing strategies for survival and prosperity rather than celebrate art meant to entertain white society. Theatre may be a part of art history in terms of its craft and dramaturgy, but it is part of social history in terms of how it is financed and governed." The key issue to him is how the resources of white American society are allocated and how inequality is perpetuated in the cultural arena. The vast amount of resources flow to venues where the stage is dominated by plays that reflect the history, experience, and culture of European Americans. Wilson doesn't consider the melting pot metaphor appropriate in terms of cultural diversities in America. He points out that it is not easy for African Americans to be assimilated into the American mainstream. He says: "Since we are a very *visible* minority on account of the color of our skin, it is not easy for us to change our names and hide behind the label of being an American as other communities can do. Also, to say that we are Africans, and we can participate in this society as Africans without adopting European values and aesthetics does not make us separatists." It is not surprising, therefore, that all

the directors in his plays—Lloyd Richards, Walter Dallas, and Marion McClinton—African Americans.

Although his plays appear to be 'period plays,' a common strand of universal elements like love, honor, duty, betrayal—things humans have written about since the beginning of time—runs through his works. Using the speech patterns and rhythms that were familiar to him from black neighbourhoods of Pittsburgh, he attempts to connect man to something larger than himself and his imagination. A staunch supporter of black theatre, he asserts most emphatically how all nationalities need to fight for the culture of the oppressed to be represented in all arenas for, according to him, "All of art is a search for ways of being, of living life more fully. A good theater must, therefore, be able to raise the consciousness of the audience towards the immensity of human potential. It must also be able to perpetuate man's faith in a sense of community by creating dramas that will guide and influence contemporary life for years to come. It should disseminate ideas and educate the miseducated, because it is art—and all art reaches across that divide that makes order out of chaos, and embraces the truth that overwhelms with its presence, and connects man to something larger than himself and his imagination."

Though he has been thrilling audiences ever since his first production of *Jitney*, he says his plays do not cater to any particular audience: "I *am* the audience and I try to create a work of art that exists on its own terms and is true to itself." Writing to Wilson is an experience that involves anguish and pain: "When I write," he says, "I try to leave some blood on the page. You can't get that stuff out of yourself without hurt. It's not therapy; it's more like revelation." Like his character Bynum in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* he seems to confess: "I don't do it lightly. It costs me a piece of myself every time I do."

The pain and the anguish of it all seems to have taken its toll and as August Wilson seeks rest and peace in another kind of wood, it is no mean consolation to believe that his words will continue to reverberate in human memory: "You got to fight to make it mean something. . . . What good is freedom if you can't do nothing with it?"

Angelyn Mitchell, an associate professor of English and African American Studies at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, and the founding director of the African American Studies Programme, thinks the construct of race in the USA is an entrapment, as it has created artificial boundaries and borders that serve to alienate and to separate. She sees race in terms of the binary of Black and White, as so often race is thought to be synonymous with Black only. She believes race entraps in very different ways for those on either side of this binary of White/Black. The category of White traps those who are identified as White in a system of white supremacy, privilege, and oppression. The category of Black traps those identified as Black in a system of economic, social, and political disenfranchisement. There may be exceptions to this but for her, exceptions don't negate the systemic issues imbedded in the construction of race in American society. Echoing Rousseau's classic statement "Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains," Mitchell states in the opening sentence of her *The Freedom to Remember*: "I was born free, but race has colored my life from the beginning.

Her pioneering critical work *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (2002) examines contemporary literary revisions of slavery in the United States by black women writers. Mitchell shows how the "liberatory narrative," a term coined by her, functions to emancipate its readers from the legacies of slavery in American society by facilitating a deeper discussion of the issues and by making them new through illumination and interrogation. With remarkable insight into her position both as a writer and a woman who is black, she suggests the need for a shift in terminology—from "slave narrative" to "emancipatory narrative" to discuss slave narratives as well as the ways of women in contemporary novels of slavery. Even at the beginning of the 21st century, terms like "the color line" and "double consciousness" continue to be significant from the American perspective. She thinks the color line will continue to be one of the problems of the 21st century. Also, she believes one must add "the economic line" to any discussion of the color line because the two are so complexly interwoven.

As a teacher and critic of literature, Mitchell has been preoccupied with examining how the cultural construct of race operates in American society. Her constant concern is: "What does it mean to be raced and American in a country where racial identity supersedes national identity." She sees a tension between the two that arises in the most unpredictable ways. It is very complicated. She says she is constantly aware of her racial identity and not constantly aware of her national identity. Yet she feels she is an American. The events of 9/11 and the war in Iraq have made her aware of her national identity more than ever before. She says, "There is "always already" something in my everyday life that reminds me of my racial identity. It might be simply a meeting at my current institution, Georgetown University, in which I am the only African American present. It might be when we meet in the Philodemic Room, a conference room in historic Healy Hall and the portraits and names of White men on its walls remind me of a different time in American history where my racial identity would have precluded me from sitting at the table. I have never been in that room without thinking of this. Even the date of Georgetown's founding—1789—causes me to consider the contradictory histories of the USA. This is my country, my home, but each July, I read Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?."

She frankly admits how in her own career as a writer and academic, she has experienced the challenges that stem from prejudice on color lines. But she knows how most often in these post-integration times, these challenges are not always overt. According to Mitchell, "they are of the type where colleagues speak in "Black English" or tell me about their family's Black maid in a feeble attempt to relate. Or where one's scholarly endeavors and productions are viewed as less valid, less scholarly, less rigorous. The most insidious is the assumptions of identity that have little to do with the individual, what Cornel West has called knowing the Negro, *a priori*."

She agrees that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did ameliorate the effects of institutionalized racism but not much has happened with regard to affordable and fair housing, education, economic mobility, health care. She asks: "If Black folk are systematically denied even

the opportunity to participate in the democratic process—look, for example, at our lack of representation in the US Senate or look at the race and the voting irregularities in Florida in the presidential election of 2000—how can America ever live up to its stated ideals and principles?"

She accepts there are numerous instances of great individual success stories of both men and women from the African American community: Clarence Thomas, Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powell et al. But she emphasizes that such stories do not provide the impetus for "healing the wounds, the shame, and the pain of the past. She believes that all Black folk, particularly those in positions of power and influence, should be concerned about institutionalized denials to access and opportunities, past and present. She says, "certainly, Oprah Winfrey's story of rags to riches is inspirational, but how meaningful is her story to the everyday lives and troubles of economically disadvantaged African Americans? Certainly, Colin Powell as the first and only Black Secretary of State is historic, but does this effective positive change in African America? Role models can only go so far. Collective memories and collective consciousnesses—repositories of the wounds, the shame, the pain of the past—cannot be overwritten by individual narratives of success. It goes much deeper. I suppose, to some minds, these narratives represent progress. She firmly believes that "Economic wealth for the individual does not necessarily translate into economic empowerment for the race."

She lauds Black women writers like Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor for opening a space for explorations of the self in ways that Black men writers had not done before they did. Referring to David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* in which the protagonist takes both physical and psychological journeys in self-reflexive ways, Mitchell thinks Black women writers helped open that door. As an educator, she thinks "there are always rainbows of hope. It is the job of the academy to help create those rainbows. She agrees with W.E.B. DuBois, that "all art is propaganda and ever must be" and asks: "Why can't art, and the criticism of it, be both beautiful and political?"

The animated conversations that I had with these African American celebrities foreground, in their frankness and energy, the powerful dynamic that relates society, polity, art and ideas to the making of the American mind. Together, they provide an intimate and distinctive portrait of how living African American writers view themselves in a world that both frightens and excites them immensely. These authors offer fresh insights and perspectives to confront the ambivalence of the 'American Dilemma' and affirm how the consolidation of the United States as a super power, the emergence of the concept of the Third World, the feeling of re-identification with Africa, appreciation by African-Americans of the nationalistic source of world resistance against domination, and the consciousness of the interdependence of people in modern society, necessitates a complete reorientation of assumptions that had hitherto directed Afro-American aesthetics. These figures—alert to the events and challenges surrounding them—often address the variable human factor in the inequities of power within the United States and its relationship to the rest of the world. What these authors perceive in terms of the ambivalence of the "American Dilemma" is no less relevant to the world's largest democracy, India where the issue of Caste is as problematic as that of race and ethnicity in America.

Despite the individual stance taken by each one of them, it is heartening to see how they are near unanimous in their approach to the changing global scenario that calls for an extensive vision, both in terms of life and aesthetics, that reinforces the need to move from narrow complaint to broad celebration to envision a future without boundaries.

Agra College, Agra

Deep Ecological Perspective in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*

BHAVESH CHANDRA PANDEY

'But man is not made for defeat,' he said. 'A man can be destroyed but not defeated.' (*The Old Man and the Sea* 71)

Though the essential message of the novella *The Old Man and the Sea* is the invincibility of man, it can also be read as a beautiful document of man's relationship with nature. The inherent theme of the novella is man's endurance against the forces of nature. This work professes to underline the power of man in his struggle against nature.

However the struggle between man and nature as depicted in the novella maintains a dignified level as the protagonist seems to understand the essential harmony between man and other beings. The treatment of nature in this book demonstrates a standpoint that is much akin to the concept of 'deep ecology' proposed by Arne Naess. This approach endorses 'biospheric egalitarianism.' It holds the view that all things in nature are alike in having value in their own right, independent of their usefulness to human purposes. So we should respect and take care of the natural environment with which we identify ourselves.

The term 'deep ecology' was coined by Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher in the early Seventies. Naess and his colleague Kvaloy were impressed by some aspects of 'Sherpa Culture' on their visit to the Himalayas. They found that their Sherpa guide regarded certain mountains as sacred and accordingly would not venture onto them. Naess formulated a position which extended the reverence felt for the mountains to other natural things in general.

The deep ecologists respect the intrinsic value of everything in nature. This perspective endorses 'the relational, total-field image,' understanding organisms as 'knots' in the biospheric net. This position focuses on the possibility of the 'identification' of the human ego with nature. The idea is briefly that by identifying with nature we can enlarge the boundary of the self.

Deep ecology has become an important standpoint in environmental ethics. It does not separate man from nature. It sees the world not as a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. It recognizes that all living beings have intrinsic value and views mankind as "just one particular strand in the web of life."

Deep ecological perspective is different from 'shallow ecology' which views nature as anthropocentric. The Renaissance and Enlightenment together produced the ideals of utilitarianism and empiricism besides helping to develop an anthropocentric ideology. These new ideals replaced the aesthetic, transcendental ideals of the pre-Renaissance world. Aestheticism believed that everything was important for its intrinsic value and not for its value for others. But the Utilitarian ideal decided the merit of an object not on the basis of their value but on the basis of their capacity of doing maximum good of maximum people. That is to say utility was fixed on the basis of satisfaction of human interest.

With the rise of materialism and utilitarianism, nature started to be viewed as pro-man. The aesthetic and the pantheistic culture that valued the essence of all natural elements has been replaced by a very narrow approach in which nature is viewed as a means of satisfying human wants and anything has value as long as it is able to satisfy human needs. In consequence man-nature relationship has turned hostile and as such there is no limit to the excesses of man against nature.

Whereas the old paradigm is based on anthropocentric values, deep ecology is grounded in eco-centric values. It is a worldview that acknowledges the inherent value of non-human life. All living beings are members of ecological communities bound together in a network of interdependencies. Within the context of deep ecology, the view that values are inherent in all living nature is grounded in

the deep ecological or spiritual experience that nature and the self are one. This expansion of the self all the way to the identification with nature is the grounding of deep ecology. To the deep ecologists, this togetherness or unity with nature is a matter of "the great Self."

The Old Man and the Sea is a moving tale of the old Cuban fisherman Santiago who goes for fishing for eighty-four days without a catch. He is called a *salao* that means an unlucky man. Therefore he is an outcaste in his village. Everyone in the village thinks Santiago as a failure because he has caught no fish that is a metaphor of money; and if he has caught no fish he is worth nothing and therefore no man.

However, Santiago continues with his resolve to go fishing. After a long tireless chase, he catches a huge fish Marlin. He is dragged by the fish deep into the sea. But ultimately he kills the fish. In his battle, Santiago never quits. The suspense heightens as the big fish drags along and sends Santiago out of course and far beyond he had ever been out at sea. Hemingway uses the long trail as a metaphor of human condition, of man's drifting or being dragged through space and time, of his being half-in, half-out of control of his ultimate fate.

As Santiago is returning with his catch, a number of sharks attack it. He starts fighting the sharks. They eat up the Marlin. The old man thinks of his mistake time and again and concludes that he failed because he went too far. "Going too far" symbolizes the crossing of limits in his struggle against nature. When the old man comes on the shore, the entire fish has been eaten up.

In the struggle between man and nature as depicted in the novella, there is an exceptional grace and an honest realization of crossing limits. The inherent theme is man's endurance against nature. In the struggle between man and nature, the former does not wish to yield and the latter can evade all attempts to vanquish it. Man would always be a minor player in his fight against nature, particularly when he wants to destroy it. However nature has been treated as friendly and affectionate besides being cruel at times. The old man catches the marlin and also kills it but there does not seem to exist a sense of hostility between them. Nature is treated as be-

nevolent, respectable and friendly. The hero is quite aware that he has gone too far in his struggle against nature. He kills the fish gracefully. There is always a sense of dignity in his struggle.

Hemingway presents three aspects of nature in the book:

i. Nature is benevolent and there are certain ecological values to be observed by man.
ii. Nature is a friend of man.
iii. There are defined limits in man-nature relationship and crossing these limits can cause disasters to man.

The old man always sees nature as kind and benevolent. He believes that even if nature is sometimes cruel or wicked, it is not with mala-fide purpose. It is cruel because it cannot be helped. Santiago says that the young fishermen thought of the sea as 'el mar' which is masculine. But he always thought of the sea as 'la mar' that is feminine. Hemingway writes:

> But the old man always thought of it as feminine and as something that gave and withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help it. (16-17)

This suggests that nature can be sometimes harmful but its harmfulness is not malicious. It is spontaneous and unavoidable. However Hemingway seems to be concerned about the disparity in nature. He is like William Blake who asks the tiger 'Did he who made the lamb make thee?' The old man poses the same question: "Why did they make the birds so delicate and fine as those sea swallows when the ocean can be so cruel?" (16)

In man's conduct against nature, there are certain culturally accepted values which need to be observed. In primitive cultures, these values were observed religiously. The old man also observed these values. Hemingway writes: "It was considered a virtue not to talk unnecessarily at the sea and the old man always considered it so and respected it." (23) This reminds us the experience of Arne Naess with the Sherpa people who considered certain hills as holy and feared to tread them.

Besides this, nature is treated as a friend by the old man. He loves the fish and the birds that come on his boat. He is determined to kill the fish but he loves and respects it too. He gives the fish to

eat. He also offers food and shelter to the birds: "'Stay at my house if you like bird,' he said. 'I am sorry I cannot hoist the sail and take you in with the small breeze that is rising. But I am with a friend.'" (35)

The old man is determined to kill the fish but he never allows the struggle to degenerate into a devilish hostility. He sees the fish as a friend and treats it with love and respect. The dignity of the struggle is an acknowledgement of the glory of nature. Hemingway writes: "'Fish,' he said, 'I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends.'" (34) Again he writes: "'I'll kill him though,' he said 'in all his greatness and his glory.'" (43)

Santiago thinks of the fish as his friend. He wants to be one with the fish. He sees him as his brother. It shows the extension of human sympathy to the other elements of nature. This extended sense of brotherliness is quite characteristic of the deep ecological consciousness. Hemingway writes: "I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother." (38).

Man's struggle against nature is unavoidable. He has to depend on nature for nourishment and for existence. However, there should be well defined limits in this struggle. If man crosses these limits he will face failures and meet unpredictable consequences. This realization is clear in the mind of the old man. When he sees the fish is being eaten up by the sharks, he realizes that he has gone too far. There is a sense of regret in his mind and he expresses it quite unequivocally: "'I am sorry that I went too far. I ruined us both.'" (80) Or, "'I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish,' said he." (76).

This crossing of the limit brought about the fall of fortune. Santiago violates his own luck when he crosses over the limits of nature. He was defeated by his excesses. Hemingway writes: "'And what beat you, he thought.' 'Nothing,' he said aloud. 'I went too far.'" (83)

Hemingway seems to suggest that whereas man's struggle against nature is indispensable, there must be some limits beyond which man's endurance fails and nature turns cruel. So, nature may be like mother, nourishing the needs of man but she turns into a rough beast when he crosses the limits. Kamala Markandaya ex-

presses a similar view in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve*: "Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk wearily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, it has you by the throat." (39).

Hemingway shows a 'Cosmo-centric' approach to nature. This approach is similar to the aesthetic and the pantheistic approach in the primitive cultures rather than to the utilitarian culture. This approach is similar to the approach to nature as characterized by 'deep ecology.'

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Postcolonial Syndrome: A Study of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Kiran Desai, the winner of the Man Booker Prize for 2006, narrates an emotional saga of frustration, despair, loss of values or rootlessness in life in his second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (Penguin). As the title of the novel suggests, this book deals with the comic-ironic situations of life, related mainly to a retired, Anglicised judge, living with his 17-year old granddaughter Sai at the hilly area of Kalimpong in North Eastern India; his loyal, poverty-stricken cook who bears the burden of his miserable life with the hope of his promising son, Biju, working in America; and Biju himself, who returns to India to lead an easy, carefree life with his father. The story is presented in the background of the political instability or insurgency, created by the Indian Nepalis who demand their own separate Gorkhaland. The story moves on rapidly with the ups and downs in the lives of the main characters, but Desai describes vividly and profoundly also the contemporary international issues like the impact of globalization and multiculturalism on the simple lives of people, the economic and social disparities which separate one group of people from another within a larger group or state, a reaction against this modern world which appears a 'sordid boon,' shaking the foundation of all past beliefs or values, the curse of fundamentalism and terrorist violence.

Desai published her first novel, *Hullaballoo in the Guava Orchard*, in 1998 and came to think of her first novel as something childish, related to the life of a useless fellow who refuses to descend from his perch on a tree and comes to be treated as a sage. Desai said, 'I wanted to write a more grown-up book,' and naturally it took her seven years to complete a realistic and contemporary novel. Kiran Desai herself is an immigrant, a true child of multicul-

novel. Kiran Desai herself is an immigrant, a true child of multiculturalism and postcolonialism, who used her own experiences of being an Indian, living in the United States to help in writing the novel. The main burden of my paper is to highlight the postcolonial chaos and despair or a postcolonial India with its fading anglophiles, their crumbling edifices and their dwindling power in the face of a modernized nation's disaffected population. *The Inheritance of Loss* presents both the inheritance and disinheritance of love, sympathy, values, pride and prestige, caused by the clash of races, classes, cultures and generations as postcolonial syndrome, which is filtered through the characters.

The Inheritance of Loss is mainly concerned with the emotional toll of colonialism which Desai depicts through various takes on immigration—the humiliation and alienation of Biju in the immigrant quarters of New York; the alternating sorrow and joy of the cook who thinks his son, Biju, 'as the luckiest boy in the world,' (187) who is granted an American visa and is making a new life in New York. Similarly, the judge, Mr. J.P. Patel, recounts his past and visualizes how his English education and his prestigious position in ICS made him 'out of tune' at home and with his own people. Against this background of alienation and fluctuating hopes, the story of Sai's life at Kalimpong takes place. When the 16-year old Sai, orphaned, reaches her maternal grandfather's house unceremoniously in the hills of Kalimpong, little does she realise the kind of life she is going to experience. She is happy and curious enough to start a new free life of her own, unguarded by the stern nuns at St. Augustine's convent where life was an endless round of punishments. She does not feel herself much disturbed and irritated by the strange speech and manners of her retired grandfather since she spends most of her time at that damp, crumbling house, Cho Oyu, in the company of the old cook who is both a friend and guide to her. When Jemubhai Patel or Jemu hears that his orphaned granddaughter, Sai, is coming to stay with him, he does not raise any objection because she seems to him a westernized India, brought up by English nuns, a type of 'estranged Indian living in India,' very much like him. He starts thinking of his own past days of studies when as a student, isolated in racist England, 'he worked twelve hours at a

stretch . . . he retracted into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow.' (39) The future judge worked hard to qualify himself as an ICS by crushing his Indian soul, his foolish faith in Indian tradition and way of life and 'eventually he felt barely human at all. (40) When he returns with his tremendous success, his anglicized modern life-style does not allow him to mix up with his wife and relatives. He believes sternly in 'keeping up standards.' (119) He becomes an alien to himself; he is conscious all the time of maintaining his westernized mask: "He found he began to be mistaken for something he wasn't—a man of dignity. This accidental poise became more important than any other thing. He envied the English. He loathed Indians. He worked at being English with the passion of hatred and for what he would become, he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both." (119)

His ruthless, westernized soul and his loyalty to the colonial power forces him to abandon and kill his wife, and to take refuge in a dark tunnel of misanthropy and cynicism. Despite all his sacrifice for maintaining his dignity and pride as a retired ICS judge, he realises the futility of his endeavours when his guns are easily robbed off by the Nepali invaders laughing at his false snobbery and helplessness, because the judge stands for them the power of oppression which made them and their predecessors suffer for a long time. The judge gets nothing but loss, despair, frustration in a postcolonial India where he is treated nothing as an Indian nor as a European. His favourite dog, Mutt, trained in westernized manner is stolen which shocked him to the degree of madness, because Mutt is not only a pet, but also a part of his Anglicised self, his pride and dignity.

Running parallel to the judge and Sai's story is that of the old cook, who felt disappointed to be working for Jemubhai; a severe comedown; he thought 'from his father, who had served white men only,' (63) but he likes to maintain the line of honest service, inherited by his father and grandfather. The friendship between Sai and the old cook is 'composed of shallow things conducted in a broken language, for she was an English-speaker and he was a Hindi speaker.' (19) The cook glorifies the family, the past glamorous life and prestige of the retired judge much to glorify his own self also.

He never complains of his miserable and poverty-stricken existence because he has been enjoying an imaginative lavish life on the part of his son, Biju, who keeps himself shifting from one-lowly paid job to another in the hope of getting the all-elusive green card—the final symbol of victory. Desai presents the realistic comic-ironic situation of the cook who glorifies America as a land of jobs, riches and lavish life-style, without knowing anything about his son's banal fugitive-like existence where each day brings in more despair than hope, and life seems to be an endless hiding in the smelly, basement kitchens. While the cook believes with a pride that Biju is invariably in a position to help other young men in getting a job in the United States, Biju has nothing but anger and pity for his father:

> Biju couldn't help but feel a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country, but he knew he wouldn't have forgiven his father for not trying to send him, either. (82)

Poor and lonely in New York, Biju finds him unable to relish the reverie of being a rich and comfortable man: he feels nostalgic, and sometimes it appears to him that he is moving farther and farther from the easy and affectionate life with his father. Stumbling from one low-paid restaurant job to another, living in seedy squalor with groups of other immigrants, Biju's whole life now sets the pace for his final act of despair and defiance. He no longer wants to identify himself with 'the shadow class' moving helplessly in America and England: "Biju knew he probably wouldn't see him again. This was what happened he had learned by now. You lived intensely with other, only to have them disappear overnight, since the shadow class was condemned to movement. The man left for other jobs, towns, got deported, returned home, changed names." (102)

Biju gets completely disenchanted with the system of life, entrusted upon him, and decides to turn homeward, despite the warnings and advice from his friends and father. Arriving back in India, Biju is immediately humiliated by the rage and frustration of the Nepalese revolutionaries who treat all other non-Nepalese as aliens or outsiders who usurp their rights and privileges. Biju is robbed of all his cash and belongings by the Nepali insurgents, and finally he meets his father in an utterly hopeless and wretched condition.

Desai, perhaps, wants to suggest that in this postcolonial society, withdrawal or escape from the harsh reality is not possible; to live with his predicament is his ultimate destiny. Biju and the cook, with all their stubbornness, discover nothing but loss, poverty and the trappings of their own class: they represent the insecure, uprooted class, struggling to survive in the modern world, with a doubt whether they will share the benefits or profits of globalization.

There is no doubt about the literary influences on Desai's exploration of postcolonial chaos and despair, since she presents before us two Anglophilic Indian women, Lola and Noni, discussing V.S. Naipaul's novel, *A Bend in the River*. Lola, whose clothesline sags 'under a load of Mark and Spencer's panties,' (44) thinks Naipaul as 'strange, stuck in the past. . . . He has not progressed colonial neurosis. He's never freed himself from it.' (46) Lola criticizes Naipaul for ignoring the fact that there is a new England, a completely cosmopolitan society' where 'chicken-like masala has replaced fish and chips as the No. 1 take out dinner.' (46) She is also proud of her daughter, a newsreader for BBC radio with her British-accented voice. Desai ironically points out that it is Lola who has failed to progress: "'This state-making,' Lola continued, 'biggest mistake that fool Nehru made. Under his rules any group of idiots can stand up demanding a new state and get it, too.'" (128)

These two sisters look down upon Mrs. Sen and her talk related to the Muslims and their birth-rate as something 'vulgar and incorrect' (130) because they belong to 'the class that reads Jana Austen.' (130) Lola and Noni never thought that their modernity, dignity and refined culture, decorated safely in their bungalow, 'Mon Ami' is outraged so easily by the rage and frustration of those people who are inferior to them in respect of culture, upbringing and education. All her (Lola) concept of BBC, Trollope and a burst of hilarity at Christmas comes to a halt, without any decency and meaning in them. Desai reflected the chaotic, stunted minds of Lola and Noni which reacted at the face of multiculturalism, and did not find any reasonable or rational logic behind the causes of extremism and violence in the modern world, in her own typical flexible and poised prose: "What was a country but the idea of it? She thought of India

as a concept, a hope or desire. How often could you attack it before it crumbled?" (236)

We also see the crumbling dreams of Sai's other neighbours, Swiss Father Booty and his alcoholic friend, uncle Patty, who still live in India with the concept of an older era when colonialism was meant for the best. It is really a matter of rude shock for Father Booty who is made to realise that even after living in India for forty-five years, he is nothing but 'an Indian Foreigner' (220) and his further living in Kalimpong would be 'abuse of privilege' (220) on his part.

Amid these feelings of alienation and humiliation, Sai gets a kind of excitement and pleasure in her life when she falls in love with her young, Nepali tutor, Gyan who is hired to teach her math. The romance between Gyan and Sai flowers with algebra formulas and geometry theorems despite their inequality of status and culture: "they had not paid very much attention to the events on the hillside, the new posters in the market referring to old, discontents 'we are stateless,' they read." (126)

This delicate relationship between Sai and Gyan gets dislocated as soon as Gyan finds himself loathing his inferior status, and the very actions of Sai that once charmed him, now repulse him:

> It was a masculine atmosphere and Gyan felt a moment of shame remembering his tea parties with Sai on the veranda. . . . It suddenly seemed against the requirement of his adulthood. He voiced an adamant opinion that the Gorkha movement take the harshest route possible. (161)

Confused and disgusted, torn between his newfound ethnic loyalties and his delicate courtship with Sai, Gyan joins the insurgents and marches across the streets, demanding liberation of his homeland and wanting to oust all foreigners. As Desai puts it, it is not a matter of surprise for half-educated, uprooted man like Gyan to take advantage of the first available political cause in their search for a better life. A shocked and dismayed Sai tries to bridge the gap between her lover and herself, but she feels only betrayed and humiliated by him. Her journey from the world of innocence to that of experience is over with the betrayal of Gyan and the fractured sentiments of Biju

and the cook; she realises the futility of love, longing, dreams and dignity in a world of cultural clashes and religious contradictions. However, Sai tries to conclude her life, like a mystic, who has seen both the vastness of the sky and the narrowness of the earth: "Life wasn't single in its purpose . . . or even in its direction. The simplicity of what she'd been taught wouldn't hold. Never again could she think there was but one narrative . . . that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it." (323)

Through the emotional setback of Sai, Kiran Desai unravels the overwhelming feeling of alienation and humiliation, caused by the winds of change, experienced by most of the world's population, who look upon the forces of globalization, multiculturalism, modernization, terrorism and insurgency as continuous affront to their notions of order, dignity and justice.

The Inheritance of Loss may not be appreciated as a novel of optimism because each and every character appears to be lost in 'a rat's alley' where no growth or redemption is possible. Postcolonial Syndrome stands as much for the longing for modern, English life as for the hatred and reaction against it. In this postcolonial world, most of the people suffer from identity-crisis, erosion of old-established human values by their loss of faith in them, a sense of alienation or rootlessness caused by the materialistic attitude, and finally their nostalgia, their longing to regain their real, emotional self. We find in this novel how the judge and other characters delve deep into their past to see what role they have played and how much effort they have put in making their life better, and how their actions or attitude finally led them to a meaningless and insecure existence.

Desai's realistic portrayal of a postcolonial world with struggling people, both in India and abroad, arouses a sense of sympathy for each of these characters, suffering from self-pity or self-hatred. With her superb kaleidoscopic technique and flexible, forceful prose, Desai cover the tragi-comic lives in Kalimpong, Manhattan and India by creating a comic bounce in Biju's troubles, a distorted shape of Sai and Gyan's romance, and a heart-broken judge, beseeching a chaotic world for help in his retrieving of Mutt. Desai sometimes wonders whether the west's consumer-driven multiculturalism or economic globalization would be helpful for the prosper-

ity of the poor or not. In New York, Achootan, a fellow dishwasher of Biju in the kitchen, wants to have a green card even though he hates the people and life of America. His simple explanation to his predicament lies in the fact: "He wanted it in the way of revenge . . . Everyone wanted it whether you liked it or you hated it. The more you hated it sometimes, the more you wanted it." (135)

The omniscient novelist, Desai presents her own observation by commenting that profit could only be harvested in the gap between nations, working one against the other. The existence of immigrants and their strange isolated lives force them to live in the postcolonial world with only the promise of a shabby modernity which appears both attractive and repulsive. Despite her young age, Desai is a promising novelist of rare insight and wisdom. Her writings reflect not only the natural mysticism of Tolstoy but also the rueful post-modern ambivalence of Dickens. One agrees with the statement that appeared in the *Publishers Weekly*: "*The Inheritance of Loss* is really stunning . . . alternately comical and contemplative . . . [Desai] deftly shuttles between first and third worlds, illuminating the pain of exile, the ambiguities of Postcolonialism and the binding desire for a 'better life' when one person's wealth means another's poverty."

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An Alien Soul on Alien Soil: A Study in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*

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Expatriation as a literary phenomenon provides the mode of writing to fictionists like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manju Kapur and many others. Unlike others, she herself is not an expatriate, so she looks at cultural transplantation from the Indian side. She is one of the major Indo-English women writers who have contextualized the women problems in general and middle class and upper class women in particular. She, like Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and others, has tried sincerely and honestly to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women. While her first novel *Difficult Daughters* is a family saga against the historical backdrop of partition, her second novel *A Married Woman*, is a work of investigative reporting on the political issue of the demolition of Babri Masjid and a woman's obsession with love and lesbianism. In her third novel *Home*, Kapur gives vent to a kind of subjectivity that refuses to reconcile and identify itself with a patriarchal and male-dominated society.

Manju Kapur's latest novel *The Immigrant* deals with the theme of geographical dislocation entailing several ruptures—emotional, cultural and fragmentation of identity. The novel centres round Nina, a thirty-year old English lecturer, unmarried, struggling to make both ends meet for herself and her widowed mother. On the eve of her thirtieth birthday, she finds her life ebbing away—no hope of any brightness in her existence. Nina finds her world totally female: "colleagues, friends, students, parent. She would end up, she dreads, a bitter old spinster like Miss Kapoor of the Economics Dept. like Miss Lal of History or Miss Krishnamurthy of Sanskrit." (3)

Nina represents the urban Indian woman. She has taken seven plus years to finish school, migrates to Delhi to study English Hon-

ours at Miranda House, take a postgraduate degree from the University and get a lectureship at her alma mater. She always dreams for a fuller life for her mother and the latter hopes that a husband can be found for her daughter who may give her a home she deserves. An arranged marriage takes place between Nina and Ananda, a dentist from Halifax, Canada. Owing to the death of his parents in an accident, he had migrated to Canada, leaving a flourishing practice behind in Dehradun. As he was building up his career there, he had no time to think of marriage. However, his sister Alka's repeated request for his marriage forced him to think of an arranged marriage; he thought of 'a willing, patient, forging, loving partner.' (47) Nina's mother, Mrs. Batra, was also very happy as she knew going abroad would suit her daughter—decent, comfortable, easy living, fine food and wine, holidays, access to books, music, theatre, concerts she would have all the things that had once made their lives privileged. However, Nina was not ready to rush into marriage with someone she didn't know. She needed some time to brood over this proposition. She told her mother frankly, "I'm not sure, Ma, it is such a big step. And so far away. It means leaving everything, job, friends, you. If anything happens, I'll be left with nothing." (75) Indeed, on 26th December, the marriage ceremony was arranged at Ananda's sister Alka's residence. After sometime he left India. Nina, too, returned to her college but now a married woman.

Nina after marriage was very sad thinking about her mother. She had seen her mother's life since her father died and now she was going 10,000 miles away. She was thinking of "her true vida—to her home, her friend, her job, her mother, everything. . . . This is the lot of women, what is one to do." (97) At last, she had to go to Halifax. Her new place looked comfortable, compact and cosy, unlike those terrible rooms in Jangpura. She was very happy. She tells Ananda, "I have never seen the sea—and the house is perfect, I shall be very happy here." (114) But very soon she realised that she, the wife of Ananda, as an immigrant had a more difficult time. However, Ananda tried his best to help her settle down there. He even allowed her to take any job there.

She eventually got ready to feel in Halifax. Like an Indian wife she was thinking of becoming a mother. She always saw the shadowy figure of her own child, listening intently, intelligence gleaming from large dark eyes. However, Ananda was not in a hurry. Sue,

her friend in order to divert her attention advised her to join La Leche League, an association of nursing mothers. They all looked concerned and sympathetic to Nina. They thought that the stress of being in a strange country could be a reason for not conceiving. The anxiety and strain often took the desire out of sex, and then the marriage often broke up. There was a storm inside her, created by raising the possibility of infertility in front of a group of women. She felt "helplessness, loss of control and a lack of confidence in her feminity. That was a sterile woman's profile." (167)

Moreover, she was not in a mood to blame her husband; she rather thought of doing what was necessary to have a child. On the contrary, according to Ananda children were important but it was more important to settle down first. And Nina wanted a child to settle down, to give her days focus in the new country. She, without telling Ananda went to Dr. Abbot for check up. With the passage of time the relation between her and Ananda got strained. Whenever she tried to get cosy with him, he would turn indifferent to her. After some time Ananda went to California to have some sort of sex therapy, though, Nina knew that it was his official tour. During his treatment, he underwent several types of experiences. He realised very soon that openness was the key to a good relationship. During Ananda's absence, Nina got a job in Halifax Memorial Library. She said, "this is my home away from home. I used to teach literature in India, now I am getting to know Canadian authors." (200)

When Ananda came back, she told him about her job. After his return he had become more calculative, he kept the record of everything related to his sexual life: "the date, the thrusts, the length of time inside." (211) Nina knew everything, but she was helpless. She observed: "Above all I want us to have a solid relationship, with us sharing everything. You are all I have in this country, you are the reason I am here." (211)

Indeed, there was a change in Nina's life when she met bra- burning feminists, a group of women devoted to the cause of the women. She felt that she should find her feet in the country; she could no longer walk on her husband's. The motto of the group was to provide the women a safe place in which to express themselves, to grow without fear of criticism, where their individualities will be nurtured and strengthened. She got the opportunity of reading a

number of books like *The Second Sex*, *The Female Eunuch* etc. After reading these books, her attitude towards life changed a lot. She couldn't decide what was bothering her most—her inability to conceive or Anand's going to California without telling her? She was now less enthusiastic about a baby, but this only made her feel empty. She was getting much influenced by Simon de Beauvoir's thesis, who observes, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature." (295) Her future, she felt, was still as unclear as on the day she had wed.

Among the students of the Library School, Anton was the one who liked Asian women—he found them warm, intelligent, gentle and empathetic. Very soon Nina and Anton fell into 'a bantering relationship.' They were both married and to keep things clear, she made frequent references to his wife and her husband. She enjoyed his company in Ottawa. For the first time, she had a sense of her own self, entirely separate from other people, autonomous, independent. Her first lover had taken her virginity and her hopes, her second lover had been her husband, her third had made her international. But very soon, that sense of autonomy she had in Ottawa turned out to be illusory. She ultimately realised, "Anton and she were not into having a relationship; it was purely a meeting of bodies, a healthy give and take." (273)

She also felt that she had to protect her marriage, the bedrock of her life in Canada. However, when she was going to visit India, her heart was heavy. She contemplated the months that would pass without the particular comfort of seeing Anton and found she couldn't bear it. When she landed in India, her mother greeted her with tears in her eyes. She observed, "her skin glowed . . . the result of regular gym visits and energetic sex. Two years of cold damp air, walking everywhere and studying hard made her seem younger." (287)

She asked her mother to immigrate to Canada as her life would assume the simple sweetness she yearned for. In India she enjoyed in the company of her mother and her friend Zenobia and then she returned to Canada. Even after her return, she kept on talking about motherhood, continuity, infertility, treatment and her biological clock, which irritated Ananda to certain extent. He came to the con-

clusion that she was conservative. He was the true westerner, she the true Indian. The death of her mother was a great shock to her. She knew that her life had been thinly populated. She was its centre and when she left India, the centre could not hold.

Thus we find that Nina passed through a number of experiences—his meeting with Ananda, thinking of a better life, her moving to Canada after marriage, her loneliness there, her remembering her mother, her meeting with different social groups, her joining the library, her relationship with her husband, her contact with Anton and finally her overall frustration. She had come to Canada in the throes of hope and love, but got nothing except disappointment and frustration: "Feeling lost is inevitable in a new place—and if the case is of a woman without a job, far away from her friends and family, it must be doubly hard." (232) She tried hard to get Canadian identity, but it was really difficult for her as being an Indian, she was conditioned to think that 'a woman's fulfillment lies in birth and motherhood.'

In Canada, men and women were often connected on platonic levels; in India, there is no question of platonic levels, every male-female interaction was suspected. Before coming to Halifax, she was a strict vegetarian: it had been a mark of remaining true to her upbringing. But now fish and beef had become essential part of her being; it was the result of fragmentation and distress, not a desire for convenience. In fact, she considered it hypocritical to hang on to vegetables, she did not want to present herself as a traditional, devout Hindu wife. This was a special trait of the immigrant in general—coming with old world values and undergoing changes in due course. In Halifax, Nina always longed for a community. She joined various social organisations like La Leche League, the HRL etc. in order to find a place into which she might fit herself, but everywhere she got nothing except frustration. She often thought that she was living with a man who never understood a word she was saying. She felt humiliated by her own longing for extra-marital relation. She thought that, 'to bargain away her peace of mind for an ephemeral satisfaction made no sense.' (301)

Moreover, she was very much conscious of her integrity. So she did not think of continuing her relation with Anton. She was also hesitant in exposing him and getting him punished. She was tired of

the life she was living. In the absence of her mother, her life was now completely her own responsibility; she could blame none, she felt adult and bereft at the same time. With no mother to disappoint, nobody's expectations to meet, the bonds of her marriage assumed a different feel, although she could not free herself totally from her husband. Rather she thought of him as her solitary anchor in the world. She enjoyed every breath of air, despite her heavy heart.

Nina felt that everything was temporary in life. Her colleagues at HRL, the woman's group that encouraged her to be angry and assertive, Beth, Gayatri, Library School---all were warming but temporary, the sense of community was there but everything temporary. She realized that it was the ultimate immigrant experience. In the modern world once moved there is no homecoming. Nina becomes a 'floating resident of the western world.' Manju Kapur sums up her novel with optimistic note: "Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again." (334)

The novelist has very well tried to establish the thesis that the self of the immigrant is diminished every moment in the adopted land. She dwells on the situation of Indian immigrants: 'certain Indians become immigrants slowly.' These immigrants are tormented souls because they are not who have fled persecution, destitution, famine, slavery or death threat. Their country has not closed its doors on them the moment they leave. They are divided beings--always in two minds. Kapur has well described the various aspects of immigrant experiences of Nina, the protagonist. She is a master delineator of the complex Indian family life. She exploits the familiar spaces of present day human experience with exceptional understanding.

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Mending the Fences: A Postcolonial Reading of Mulk Raj Anand's Autobiographical Novels

BINOD MISHRA

Mulk Raj Anand belongs to such a generation of Indian novelists in English that witnessed both the phases of Indian life—a life lived as a colonial and a life experienced as a postcolonial. His sympathy with the victims of British alien rule and its sequel in the form of silent revolution getting voices under the leadership of Gandhi and his likes is a testimony of the fact that his fiction is suffused with the dual consciousness. His understanding of the deep-rooted agony of the underprivileged in his earlier novels prepares his readers to expand their thought-processes as individuals in a postcolonial world of conflicting loyalties, criss-crossing cultures and threatening ethnocentric ideologies.

The present paper is a humble attempt to trace the elements of postcolonialism in Anand's fiction. His fiction has been viewed more as social documents and he has been labelled a period novelist. But a reading of Anand's autobiographical novels provides the readers with his worldview; the anxieties of man in a postcolonial set-up where values violate and the rough and tumble of life put human beings in a state of confusion and chaos.

Anand can be studied under postcolonial context not only because of his writing in English and his identity attached to a former British colony. What appear more pertinent in his case are the echoes of his national identity and the unifying global tinge. Anand seems to share more of Bhabha's belief that 'cultural differences are sought to be maintained in hybridized societies to produce imagined constructions of identities, cultural and national.'[1] Anand's concern for the local merges into global because of his ever-awakened reali-

zation. What Anand told philosophically to P.K. Rajan comprises most of what postcolonial theorists have been debating:

> I have been evolving a philosophy of the human person, which is miscellaneous. It is not doctrinaire thought. It is a number of insights, possibly arising from my experience. I think we are part of a much bigger universe; we are part of the whole world.'

Anand demonstrates his postcolonial consciousness in a number of ways. As a writer of sociological novels in his early phase he shows his rebellion in the form of Bakha, Munoo and Lalu who carry volcano in their physical frames and tame the feeling of otherness in their own country ruled by alien forces. Unable though to wage a war with their rulers, these protagonists are shown communicating in their own language full of slangs and abuses. What tempts us to trace the vestiges of postcolonial challenges in his work is Anand's attempts to accommodate his protagonist in a multi-cultural, multilingual flexible world. The burden of colonial anguish gets a subtle release in his later novels. His double consciousness prepares him to answer the metaphysical questions of space and time.

Anand is not a slave either of rigid social conventions or false fetishes. His father's subservience to British rule and his mother's blind devotion to worshipping of gods and goddesses suffocate him. His experiences with his schoolmasters are also unpleasant and he considers them stuck in the old notion of sparing the rod and spoiling the child. He foresees the future generation of his nation becoming the puppets responding and restricting themselves to instructions of poor masters. The contractors of knowledge were bent on confining the minds of a new generation who would disseminate nothing but fear and anxiety. The stunted growth of human personality, caused by the fear instilled in young amateur minds would rewrite the history of India, agitated the mind of Anand. He makes the protagonist of his later novels question all sorts of issues and enables them to explore alternatives that could help them earmark their space and realize their roles.

Anand's sociological novels were written with a purpose to transform the conditions of the oppressed. The ebb and flow of his heart could not get its outlet in the novels of his first two phases. His

sociological novels though have a wider spectrum and epical range but the structure of these novels hindered the novelist from unlocking the flood of his feelings. He changes his narrative method in these novels to record the colour and texture of the protagonist's emotions and thoughts. The later phases of Anand's fiction-writing show him maturing as a sober and restrained artist who could look beyond the stars and the sky and undertake a peregrination of self-analysis and self-exploration to a spiritual journey blocked by terrestrial forces.

Anand does not carry the hangovers of colonialism in his autobiographical novels. The spiritual quest of his protagonist in these novels arises from the consciousness of the transience of things. His optimistic approach towards the new world enables him to forget the bumpy road of past and entails in him a will to transcend and transmute. The notion that man is primarily the inner man and his outer actions are propelled by his inner life makes Anand a post-colonial thinker who has to accommodate in himself the roar of machines without silencing the voice of his inside. Most of his autobiographical novels bear a testimony to the realization of the awakened man who has to broaden the walls of his house to mend the fences. The protagonist of these novels is Krishan who is a transformed version of Bakha, Munoo and Lalu. The encounter of these characters with the tide of time is an investment and not an exercise in futility.

Seven Summers (1951), the first in the series of Anand's autobiographical novels, opens on a note of symbolic cheer and joy: "Sunshine scatters like gold dust."[3] Anand employs the old myth in the context of a new India to perpetuate the rhythms and flow of Krishan's personality. He does not repudiate the old myth in a categorical manner; rather he retains part of it to renovate the decaying social and cultural life of India. Saros Cowasjee's remark in the introduction of the novel *Seven Summers* adds to the glory of the novel: "It is the product of an epic intention to absorb, transform and reveal the whole heritage of India."

The world, which offers Krishan attractions and distractions and puts numerous challenges help in broadening his vision of life. The road dominates the first part of the novel whereas the river symbol-

izing flow and mobility renders a postcolonial hue to the second part of the novel. Anand is not a captive of nostalgic feelings and his desire to establish rapport with the outside world enables him to demolish the old barriers. His aversion to his father's patched up compromise world indicates his revolutionary nature. The army life of his father had bred in him gruffness and seemed to have stunted his sensitivity. The uproar for expansion and his desire to mend fences even with foes amply demonstrates Anand's craving for life. We can find a representation of Anand's ideology in the dream world of Krishan. What Krishan says is not devoid of postcolonial preoccupation: "The fervours of these early desires sank into the labyrinths of the mind, soaked me in the colours of this fantasy." (49)

Many of Anand's critics find him stuck in sociological and documentary significance of his fiction. What they see is only half-truth and the other half is left unplugged. . Such critics forget the relationship of the author with his surroundings. Fiction for Anand is not an escape but an alternative to enlighten the minds gone astray. He represents Indian fiction in English as an innovation, a new kind of creative expression. He advises these critics to shed their frozen evaluation and comprehend the internal evidences before jumping to hasty conclusions. Serious readers and critics of Anand's novels may find a fountain of the collective unconscious of India. In a mood of confession, Anand says: "The connection between my life and my writing is more intimate than in other novelists. I write as I live. My life is my message."[4]

The advocate of the lowly who pleads for removing 'otherness' of his characters unlocks the secrets of his heart not in a mood of withdrawal but in a spirit of go forward. The fight against otherness gets a new intensity and awareness when Anand's protagonist, Krishan readies himself for the various selves of man and woman. All his conflicts and contortions, which cause anguish, double with his experience of European life. His contradiction reaches a point of resolution in his autobiographical novels. The miscellaneous philosophy of the human person evolves in these novels. He shows in these novels that we are part of the whole world and our doubts, questioning and contradictions lead us to a more comprehensive vision of life. The multifarious impulses and imperceptible feelings of

his protagonist procreate a subtle dimension. What makes Anand a postcolonial is the fact that his inherited culture and acquired vision do not result in any ambivalence or distortion.

Life is not static. It is always in a state of flux. The mores of our individual as well as our social responsibility cannot remain fixed. The resistance to change and the deep-rooted miasma of negating all that is new will ultimately lead mankind to despair. Variety is the spice of life and adjustment the order. Anand's experiment of dispensing with the linear approach and adopting a complex one is also an attempt to situate himself amid all fractures and fragmentations. This new approach is determined by the protagonist's instinct and emotion, impulse and idea. We find Anand's postcolonial pattern of despair and delight in his novels. What Anand says about novel hints at his multifaceted personality both as a writer and as a human being:

> The novel is prose form in which you get the echoes of all kinds, not only from the outside life of nature but also from the biological impulses which are very deep underneath the racial unconsciousness.[5]

Morning Face (1968) is Anand's second autobiographical novel. It exhibits the protagonist's growth of self-awareness in a more definite shape. Krishan enacts the dream of existence in its love-hate relationship in the phenomenal world. The panoramic background of struggling India adds a new dimension with the focus on Krishan's evolution to higher consciousness. The tension caused by conflicting political loyalty in the protagonist's homeland adds to his fury. He breaks the curfew and is also punished. The Jallianwallah Bagh massacre has a very severe impact on his mind and he feels a sense of alienation. The description of the protagonist's anguish not only expresses the postcolonial anxiety but also the clash between tradition and change. The encounter of the protagonist with irrevocable reality presents a postcolonial problem:

> I now began to realize actually the nature of difference between the two worlds in which I lived, the world of the compromise of my father and the world of the principles of the nationalist.[6]

Krishan faces Kaushalya's death, which acts as a crack in his consciousness. His brother's marriage with Draupadi is for him an insti-

tutionalized suppression. Krishan feels delighted in the company of Mumtaz, his brother's mistress. She provides him energy and a creative direction and inspires him to divert the flood of his feelings of disquiet into the loveliest words and the most haunting refrains. The moments of relaxation in the company of Devaki, Mumtaz and Shakuntala gradually transform his quest for love into quest for truth. The metaphysical questions of life, death and mortality enable Krishan to respond to the inner rhythms of life to give an intense expression to these rhythms. He describes himself as a divine imbecile who listened to the music and rhythm and evocations inside him. His grief and joy have a larger context and not mere private indulgences. His desire to learn the distance through which personal experience can be transformed to another plane of understanding is a burning example of postcolonial struggle.

Another autobiographical novel *Confession of a Lover* (1976) presents Krishan's problem of attaining a new identity with greater force and unrelenting tenacity. His determination to correct himself takes a metaphysical hue and stirs his consciousness. Krishan's self-awareness is a way of grappling with the world. Krishan's love with a married Muslim woman has its various ramifications. The love affair between the two fails and Krishan has nothing to fall back upon since Yashmin is murdered. He hates the blind orthodoxy, which snatched his beloved and brought him despair. Devoid of love and lost of purpose, Krishan suffers void, anxiety and restlessness. Anand sympathizes with Krishan in the following lines: "What was the self really? What was thinking itself? And the whole apparatus of fears, of horrors, prides and prejudices. Who was it in me that was loving?"[7]

The death of Yashmin is a big trauma yet it fails to destroy his resilience and zest for life. Krishan has to transcend himself for greater truths and has to guard himself against the impending hazards because the sickness and morbidity will weaken the revolutionary who has to create a new world, a new order to liberate from the sickening surroundings and paralyzing despair. The roads may be rough and the ride bumpy yet the journey has to reach its mansion.

Anand answers most of the queries of his half-hearted critics in his most artistic and relenting manner in his internationally ac-

claimed novel, *The Bubble* (1984).The novel shows not only Krishan's transcendence but Anand's penetrative and panoplied confidence. His stay in England enabled him to enlighten himself and it helped him understand the problem of a postcolonial world. His agonizing awareness of insufficiency in the stagnant climate of India is given a sharp expression in the following lines: "And each of us has the ghosts of the dead past in us, the enemies who deny the poetry of life, the demons who have to be exorcised."

Krishan is not the fiery and flamboyant Indian who loves his nation just for the sake of loving it. He can reject all that is dross in any culture. He has to grow by absorbing everything and by becoming more than anything. The problem of knowledge and experience is more important to him. He is unsettled at Prof. Dicks' remark about Indian students sticking to old jargons. His Indian root does not seem as an appendage to him though he wants to develop a universal outlook. The world is for him an image of harmony and space-time continuum is for him the poetry of life.

Krishan faces dread and despair because of his split existence in England. He has to restore the vitality of the old myths because it is 'shrouded in the rituals.' His determination to gather new sensations in England for his self-discovery shows his awareness. He prefers the ideologies of Iqbal to Hume and finds delight:

> So to exist is to be. And to be is to become aware. Matter cannot become. Every new experience makes me. I can choose to be. Nature cannot. I have the freedom of choice. I can create myself through my consciousness. (72)

The Bubble is a quintessence of innocence and experience. It extends beyond time and space and the novel is more expansive because it shows Anand's penchant for absorbing everything in a fast-changing postcolonial world. More of an autobiography, the novel comprises letters, diary entries and has many beautiful titles. Spread in nine parts, the novel breaks barriers of all kinds both thematically and structurally. The first part depicts Krishan's stay under Prof. Dicks who unravels many mysteries and makes him aware of the various threads of philosophy and shreds of human existence. The second part acquaints Krishan with the landscapes of London and

creates in him nostalgia for his homeland. The second part also has a mention of Krishan's meeting with Lucy, who is a bundle of repressed emotions. The third part which brings Krishan to the top of his consciousness as a fuller being is his contact with Irene. It is Irene who acts as a catalyst in Krishan's search for an authentic existence. Krishan's journey to Paris in the fourth part, his interaction with literary giants in the fifth and his journey to Ireland brings a transformation in him. Krishan's letters to Irene in seventh and his father's letter in the eighth part pave the way to his self-discovery. The last and ninth part of the novel is Krishan's reply to his father's letter. Krishan is a changed person and a fuller being. He argues his own case and like an adroit advocate he clears all charges. What Krishan says is free from all inhibitions and honest appraisal of his personality:

> I don't want to pose as a saint or a hero, though I confess I often feel glow of that ambition and must extirpate it. I just want to be a human and recreate tragic lives of our dumb people. (602)

The various phases of the novel show Krishan's transcendence towards a better life, a life of consciousness, and a life of ability to accommodate the oddities of life. As a novelist who aimed 'to answer many challenges,' Anand hated confinement and bondage of all sorts. He didn't remain fixed and advanced on a journey to meaning and maturity. He asserts: "One must awaken to fresh possibilities latent in the writers' decay, the opening of bud into flowers and the promise of the coming of luscious fruit on the tree of happiness."[13]

What makes Anand's autobiographical novels postcolonial is the spark of existential awareness present in the protagonist, Krishan. The wide range of concerns and perceptions provide the outer and inner curves of action and introspection. K.K. Sharma applauds Anand as the only Indian English novelist having a thorough understanding of world fiction. The structure of Anand's fiction comprises the disquiet of Emile Bronte, the freedom of Virginia Woolf and the exile of V.S. Naipaul. Anand may at times appear diffuse and lost but he is always comprehensive. Like D.H. Lawrence, Anand leads us away from all that is dead and corrupt. Anand shows Krishan's changing subconscious and unconscious levels:

> I feel quite excited about going into the interior, into the quiet of the country, away from the big, noisy London, where I may be able to go further into the unknown and find some purpose and a will of my own to master life. (64)

Anand is keenly aware that his technique and style must differ from those employed by Western writers. He is aware of his Indian ethos, which colours everything he writes. His fictional pursuit is primarily a search for appropriate verbal structure. He combines the technique of self-projection with the objective social reality. He is able to give his commitment a broader base in an age of concern. His concept of body-soul drama in autobiographical novels shows that his intellectual awareness does not dominate his imaginative fiction. His hero is not an intellectual abstraction. Krishan travels a long way and he moves from the realm of fact to the realm of essence.

Anand, though writing in English, is aware of his Indian flavour. He does not follow a fixed pattern and uses language the way he likes. Language is only a medium and its purpose does not get defeated if one understood the essence. He takes liberty, alters rules of grammar and gives English language a new potential and a new range. He draws examples from other Indian languages and infuses their essences into his English. He captures the rhythms of Indian images and symbols in English. These images do serve their purpose in the context and become integral with the total pattern. Those who have read *Confessions of a Lover* and *The Bubble* may attest to it. Description, narration and reflection pose no problem for Anand.

Style and language are not neutral in Anand's fiction. They reflect the temperament and the culture of the writer like a true Indian. Anand's fascination for embellished expression shows that Indians are sentimental people. The matter of fact is dull for him. His language conveys adequately what he feels intensely. Imagination and insight acquire substance because of his linguistic energy. It is the language that constructs and interprets reality. Language in a significant way crystallizes the inner history of a society. Words used by an artist are the units of sensibility. A new style indicates a radical change in the collective psyche of that society. Anand's language does not have a monkish quality about it. His language and

style also show a revolt against his oppressive society. They also indicate his moral and spiritual energy and total being.

A sense of futility and helplessness is the major component of a postcolonial world. In such a world, man lives mechanically without being alive. Anand loosens the old culture and language for full communication. Krishan's dreams and desires give him freedom and prepare for renewal of those dreams. The old categories of ethics and religion do not satisfy him. Transcendence is achieved in the stillness of his mind.

Anand's autobiographical novels remind us that the east and west can understand each other sufficiently to make a creative alliance and march towards a better future. He tries to 'yoke in his fiction the new pragmatism with the awakened spirituality.' East and west in Anand's fiction comes together and evolves new aesthetic values. This togetherness can forge new waves of life. K.R.S. Iyengar rightly describes it as 'the decisive evolutionary advance of the human race.'[9]

Like a postcolonial writer Anand gives us a greater sense and a vaster, subtler and profounder form of our existence. We find in *The Bubble* that material realm is not the sole world of experience. Krishan is the seeker of self and spirit. That is why he at times goes away from the noise of life to commune with the largeness and peace of Nature. His mind moves towards the realization of the totality of life. He makes the actuality of our earthly life rich, full and wide. Anand's depiction of this realization reminds us of what Aurobindo said: "To know other countries is not to belittle but enlarge our own country and help it to a greater power of its own being." (233)

Krishan in *The Bubble* substantiates the life of this vast self and spirit. He, like Mulk Raj Anand, was fascinated in England by all the categories. His desire to absorb everything and fill the empty inner space symbolizes his fervour for life. His search for happiness sometimes receives a jolt. We find him full of despair when Prof. Dicks dismisses India as a mumbo-jumbo. He remembers the phrase of Mama Dayal Singh to counter Prof. Dicks' feeling: "Man is on a journey to the unknown sun, but he has no shelter. He seems uprooted. He has to find a home in ecstasy." (18) The lines express

Anand's anxiety in particular and the postcolonial world in general. The crisis of India is not an individual but a worldwide phenomenon.

The story of loss and regaining of identity is the framework of all great literature. The symbols and images in Anand's autobiographical novels are not only realistic but also fantastic. Paradisal and pastoral words are linked to the archetypal. The hero looks beyond himself towards the universe and this becomes a cosmological cycle.

Anand has aptly made Krishan advance beyond the carryovers of the past and rise to all the possibilities of an authentic existence. Buddha was not right, according to Anand, if life was all pain for him. We have to move beyond death and decay, suffering is more liberating than constricting for Anand. He finds Buddha's philosophy bereft of drama and magic. That is why Lucy is a part of negation and Irene a part of fulfillment for Krishan. Krishan's fascination for the mountain tops is a longing for life. Anand says: "Why do mountain tops uplift us? I asked myself. Is it because we reach beyond our flat days towards the gods on some Mount Meru." (109)

Thus we find that Anand's autobiographical novels are much more than the colonialist fiction because he does not negate the individuality and subjectivity of his native hero. The hero is commodified into a stereotyped object. The colonialist is not seen as a superior being. Anand does not create the impression that the technological superiority of the Western indicates his moral superiority. Anand is not the ambivalent colonized intellectual. The colonizer's worldview is not the only mode of articulation left for him. Anand as a Westernized intellectual is not a "pathetic creature that in his search for an articulate self strays towards becoming a caricature of the other."[10]

Anand as the third world writer is not constrained to perpetuate the colonial heritage. He represents those who at a conscious level attempt to break through the paradigm they have inherited from the colonial past. Anand's fiction is not a 'communication satellite' for the West. The use of postcolonial context helps in determining our response. The cognitive structure does not pose any barrier to the exploration of awareness. We do not share Hasnain's observation:

> The result is that an encounter between a postcolonialist text and the native reader lapses into a battle in the darkness of alienation in which there are no winners, in which there are only bemused losers. (131)

Anand projects in his autobiographical novels the inner reality and his own spiritual perplexities. The dramatizations of his experiences are rooted in concrete situations. He possesses a postcolonial and modern mind in the sense that he has tremendous capacity for self-analysis. The power of self-analysis is the manifestation of growing consciousness. The increase in awareness is possible only when man looks inward and is prepared to confront the mystery of his own self. *The Bubble* and other autobiographical novels are richly coloured by an awareness of individual identity. The design of *The Bubble* is inclusive because the awareness of the east-west confrontation prevents any simple resolution. The protagonist is able to reach forward through a maze of contradictions to a positive state. Anand appears quite close to modern writers not only in his fidelity to feeling and thought but also in his organization of cultural and spiritual drama.

Thus we find that if Anand's autobiographical novels on the one hand may seem to be suffused by his personal melancholy and the various circumstances putting obstacles in his ways of becoming a man, an artist having free will yet they are not untouched by the exploitation and atrocities of colonial rule. The irrational attitude of his European teachers during his school days and his father's subservience to the British government were not a case of personal choice but a circumstantial compulsion. The conscious artist in Anand had a candid realization of all these and his seminal book *The Bubble* manifests everything. *The Bubble* appears every inch a reminder to the colonizers what they had done to the colonized. The painful realizations which get an outlet in Anand's autobiographical works give a clue to how boundaries prevalent in the minds of the propagators of East-West divide can be broken to usher in a new era of camaraderie. Mending the fences, to a great extent, means mending the ways and amending our relations not widening the walls. To be fair, we find Anand's fiction having a sensibility that releases a state of contemplation. His fiction perpetuates an order of existence, which in actual life constantly crumbles. What makes his autobio-

graphical novels more significant is the sensitiveness rather than doctrine or belief. It is more of a cognitive discourse, which asserts a worldview. It imposes an order upon ordinary reality and the order can be experienced only by a contemplative mind.

Notes

1. Rajeshwar Mittapalli, Editorial notes. *The Atlantic Literary Review*. Vol. 2 October-December 2000.
2. P.K. Rajan, *Studies in M.R. Anand*. New Delhi: Abhinav 1986.
3. M.R. Anand, *Seven Summers*. New Delhi. Orient Paperback.1970 Rpt.
4. Rajan, p. 95
5. *Ibid*, p. 102.
6. M.R. Anand. *Morning Face*. Bombay. Kutub Popular.1968.P-438
7. M.R. Anand. *Confession of a Lover*. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1976. p. 160.
8. M.R. Anand. *The Bubble*. New Delhi. Arnold Heinemann, 1984, p. 12.
9. K.R.S. Iyengar, *The Adventure of Criticism*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1965, p. 294.
10. Hasnain S. Imtiaz, ed. *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism*. New Delhi. Bahri, 1992, p. 20.

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Quest for Spirituality: A Study of Kamala Markandaya's *Possession*

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Spiritual pursuits as reflected in the noble aspirations of religion are supposed to be *summum bonum* of social living and are also the prime motivations of life. From the earliest phase, religion, mythology and literature all over the world have recorded the human craving and prayer for deliverance, both individual and collective, from the paradoxical, death-haunted existential situation, and the forms of evil, moral and natural. Especially in the post-war world of doubts and rationalistic prophecies, the quest for spirituality became incidental or rather a prerogative or 'complete vision.' Almost every religion believes in the worship of god-forms, divine-symbols, god-names and god-men. Each of these forms is something positive, concrete and shows a passion for God. Commonly there has been a belief in a saviour, divine or human, a model of perfection who preserves the cosmic order, makes human life harmonious, and the society a renewed blessed state. The *Sanyasi* is such a model in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, a blessed symbol of quest for spirituality. The interest in this paper is in whether and how far the novelist has been successful in presenting a common human being, a spiritual one and what, in fact, is her purpose in presenting him so.

Indian sages who are both philosophers and metaphysicians view life in its totality. Spirituality as evidenced in the novels of Markandaya is not an experience that transcends life but an experience that springs from total relationship with nature and its element. It is this exciting, rewarding and life-giving experience based on blind faith that is spiritual for her characters. Kamala Markandaya has portrayed sanyasi's character as a quest for spirituality and an

assertion against the irreconcilable world of science that co-exists in the society. A *Sanyasi* is a man who has a developed spiritual side but this does not necessarily claim to a high order of intellectual development. This man, in fact, makes a complete renunciation seeking persistently spiritual knowledge and striving to seek universal love and compassion. These are the years of meditation, discipline, austerity and dedication that make him a *Sanyasi*. He is above any particular religion and his attachment is with humanity in general. In this reference Dr. Radhakrishnan opines, "Nature is not opposed to spirit. It is attachment to nature that is inconsistent with spiritual dignity. Asceticism is opposed not to enjoyment but to attachment."[1] *Sanyasis* are known by various names such as 'guru,' 'rishi,' 'sadhu,' 'baba,' 'saint,' 'holyman,' or 'swamy' in our society.

Since its very inception, Indian English fiction has described the *Sanyasi* and his renunciation of world. R.K. Narayan in *The Guide* and *Waiting for Mahatma*, Bhabani Bhattacharya in *He who Rides a Tiger*, Raja Rao in *Kanthapura*, Santha Rama Rau in *Remember the House* and Anita Desai in *Cry, the Peacock* portray skillfully such characters in some or other form. Out of them Raju of Narayana, Kalo of Bhattacharya and Swami of Markandaya have become almost immortal.

In India, a *Sanyasi* is considered as the representative of God on earth representing the venerable ascetic order and Markandaya has successfully depicted this mental and psychological tendency of traditional Indians in her novels, especially in *Possession (1963)* and *A Silence of Desire* (1963) by creating such pure Indian characters as Swamy. In Indian tradition, all the possessions of man are regarded as the divine gift or 'prasad' which one gets in return of one's good deeds or 'punyas' and all these possessions can consciously be enjoyed and even re-surrendered to the Lord back. And in this rededication a sanyasi generally plays the role of a guide, a source to god. In the novel *Possession*, Val is presented a true disciple of his guru who is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for his art and even for his life. Anasuya is presented as an observer-narrator in that the main action of the plot does not concern her though she is present through the main action of the plot. Through Anasuya, Markandaya

expresses the view that the cultural chasm between East and West is vast and wide and they represent two value systems which cannot be apparently reconciled: "Undiluted East had always been too much for the West; and soulful East always came lap-dog fashion to the West, mutely asking to be not too little and not too much, but just right" (107). A.K. Bhatnagar opines in this connection: "relations between England and India are strained because of the spiritual and the political reasons."[2] Rao and Menon call it the "essential unbridgeable differences" and "the powers which stand opposed in *Possession* are not really just East/West but also spirituality versus materialism, tradition versus individualism."[3] When Lady Caroline Bell, a woman of insatiable possessive instincts, tries to whisk away Valmiki, a fine artist who paints murals on the walls of rockcaves, from his village and his poor ragged family to London, she has to face a direct conflict with Swamy. Before leaving for London, Val, the blind follower of Swamy goes to seek the permission of Swamy in deep devotional manner: "Now he had advanced, and bending down, touched the Swamy's feet while the Swamy's hands rested briefly and gently on his bowed head."[4] Further, Markandaya explains this devotion more as the father-son relationship between the two: "It was a common enough gesture, this touching of the feet, to be seen many thousand times in any temple: but there was not in it the same impassioned abandonment to god, it was more a gesture of filial reverence" (31).

So, this relation between Val and Swamy cannot be confined merely within the 'guru-shishya parampara'; rather it is more than that—a spiritual relation, in fact. Val himself accepts the intensity of this relation while he is in London: "He was like father and mother and friend. Always good, always helpful. It was so – I do not know how, only it was so. He says good, I feel, I feel good. He says work for god I work for god. He says you paint well, I paint well" (53). On the other hand, Swamy too has full confidence in Val's spiritual allegiance, so he speaks confidently about him thus:

> He came to me as a child. . . . He was my disciple during the formative years. Nothing will touch that. Where other men despair, he will turn to God, unlikely though it seems to you now. If he is fretted by wher-

> ever he is, he will return to me and it will not be a joyless void—it will be a homecoming. (98)

Through Val's faith reposed in Swamy, Markandaya actually wants to depict the deep faith of thousands of poor and illiterate Indians in their religious and spiritual 'gurus.' In the moral teachings of their 'gurus,' these innocent villagers not only seek happiness and contentment but also the solutions of their physical, mental and spiritual problems. In this novel Swamy is a source of peace and satisfaction to all, along with Val. A cripple of the village informs about this fact to Anasuya, the narrator, when she once goes to Val's village: "When he was here, there was peace and order" (174). Moreover, the ashrams, literally the resting place of sanyasis, are open to all indiscriminately—rich or poor, educated or uneducated, Indians or foreigners. These ashrams are, in fact, a shelter for the perturbed, distressed and alienated ones. In the novel, the ashram of Swamy is hospitable enough for the two women (Caroline and Anasuya), who sleep on the hard, uncomfortable floor of it more easily and comfortably in contrast to the Western clubs and hotels.

Being shifted to London with Caroline Bell, Val is totally immersed in the Western culture, but with the arrival of the Swamy in London, he is reminded of the Indian spiritual values. He starts ignoring Caroline so much that Caroline feels jealous of the Swamy, a source of abundance of spiritual strength. She says: "It is seduction, spiritual if you like" (139). Further, the arrival of Swamy at London embodies the Hindu ideal of self-existence in detachment and yet taking active part in all the activities of the world. Though he never checks Val to leave India or to live with Caroline, yet he always has full knowledge regarding his advanced life. It is the strength of his spiritualism that Caroline is always afraid of him and always finds herself powerless and helpless before him. Val's final return to the Swamy's cave after spending so many years abroad could be taken as the victory of spiritualism over the materialistic possessions. The last conversation between Caroline and Swamy is worth noting when Caroline surrenders saying: "Valmiki is yours now, but he has been mine. One day he will want to be mine again. I shall take care to make him want me again: and on that day I shall come back to

claim him" (224). To this Swamy replies: "If that day comes" (224). Iyengar calls it "Val's 'atmasamarpana' after his escapade to civilization."[5] The most important fact about the Swamy is that his role is minimal in the book and yet his influence on various characters is the heaviest. In fact Swamy acts like that protagonist around whose magnetic personality all the characters rotate as mechanically as the planets rotate around the sun. Lastly, the loss of materialistic possessions becomes insignificant to Val before the spiritual satisfaction that accompanies the sense of liberation too. So, Val's decision to stay with Swamy is, in fact, the victory of Swamy. K.R. Chandrashekharan remarks rightly in this context: "The struggle between the Swamy and Caroline for the control and custody of Val truly becomes symbolic of the struggle between the Indian spiritual values and Western materialism for the art or even for the soul of India."[6]

The spiritual life is, in fact, full of many hardships and one has to go through so many ordeals while leading it. Srivastava remarks very significantly about it: "The way from the city to the Swamy's place is long and winding because there are no shortcuts and straight paths to spiritual enlightment."[7] The life of a true ascetic is a life of sacrifice and detachment while living within the world. This is the power of a true *Sanyasi* that compels others similar to him to worship him like a god.

One thing is quite common about these Swamys that they stand for some or other moral values too, like freedom and frankness. Freedom from all bonds is an important lesson which they teach. They believe that there are certain areas where no human being can trespass. Freedom is of essence: this is the motto of their life.

Now the question arises, what can be the purpose of the novelist in glorifying these *Sanyasis* in her novels? We can see that she intends to show the deep roots of Indians' belief in their religion. And by doing so, the novelist represents the mass of country because the psychic leaning of basic Indian is deeply rooted in the traditional religious and spiritual values of his soil. In portraying such characters, her intention is never to present Indians as orthodox, superstitious or conservative but to show their passive resignation to fate which, in fact, enables them to face the hardships of life boldly without com-

plaining. These *Sanyasis* play a leading role in imparting them a sort of mental strength and prove a strong medium in solving their physical afflictions as well as mental tensions. They do not make their followers fatalists or inactive but try to inspire them to be active and optimistic. We can conclude by quoting K.R. Chandrashekharan who interprets rightly the actual intention of Markandaya: "The implied message in Kamala Markandaya's novels is that India should confidently pursue her own path holding fast to her traditional values. . . . Her emphatic teaching is that India should preserve her soul and carve out her own destiny. In religion, she should be proud of her great legacy and her constant aim should be the attainment of the purity, equipoise and altruism represented by the Swamy of *Possession* or *A Silence of Desire*." (328)

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Mohini, the Unwed Mother
Kamala Markandaya's *The Golden Honeycomb*

JYOTSNA RANI SAHOO

Indian women writing novels in English have come to their own only after world war II and Kamala Markandaya is one of the greatest of these women novelists. She is different from other novelists of her time in the sense that she comes up openly through her characters. Though her novels have been studied from different angles like east-west confrontation, socio-economic and political religious encounter, the primary theme with her is man-woman relationship.

The Golden Honeycomb[1] projects a more thoughtful image of the ordinary lives of men and women behind the glamour and glitter of royalty. The princely states in India under the British administration continued to be ruled by the native rulers who styled themselves as 'Maharaja.' To have an effective and greater control over them, the political agents appointed by the imperial government, who in fact exercised all the powers to an extent where these Maharajas reign but do not rule over the people. Without exercising any power of their own, they are virtually in a state of bondage without any freedom.

Bawajiraj III of Devapur is one such native ruler who has been described as "you are not master in your own house. You, are only a Nam-ke-vaste King" (36). So is the position of Maharani in these royal palaces, where different practices are introduced at different times and circumstances. Sometimes age-old practices which may be said as elementary rights exercised by the mother over her newly born babies are found as not permissible under the name of customary practice of Devapur. When the Maharani gives birth to a child, the future Maharaja Bawajiraj, the flesh of her flesh is not allowed her freedom in exercising her prerogative in feeding her breasts which is the essential ingredient for the child's mental and physical

growth. But this right is given to a 'wet-nurse' who used to feed the baby for about a couple of years. The mother is deprived of the "world of intense sensation" and becoming the only 'supreme incumbent' (15). Further the child is detached from his mother and is left in company of women who "flock around him like doves" (16).

It is said: "The teacher is ten times more venerable than a tutor (Upadhyaya), the father, a hundred times more than the teacher; but the mother is a thousand times more than the father. This is because she bears him in her womb and rears him up.[2]

Mohini, a poor and low-class "fair skinned, very suitable, good-looking and attractive one, serves in the royal palace of Devapur. Under mysterious circumstances she comes in contact with the newly married prince. In pursuit of sensual pleasures and recklessness, the prince continues to maintain the relationship with women even after marriage. He considers it as his privilege. Because of her shyness and fear of being penalized to the extent of losing her job in the palace on the one hand and not to incur any displeasure of the prince on the other, Mohini takes a full month for consideration and ultimately yields to the prince to gratify him.

With a view to keep their affairs secret, particularly from the knowledge of the Maharaja, Bawajiraj II, Mohini is taken to a secluded place of their 'estates' (29) where both enjoyed to their hearts' content. Meanwhile, owing to sudden death of Maharaja, the prince Bawajiraj ascended the throne and is declared as Maharaja, Bawajiraj III. To strengthen his relation with Mohini and to please her, although she is young and inexperienced, she is elevated to the position of "ward to the then Dowager Maharani" (32) who is made her guardian in the palace. So Maharaja has introduced the concubine practice in the royal palace which was not there earlier because his father Bawajiraj II was strictly a monist, without any eye on other women beyond Maharani Manjula Devi, though 'there are other beauties in the palace.'

No sooner does the joy of his ascending to the throne is on, than 'the darkest clouds' appear in Maharaja's life when he is given to know that Mohini is pregnant. He has not come across such incident though he has affairs with many. Mohini's pregnancy "was the result of their first meetings." (31) He himself verified it in 'surveying' her body and Mohini gave him a date and found an unmarried pregnant woman, which is considered in Indian society unlawful.

Being the head of the kingdom Bawajiraj III became defensive and asked her 'what you will do.' Mohini is intelligent. She is "a spirited woman" and was able to know the mind of the Maharajah. She resented and without any fear she replied: "when the pleasure has been shared, why the burden should be single and borne by her alone." She boldly corrected it as not 'You' but 'We' (30).

Mohini is very firm and confident. She is given a commitment that "there would not be another woman" (31) in Maharaja's life which Shanta Devi was unable to do. Bawajiraj knows the boldness of Mohini. To save himself from the scandal in his own land, he humbly appealed to Mohini, "I beg you, will you not marry me" and such marriage shall make him 'happiest man alive' (32).

Mohini thought why Maharaja was not the happiest man when he was already married to Shanta Devi, the present Maharani. So she did not accept his logic. She refused and said: 'I can make you happy without marriage' (32). Being born and brought up in Indian soil she knows the Indian system of marriage and she did not want to dilute the sanctity of it. So she prefers to remain free and said 'I want to be free' (32). Because she knows how the women in the royal palace are in a state of bondage during the British rule. She did not want her child to be fed and nourished by other women.

When political freedom was raising its head throughout the country against the British rule, Mohini takes the initiative in the palace to release women from such bondage created in the name of custom and attempts to restore motherhood to its own form in spirit of Indian culture.

Her child is born in due time and the baby is a son. "The child is a bonny infant, fair-skinned like his mother and amber eyed like his father, those matchless irises that have come down from Manjula. The parents drool over him" (40). For Maharaja, it is the happiest moment for him. Till then he was in fear that he was incapable to produce a son. Now, he has no such fear; rather he feels proud for his masculinity. What has not been produced from Shanta Devi, his wife, that was given to him by Mohini. So in his eyes Mohini's position has been elevated, he says: "there is nothing more precious to me than you two" (74).

Mohini to him is the true woman who could fulfill his lust which he was not getting either from his lawful wife or other women with whom he indulged earlier. He considers his wife "a

tepid woman." Bawajiraj III offered her to become his 'Queen' the Junior Maharani but she refused. She did not want to be a competitor in becoming the Junior Maharani. Moreover, as per the prevailing practice of Devapur, a Maharani must belong to a royal family as the princess and Mohini does not belong to the class of princess. She does not want to violate the principle set in the royal palace of Devapur through ages in making the Maharani. Now, "Bawajiraj III wishes to honour the mother of his son; by providing a separate and exclusive residence that matches her status" (42). To give the same status as Maharani, he thinks to present her the summer palace ten miles away from the royal palace which was given earlier to Shanta Devi as a wedding gift, now to Mohini "where Mohini and the boy can live in style on their own" (44). But Mohini refused the offer of the Maharaja. Various factors influenced her not to accept such offer. She knows very well that Bawajiraj III is a 'reckless person' so it is not wise to remain away from him in a separate establishment. Further she knows the economic condition of the state. So instead of leading a luxurious life she prefers 'simple living and high thinking' which is another reformative step in relieving the state exchequer from its burden which has already been overburdened due to heavy expenditure incurred by both the establishment of royal family and of political Agents. She only accepts two attendants instead of many.

She prefers to remain a commoner. Like common people she wanted joint family where, she, her son, Bawajiraj III and other elderly members of the royal family like the then Dowager Maharani and Shanta Devi can live together and share their pleasure and sorrow. For her, such joint family is necessary for the mental growth of the child.

Maharaja ultimately submits to her and is pleased to allow Mohini and her son to occupy the set of apartment in the East wing known as 'Pearl suite' (42) which is within the proximity of another wing of the palace which the then Dowager Maharani occupied. Since the newborn son is the only son and likely to succeed the throne of Devapur, Bawajiraj III intends to celebrate the name giving ceremony at the summer palace. But later it is celebrated in the royal palace.

From the very beginning for the preparation of name giving ceremony resentment commenced by the Brahmins, who play a vital

role on the occasion, as the child is considered illegitimate and the procreation is without any marriage between Mohini and the Maharaja. But Mohini throws cold water to such resentment when the name of his son is associated with the royal dynasty. Mohini knows that the king has no power and they do not know about their own people. Mohini has not received any western education like Bawajiraj III, but she knows very well the significance of talents. In her eyes a talented person like Rabindranath Tagore "is definitely greater than a prince" (41). So she prefers to name her son Rabi after the great Indian poet. Now she has set aside the name giving ceremony as per the royal practice and she plays a significant role in giving her son's name as per her own choice.

During the British rule in India the parents had no right and freedom over their children. It was the British administration and the political Agents who played the decisive role in imparting education to the prince. The then Maharani Manjula Devi possessed an inclination towards her own country. During her time she cried for her son that "let him learn about his own country first" (17). But the Agents opined: "Indian women are backward" (17). He overrides the Maharani. So, Mr. Barrington a charming dedicated young English man carefully selected and imported from England remains engaged to teach the prince more about England. This is the way through which the western ideas, culture and life style were introduced in the royal palace. Bawajiraj III is influenced by the English culture and "Bawajiraj III's, schooling has fitted him for friendship with the English" (49).

So Mohini wants to give her son the native education. Rabi gets the inspiration and heroic deeds from the then Dowager Queen. So Mohini along with the Maharani has taken Rabi to that particular spot where the ancestors of Bawajiraj III fought against the British and died. Mohini intended to rear up Rabi according to the taste and habit of the common people as an Indian arising from the common fold. Now, Mohini could succeed to get back such power from the political Agents who insisted upon giving western education to Rabi through the Maharaja. Mohini does not accept it and selects the tutor who is a local pundit and instead of giving western education she imparts her son the Indian education and culture. At the same time being the son of Maharaja Rabi is trained up with the practices of horse riding, swordsmanship etc. Mohini is very conscious and her

target is not against the ruling dynasty but against the British imperialism.

When the struggle for freedom is going on in India, hardly any attention is given to release the women who are subjected to a number of bondages created by the age-old royal customs or political administration, but now Mohini takes steps to free those women. She is a pathfinder. Mohini stands different from other women in Kamala Markandaya's novels. She is the new woman in Indian fiction in English. She does not want to become the queen, rather she prefers to remain an unwed mother and she is not frightened of the stigma. She could have overthrown Shanta Devi, the Maharani but she did not do such a thing just to bring bad name to womankind, which has been an age-old stigma with women, at least, Indian history and the scriptures are replete with. Mohini wants freedom, her identity as a woman. She is an Indian woman who wants to bring up her son completely wedded to the Indian culture and tradition. She is a rebel and she goes against the royal tradition and names her son after Rabindranath Tagore. This reveals her character. She is a patriot. She had in her the poetry of life, the poetry of existence. Without this awareness of poetry in life, no Indian can love his or her motherland. Patriotism is a kind of passion, which these politicians would take thousand years to understand and Mohini understands it. So she prefers to remain an unwed mother to becoming a queen or second Maharani. Tolstoy's Anna Karenina refuses to be second to any woman and prefers a suicide.

NOTES

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Bama's *Sangati*: From Dalit Feminist Perspective

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Feminism refers to political, cultural, and economic movements aimed at establishing greater, equal, superior rights and participation in society for women. On economic matters, feminists have advocated for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay, and against other forms of gender-specific discrimination against women. During much of its history, feminist movements and theoretical developments were led predominantly by middle-class white women from Western Europe and North America.

Black Feminism is a political/social movement that grew out of Black women's feelings of discontent with both the Civil Rights Movement and the middle-class white feminists from Western Europe and North America. Further, they are dissatisfied with the kind of treatment they receive from their male counterparts. They strongly feel that neither Anglo-American nor black men address the issues concerning them. Thus, they are marginalized both by White feminists as well as black men, and therefore, they have not been able to identify either with mainstream European feminists or with black men.

Just as white middleclass Anglo-American feminism does not address the concerns of black women, so also the mainstream elite Indian feminism ignores the oppression of Dalit women. Mainstream Indian women became beneficiaries of colonial modernity and had access to education and employment. They could get some space in politics as well. However they remained elitist urban and essentially Hindu in spirit. Thus they have not addressed the problems and difficulties peculiar to lower classes and castes, hence the rise of Dalit Feminism.

Likhari Tanvir describes Dalit feminism as "a discourse of discontent, a politics of difference from mainstream Indian feminism, which has been critiqued for marginalising Dalit women. Dalit feminist discourse not only questions Indian feminism's hegemony in claiming to speak for all women, but also the hegemony of Dalit men to speak on behalf of Dalit women." Although, Dalit feminists share a definite sense of solidarity with many basic articulations raised by both Dalit movement and feminist movement, yet they differ from these movements on certain issues. Dalit feminists hold the view that Dalit women experience oppression different from those of Brahmin and non-brahmin women as well as Dalit men because of their sex and economic status.

They are, thus, committed to liberate Dalit women from sexism and double patriarchy of Dalits and non-Dalits. The Dalit ideologues like Katti Padma Rao, Gopal Guru and Gaddar seem to be less sensitive to the internal patriarchy of Dalit communities. They maintain that all women are Dalits. Since the upper caste women are not allowed to enter into their kitchens and are treated as impure during their menstrual periods, they are also untouchables!

Here "untouchability" is the ideal framework to fight against caste oppression, claims Gopal Guru. What Guru overlooks is that untouchability is a phenomenon that evokes various notions and images of bodies—bodies that are marked by their caste, gender, class, age, sexual orientation and other identities. And different bodies are ascribed different cultural meanings. Dalit men, even those identified with the movement do not want to see women as intellectuals. Therefore, Dalit women are closer neither to Dalit men nor to upper caste women.

Muktabai, a mang woman, in 1855, wrote about the subjugation that the poor mangs and mahars, especially women, suffered at the hands of the upper castes. She also points to how the mahars have internalized brahminical values and saw themselves as superior to mangs. Dalit women writers are sensitive to the differential treatment meted out to different sub-castes and women within Dalit communities. According to her, "experience" has to be the basis of one's understanding and analysis of the society.

Tarabai Shinde in her *Stree Purush Tulana* (1882) voiced the concerns of women. The book is a scathing criticism not only of brahminical patriarchy, but also the patriarchies among 'kunbi' and other non-brahmin castes. It is also a sharp criticism on commodification of women's bodies (Bhagwat 70).

After a long period of about a century, Dalit women like Kumud Pawade, Urmila Pawar, Hira Bansode, Sugandha Shende and Jyoti Lanjewar started giving literary expressions to their consciousness. Brutal patriarchy within Dalit communities is one issue which repeatedly appears in Dalit feminist discourses. Swati Margarete's appeal is worth considering: "young Dalit women should not get subsumed in the relatively macro-identities of mainstream progressive movements such as the male Dalit movement or the upper-caste feminist movement. It is only by retaining our unique voice within these movements that we can contribute meaningfully to these movements and benefit from them. Giving ourselves a separate space does not mean we want a complete break with these movements."

Against this background, Tamil Dalit woman writer Bama takes pain to pen and articulate their experiences of hurt and humiliation. *Sangati* is a record of their experiences of the joint oppression of caste and gender faced by Dalit women. It is in a sense an autobiography of a community. It analyses Dalits women's oppression as a triple jeopardy of oppression by double patriarchies. Bama locates male violence unleashed by their caste men. She foregrounds the "difference" of Dalit women from privileged upper caste women and also celebrates their "identity" in their strength, labour and resilience. As a feminist writer, Bama protests against all forms of oppression and relying on the strength and resilience of Dalit women, makes an appeal for change and self-empowerment through education and collective action.

The novelist has used narrative as a means to voice the deprivation, exploitation and oppression of Dalit women in general and paraiya Dalit women in particular. She has articulated their pains and agonies caused by inequality, discrimination and inhuman treatment to which they have been subjected. She throughout her novel describes the pathetic condition of women and asks why they have

been treated like nonentity, worthless creatures as if they were non-human species. Thus, *Sangati* is a metaphor of Dalit women's oppression, exploitation, and sexual abuse across the country.

Sharmila Rege points out, "Dalit women are more likely to face the collective and public threat of rape, sexual assault, and physical violence at workplace and in public" (217). The novelist exposes how the upper caste landlords in the village sexually abuse the Dalit women. Since these women have to work in their fields, many times they keep mum, and become victims of their lust, and even if they tell it, nobody listens to them. Thus these people are the most vulnerable community in the village. It is very clear from the fact how Mariamma, a Dalit girl, was molested by Kumaraswami Ayya, the upper-caste landlord and had to keep quite in fear of her own ignominy. She was sure that even if she reported it, the whole blame would squarely rest on her. The landlord is horrified and afraid that the girl will report it in the village, so he hurries and tells the head of the pariya community that the girl and the boy called Manikam were behaving in the dirtiest way. The head of the community takes the matter seriously and considers it the ignominy of entire community. He calls the Panchayat and makes the boy and the girl appear before it. The boy and the girl try to convince the panchayat that they are innocent, and even the women who were there in the fields with them try to convince the senior nattamai and junior nattamai, but nobody listens to them. No man, not even her father, stand by her or question the upper caste rascal, rather she is forced to beg forgiveness in front of the whole village. Thus, she is subjected to utter humiliation right in front of the entire village. The head of the panchayat ends the meeting with his precepts that the women have to be humble and modest. A woman is silenced. Gayatri Spivak rightly says that "subalterns cannot speak, and even if they speak, they are not heard." Nobody questions the landlord, the boy and her own father who keeps a mistress. The novelist is resentful and asks why men and women are governed by different rules:

> Everybody in the village knows about her father's kept woman. . . . Did anybody call a village meeting and question him about it? They say he is a man: if he sees a mud he will step into it; if he sees water,

he'll wash himself. It's one justice for men and another for women. (24)

Mariamma was forced to marry a boy not of her choice simply because the landlord in the village accused her of indecent behaviour in the field. As a result she had to suffer her entire life right from the day of her marriage. She was daily beaten up and humiliated by her ruthless husband, and thus her whole life is destroyed. Nobody bothered in the family and the village to see whether the accusation was true. The novelist asks her mother, "well, Amma just because he's tied a tali round her neck, does it mean he can beat his wife as he likes?" (43) And the mother helplessly tells her that a woman becomes slave to her husband frum the day of her marriage.

The novelist is assertive enough to articulate the concerns of women folk in general. She highlights the gross discrimination and inequality prevalent in our society. The women are supposed to behave in a particular manner whereas there are no norms for the men. They do whatever they please without caring about anything and anybody. The proprieties are applicable only to the women, and if they tried to defy the so-called norms of the phallocentric society, it is considered an aberration. There are so many restrictions as to what a girl should and should not do—how they should sleep, when they should eat, how they should walk, and this is very systematically inculcated by both elder men and women alike. The novelist asks her grandmother, "What patti, aren't we also human beings?" The male babies are taken care of whereas female babies are ignored and neglected as is common in each society. They look up to the male children as the support in their old age whereas girls are treated as property of others, i.e. "paraya dhan."

Dalit women suffer multiple oppressions. Being women they are vulnerable, and being Dalit and poor women they are even more vulnerable. So far as women in other communities are concerned, they are to some extent financially sound and therefore more protected. In their case caste does not become a barrier. They too, no doubt, are the victims of male-dominated patriarchal society. They have to depend upon their husbands and so they have to dance to their tunes. And thus all their activities and even breath are virtually

controlled and monitored as if they were non-human species. Dalit women being illiterate or less educated have no alternative than to work in the fields. Here men and women both have to work. They are as hard-working as the men. They are landless labourers, no land of their own. So in the villages they have to work in the fields of the landlords. They are the only employers who provide them a means of living. This helplessness of the poor Dalit women becomes their weakness, and so the landlords take undue advantage of their helplessness. They molest them, they sexually abuse them. They know that if they complain, nobody will listen to them and ultimately the blame will rest on them, and at the same time they are afraid of losing means of living, as in such event the landlord will no longer allow them to work in their fields. In such circumstances, they prefer to keep mum, and thus sexual exploitation continues endlessly.

The men in the poor Dalit families are like men in other communities. They are rather illiterate, irresponsible and drunkards. They just care for themselves. After the day's work, their responsibility is over. They are least bothered about their children whereas women after the day's hard work have to cook for the entire family, take care of the children and at night they give themselves to the pleasure of their husbands willy-nilly. Bama very realistically brings forth sufferings and agonies of Dalit women through her novel *Sangati*. Bama admits that all women are slave to men; however, Dalit women are the worst sufferers. They have to bear the torment of upper caste masters in the fields and at home the violence of their husbands.

As regards marriage outside caste, there are no problems for the men. It is rather welcome if they marry a girl from upper caste. This is not the case with girls. Not only the family, but the entire community is against it. Bama points out this unfair, unjust and discriminatory treatment meted out to women, simply because they were born women. People find ignominy of the entire community if a girl marries outside her own caste. The novelist vents her exasperation:

> In our street there are men who have married girls from other castes and other villages and who live together happily. People who can accept such marriages get really angry and upset when it is a girl who

> marries a man of different caste. If do it is fine. But if a girl does it, it's terrible. (109)

The novelist acknowledges that the men in the family no doubt work very hard. They are also the victims of discrimination and prejudices of caste Hindu society. They too are subjected to utter humiliation and exploitation, however they still have some freedom. They control their women, rule over them. Within home, their words are the rule of the law. Bama brings out sexual exploitation of Dalit women outside and within the house. At workplace they have to escape the molestation by the landlords, while at home husbands are least bothered to understand them. They think of their own satisfaction without caring for their health and mood after day's hard work. Women are overwhelmed and crushed by their physical exploitation. The novelist appeals to women to voice their ideas:

> It is we who must uphold our rights. We must stand up for ourselves and declare that we too are human beings like everyone else. If we believe that someone else is going to come and uplift us, then we are doomed to remain where we are, forever. (66)

The British did certain good things in India. They tried to bring about certain reforms. Christian missionaries started schools which were open to all, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Besides running schools, the missionaries started proselytizing the poorer section of society, especially Dalits and tribals. These sections of society oppressed by brahminical Hinduism naturally got attracted towards Christianity, hoping that their conversion to Christianity will improve their plight. No doubt, they could get elementary education in missionary schools. But what about higher education? Secondly, these people were so poor that they preferred to work than to take even elementary education in such schools.

In addition to it, this conversion did not change their social position in society. What changed is only nomenclature; now they are referred to as 'Dalit Christians.' On the contrary they lost right to reservation to which Scheduled Castes—legal name for Dalits are entitled. This is a huge loss for them. So far as their social position amongst Christians is concerned, they assume subordinate position. In the churches also, there is discrimination and exploitation.

It is paraiya Dalit Christians who sweep the church and the women from other castes wait until they have finished. The writer says that once she complained it to the nuns, but their response was absolutely rubbish. They said that Dalit women would get merit by sweeping.

God would bless them specially. Thus, these poor, illiterate Dalits are fooled in the name of god by the nuns. In one of her interviews, Bama states that things took an ugly turn after the Indians took over. So we became Christians, but the caste did not go off. Even today Dalits are not allowed to sit with other castes inside the churches in Kanchipuram district. Even the graveyards are separate.

So far as paraiya Dalit women are concerned they have to confront so many problems about marriage, divorce and remarriage. Men in the community can have as many women as they wish, they can keep a keep, if a man doesn't like a woman who he marries, the very next day he breaks a marriage and gets remarried, but a woman becomes a slave on the day she gets married. In any Indian communities it is not that easy for a woman to leave the man they don't like. It is not so simple to break a marriage and stay alone. People don't let them live, they look at them with suspicious eyes, they lose self-respect and all the status the moment they break a marriage. However, there is legal provision for divorce and remarriage so far as the women of other Hindu communities are concerned. But paraiya women who converted to Christianity cannot leave their husband and live on their own that easily. The promise they make to priest at wedding is as good as the promise they make to God. God blesses marriage, and therefore, neither panchayat, nor court, nor law can separate a wedded couple. Among non-Christian paraiyars, family matter is settled by the village panchayat. The panchayat calls the father or brother of the girl and order him to send the girl back to her husband. Nobody bothers to listen to the girl. Their simple advice is to give the girl a slap and tell her that she must live with her husband. Thus they are treated as commodities and are forced to live even with a drunken brute. The novelist complains:

> God created women only for the convenience of men. In daily practice, women have to make sure that men don't suffer discomfort that they are consoled and comforted, all their needs are looked after, and

> all their bodily hungers are satisfied. In short, they must be conscious every minute that men are at the centre of their lives. (122)

Even the educated, financially self-sufficient women encounter trouble even in the cities while renting a house, and it becomes more troublesome when a woman is single i.e., unmarried, and it is still more troublesome when it is a dalit unmarried woman. People think twice before renting out a house to a woman as if she were a whore, a nympho who would spoil the young and old around. They elicit information about caste, sometimes directly, and sometimes indirectly. The women face the very unpleasant, and painful questions like, are you married? What caste are you? It really matters to non-dalit and Brahmin communities. Bama narrates her own experience in this respect in this novel.

It is said that 'poverty breeds children and children breed poverty.' Dalits are poor people, they are socially and economically backward. In poorer Dalits families, the number of children is far bigger than that of economically sound families. As a result, the elder child has to take care of the younger. As they reach ten to twelve, they too have to work in factories or at construction sites. Thus, instead of being in school, they are forced to work as child labourers, and this evil in society spoils the entire life of the whole generation. These social and economic constraints do not allow them to come out of poverty that ultimately leads to all sorts of exploitations. Besides doing household chores, poor, innocent little girl Maikkanni has to go to the neighbouring town to work in a factory to support her family whenever her mother gives birth to a child. She has to get up early before dawn, take a bus and reach the factory. This is so ironical that our government has made so many laws to check this practice, so that such children should be in school, and still we find children from socially and economically backward classes and castes at workplaces. Manikkanni would say, "who does my mother have, except me? My father has left us. I must see to everything" (70).

Though the lives of Dalit women are marked by exploitation, oppression and deprivation, they have their strengths too. Bama enumerates certain virtues in paraiya Dalit community and is proud

to have been born into it. In this community there is no dowry system that impoverishes the families of brides, and many times leads to dowry deaths. On the contrary, grooms' families bear all the expenses of wedding, and it is the groom who gives the cash gift to bride's family.

Secondly, in this community people don't look down upon the widows. Widows can re-marry. It is a common picture in society that widows are kept away from auspicious occasions. They dont wear kumkum, put jewels etc. Bama says, "We don't use the word 'widow.' We are all same and live alike." (113)

Thirdly, men and women in this community work together. Women don't have to stretch their hands to their husband ever for lingerie as the women from other communities do. They earn their own living. So the girls are not a burden on the families, rather they supplement the income of the family.

To sum up, all women suffer oppression, however, the extent of suffering varies from nation to nation, class to class and caste to caste. Indian mainstream feminists while dealing with women's issues ignored the plight of Dalit women. They have failed to address the concerns of the oppressed lower caste women, and hence their movement of liberation of women seems to be lopsided and haphazard. Hence, their claim to represent Indian women in general is fallacious. The Dalit intellectuals and ideologues, too, failed to attend to the sufferings of Dalit women. Even the experiences of women within Dalit community are not similar. The educated and financially self-sufficient are less prone to oppression. Economic factor also plays an important part. The poorer the people, the less protected and secure they are. Thus caste and class play a very crucial role in determining position and place of women in society. Hence, the issues regarding women in general be addressed at micro level.

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The Subaltern Condition of Women and the Way-Out: A Study of Select Indian Novels

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The subaltern status of women is pronounced more articulately in the corpus of Indian English literature with all critical and creative insight. A re-assessment of the Indian epics and other illustrious works bears an ample testimony to the blue-blooded marginality of women, not to speak about the other "gendered subalterns." Their plight remains unaltered and their problems unaddressed despite appendage of culture and the refinement that goes with it. Shashi Deshpande rightly observes in *The Stone Women*: "The fact is, we don't start with a picture of ourselves on a clear slate. Already inscribed on it are things told to us by others, there is what we read, what we gather from the ideas and expectations around us, what we imagine and dream. Myths form a large part of this baggage we bring to our self-image. How we see ourselves, collectively or individually, depends greatly on myths. They are part of the human psyche, part of our cultural histories" (86).

Whether women hail from the pedigrees of royalty or the mothers, the wives and daughters belonging to the less fortunate households, the very image of "the angel of the house" to quote Virginia Woolf is fashioned according to the male imagination keeping in line with their vested interests. The "phallocentric" Indian society deprives a woman her freedom of choice through imposition of sanctions that are only used against her and never against women. According to Simon de Beauvoir, the history of humanity is a history of systematic attempts to silence the female. She says: "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature" (295). In the Indian context, the Dalits and the tribals, as a whole community, are starkly discriminated but the predicament of these women is even more pathetic since they suffer the triple oppression of caste, class and gender. Marginalized

and oppressed, these "gendered subalterns," to use Spivak's phrase, are muted and have to put up with all forms of oppression and indignities. Originally a Gramscian term for the subordinated consciousness, "Subalternity" was popularized by the postcolonial theorists like Ranjit Guha, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and others. The subalterns represent the marginalized, repressed and the peripheral. It is common knowledge that women cannot vie with their counterparts in terms of physical strength and this became a crucial construct in understanding women characters in the novels in general and the novels taken up for the study in particular. Hence, the characters are "othered" and have been treated with contempt and disdain when the issue of power relations crops up. Men establish their masculine strength and hence satiate their carnal desires by assaulting women. Men as aggressors feel elated and victorious whereas women endure the pain and humiliation of the barbarity enacted upon their battered bodies. Sudhamoy in *Lajja* reflects on the predicament of women: "Women after all were like commodities, and therefore stolen just like gold and silver" (162). A contrapuntal reading of many an Indian novel, indeed, brings to the fore the inhuman commodification of women. It goes without saying that they are the most exploited lot of all. Many of the novelists have realistically illustrated women's plight and exploitation in the patriarchal society both explicitly and implicitly.

In *Sex of Knowing: Towards Revitalizing Epistemology*, Sreekalam Nair sheds light on the issue when she observes: "Men are systematically conditioned not even to notice what women want" (34). It is worthwhile to note that Greek civilization, one of the oldest and richest, placed women in the category of slaves, deeming it fit that they should humbly accept and obey, without question, the demands of their masters. Notwithstanding the periodic emergence of male philosophers, from the ancient Plato to the more recent John Stuart Mill, who argued that no society could hope to approach justice so long as one half of its people were in a state of subjugation, the situation remains more or less the same. Not much has changed since the setting up of the social infrastructure of some of the earliest civilizations. At the most, man has progressed from the use of the whip to a finer, more sophisticated means of rhetoric and cajoling in order to keep woman to fit into the scheme

of things. He presses into service some strategically ingenious ruses to keep her into his fold. The paper, while shedding light on the treatment being meted out to the weaker sex, seeks to cogitate on the possible ways and means for the redemption of women as has been posited in the fiction. The paper is an attempt to raise questions related to women's quest for identity and self-fulfillment.

II

Commenting on women's debased position, a Mexican scholar and poet, Sister Juana Ines (1651-1695), who serves as a mode of the 'independent women' in the centuries before emancipation, was rightly indignant at the injustices women suffered in the process of becoming the construct—the angel of the house. A major part of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* is centred on Lenny's Ayah, Shanta around whom the male moths hover constantly and snuggle in the warmth she radiates. Nevertheless, during holocaust, she senses tension among the competing admirers belonging to different faiths. They look as if each is "a whiskered dog circling the other, weighing in and warning his foe" (151). The protagonist not only observes but also analyses men's lascivious and degrading attention towards women, voraciousness of male sexual desires, women's plight as they are reduced to the status of sexual objects, and relates to the peculiar disadvantages of social and civil subjection. Juxtaposing sexual images with images of violence, Sidhwa describes the scene of Ayah's abduction: "The men drag her in grotesque strides to her cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright—their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces" (138). Here the novel almost becomes a significant testament of a gynocentric view of reality. Here the woman becomes an object, a body that is conquered and a consciousness that is violated.

An explicit connection is visible between femininity and objectification. Her appropriation by the patriarchal culture and her abject gratitude is linked with conventional morality. In her gynotext, *Lajja*, the novelist gives a graphic description of the dangers that plague young women. Besides bullying them, the local boys intimidate them. Sudhamoy narrates the story of a young girl whose sari has been stripped off in the middle of the street by a gang of boys.

He reflects that it is the question of the weak bullied by the strong but not an issue of exploitation based on religion. Since women are weaker, men who are stronger are keen on oppressing them. This violence is sometimes overt, but not always visible or recognized. But it is always linked with women's disempowerment.

The double colonization of women is a stark reality during the communal holocaust which crops up in the wake of the demolition of Babri Mosque. Like their counterparts, women silently watch while their colonial masters vivisect the country and are subjected to barbarities as a result. But unlike men, they have to put up with the ineluctable system of inhuman patriarchy. Hamida in *Cracking India* was abducted and kidnapped by the Sikhs. She has children and she longs to see them. Though she is free to go back to her family she does not do so, for she is a "fallen woman" and her husband may be angry with her and so she is content to play the role of ayah thereby gravitating to patriarchy which has been inhuman to her. While throwing light on the predicament of women in the south Asian context, what Rachel Bari says in *Charting a Path: Taslima Nasreen's French Lover* is revealing: "Home is breeding ground of oppression. It also signifies a role for women: that of a custodian of religious practices, myths, traditions and honour. It is through the confines of a home that her sexuality is sanctioned. If this is traversed then she is doomed to listen to the innumerable insults of being unwomanly and of destroying the family honour." Nilanjana in *Lajja* finds her husband's house embellished with all luxuries to be a gilded cage where she functions as little more than a housekeeper and a sex object. Generally women's space is domestic and their functions, as it were, servile and sexual.

III

Caught in the web of the blatant binary and indoctrinated by patriarchy, women undergo all the psychological traumas with the sole exception of Ayah, who, despite her "husband" (my emphasis), Ice-Candy-Man's importunities to stay with him, defies the patriarchal principles, allowing the dictates of her conscience. Her fate is like that of Nila in Nasreen's novel, *French Lover*. The novelist tries to objectify her situation: "Nila wondered if there was any difference between a prostitute's client and a husband. The only difference she

could find was that the client can get away only after paying off the prostitute whereas the husband can get off the hook without ever paying his wife's dues. . . . A mother, a sister and a prostitute—were they the three roles which a woman had to play to the hilt or were they merely the three personas that a woman was born with" (28). It is clear that the marriage has inexorably locked ayah into a social system, which has denied her autonomy. But she does not care a fig for it. If she puts up with Ice-candy-man it would be tantamount to "concealment and doubleness" to adopt a double character without intending to deceive anyone. She is like Hamida, who scrupulously toes the line of patriarchy, represses her own impulses. She cannot go home to see her children, for her good husband may turn his ire against the children for talking to the fallen woman, their mother as she repeatedly calls herself. In her the process of denial, her "social castration" is complete. She remains consigned to the parameters of the conventional concept of womanhood. She remains on the margin, while the task of furthering the action is given to the male protagonist. She represents women's psychology that has been toned by centuries of conditioning. The novelist does not privilege her role as she has done with Ayah's role.

Though they are not minorities in any way and are far away secluded in their homes from the din of communal politics, women during holocaust undergo all suffering as has been evidenced in the novels. Ayah and Hamida in *Cracking India*, Maya in *Lajja*, Jasbir Kaur in *Tamas*, among others, have experienced death in life when riots rage through parts of the subcontinent. The novelists project the social behaviour that victimizes women alone. The physical violence enacted on their bodies and the trauma in its train leave them to agonize for the rest of their lives. Their bitter experiences give them a feeling of pain and a sense of loss. Of these novelists, Bapsi Sidhwa has given a feminist touch to Lenny's character that moves forward in life despite apparent insurmountable obstacles. As she observes the lives of various women around her, she understands the limitations associated with women's lives in patriarchal society. Priscilla Hart in *Riot* talks about the problem and cautions against the help extended by such a society: "When society stacks up all the odds against a woman, she'd better not count on the man's support" (63).

In *Riot* and *Cracking India* are about need of the self-sufficiency of women because relying on men during the cataclysm is fraught with dangers. Therefore, it is imperative on the part of woman to break open the seal. It is worthy to note that the focal women characters are able to transgress the line of marginalization. Bapsi Sidhwa illustrates through the female characters that women have to eschew the image of weaker sex or deprived feminity. Taslima Nasreen demonstrates that mindsets need to be changed in order to establish equality between the sexes. She maintains that the patriarchal society should perceive women beyond the roles of daughters, wives and mothers. Traditional male fantasies have created a particular image of women to suit their interests—submissive, servile, docile and self-abnegating. These fantasies have become alive, as women have been meticulously trained by the patriarchal social system to assimilate them. Bapsi Sidhwa, Taslima Nasreen and Shashi Tharoor expose the patriarchal practices of the society that seeks to stunt women's growth and development. They also try to bring out the resilience and tenacity to shake off the androcentric attitudes.

Cracking India projects through Lenny's mother that women should have a purpose in life and the need to liberate themselves from the constraints of womanliness, and the existing discrepancies regarding their marginalization. She exhibits a change in her personality towards the end of the novel when she helps the victims of riots "smuggling the rationed petrol to help Hindu and Sikh friends to run away" and sends "kidnapped women to the families across the border" (242). Lenny's mother also employs Hamida, a woman forsaken by her family, because she was raped and therefore, a fallen woman.

Bapsi Sidhwa turns the female characters into the moral centre, while most of the male characters either remain apathetic or indulge in destructive violence and disintegrative action. The women are determined for whom the traditional role is inadequate and are ready to assume new roles and responsibilities. Towering among the women protagonists is the vibrant figure of Lenny's godmother, Rodabai. She is endowed with profound understanding of human existence. She undauntedly visits the disreputable Hira Mandi which is the red light area of Lahore. She rescues Ayah, once she is con-

vinced that Ayah is being kept by force against her will. Godmother's personality sparkles with wit and repartee when she encounters Ice-candy-man who compels Ayah to be his possession in the name of marriage after permitting her, in godmother's words, to be 'raped by butchers, drunks, and goondas.' Though he is endowed with a glib tongue, he is unable to stand her assault. He winces: "His head jolts back as if it's been struck" (248). Her wisdom is revealed when she consoles Ayah after her abduction. She soothes in philosophical vein: "That was fated, daughter. It can't be undone. But it can be forgiven" (263). Her capacity to handle the crisis of Ayah's life is provided by her dealing with the Ice-candy-man and the rescue of the Ayah. The sharing of personal experiences helps women articulate, seek, support and formulate strategies for change. The pressing need is to talk about the trauma and share their emotional experience with their soul-mates or with trained professionals who then help them put things in perspective, change the way they think about the event and overcome whatever fears are residual in the minds of the victims. Counsellling and fair and sympathetic treatment help them to ride out of the storm of the anxiety and terror. Such individual experiences do need to get a calmer state of mind, which facilitates a more beneficial response. It encourages the individuals to ventilate and express the terrifying emotions that have been experienced and work towards prevention of nightmares, flashbacks and survivor guilt. Exceptional service as done by Rodabai helps them manage the aftermath of the unimaginable trauma they have suffered.

In the novel, Ayah shows phenomenal strength to get rid of the Ice-candy-man's bondage. She is not complacent with the new role that he imposes upon her. She has the fortitude to shake off the chains of patriarchal culture and has indomitable will to start life afresh. Godmother tries to reason with her, asking her to bury the debris of the past and accept her marriage with the Ice-candy-man. But Ayah with all reasonable tenacity is determined to go to her family, even if they do not accept her. She has the courage to break through the prison. She reiterates: "I have thought it over. . . . I want to go to my folk" (263). The idea of rape as "a universal system of control" (Metcalf and Humphries 91) has found its clear expression in Ice-Candy-Man's molestation of Ayah. It represents a primitive

patriarchal mindset that is all about control—particularly over women. He is taught to believe that women are sex objects. People thus indoctrinated pay lip service to women as a goddess, mother and wife but never think of women as individuals. She has no place in society and therefore, she must always be attached to someone. Though not totally free from patriarchy, Godmother lashes out at some of its practices. She attacks, for instance, the idea that a raped woman loses her honour. Surely it is the male rapist who should feel the pangs of shame. In *Lajja*, Suranjan contemplates: "Shame most affected those who inflicted torture, not those who were tortured" (27). Ayah exhibits the line of argument and her action to leave Ice-Candy-Man also questions the patriarchal assumptions like the sanctity of marriage, which has been used by him to colonize her mind. But Ayah evinces indomitable energy to defy the callous system. Ice-Candy-Man's pathetic pleas do not budge her an inch and she sets out on her path to work out her redemption. She rebels against all "power structures, laws and conventions that keep women servile, subordinate and second best" (90) to quote Mary Eagleton's introductory remarks made in *Feminist Literary Criticism*. Her action is remarkable because she challenges the institution of marriage when the odds are hopelessly stacked against any possibility of organized feminist action. By leading a complacent life, she may paralyze her life in the hierarchy. But, she tries to vocalize the dissatisfaction that such an enforced marriage brings.

In the novel, the narrator-character, Lenny, promotes the action by her active involvement and concern. Her relationship with her cousin upholds the principle of equality. Like her Ayah, she does not allow him to manipulate her sexually. In no way do her lameness and her sex become a source of self-pity or a constricting force on her psyche. She remains assertive, at times even aggressive. Priscilla Hart in *Riot* shows the proclivity to cling to her ideals, as she remains undaunted despite the danger to her life owing to her disseminating the importance of family-planning methods among Muslims. She believes that women's empowerment, among other things, is the panacea to their problems.

In *Lajja*, Maya brings out the essential quality of a liberated woman. She allows the dictates of her conscience and does not waver to "take refuge in Kamal's house" (1) during the communal

holocaust thereby brushing aside the inveterate patriarchal norms. The novelist exposes the gaping holes that stare into Maya's face when she tries to run against the barriers that lie in her way. She tries to set herself free from the dead weight of tradition that crumbled when women came into open after the World War II when their breadwinners had pawned down their lives in it.

However, Bapsi Sidhwa is a radical feminist as she sees the problem as patriarchy: "a whole system of male power over women" whereas Taslima Nasreen is a socialist feminist as she sees the problem as "a combination of male domination and class exploitation" (Gilbert and Gubar 77). Ice-Candy-Man's wiles and guiles of patriarchy and the conservative backlash do not impede Ayah in any way. Women recovering from the trauma of rape need love and support, which she cannot get from her ravisher, Ice-candy-man. In chameleon-like fashion, he changes into role of 'meek' (my emphasis) husband and in the name of marriage he commits or seeks to perpetrate rape everyday, thereby degenerating it into licensed prostitution. He tries to veer her life in a different direction in a mischievous attempt to justify a flagrant violation of women's right and a criminal act of violence. He wants her to be within the control, for he fears her autonomy as it may challenge his power. As Ayah is able to see through him, she moves forward as she has demolished 'the glass-ceiling,' the invincible barrier that no amount of legislation seems to be able to break. Her strength to challenge representations of woman, as 'Other' and 'lack,' are part of 'nature' based on masculine norms and attitudes.

It is important to note that education plays a dominant role in the lives of women. In certain cases it fails to free them from the shackles of male dominance, social tradition and popular prejudices. However, right type of education gives them the authority to doubt and question, to assert and reshape their lives. As suggested by Woolf: "But it is not education only that is needed. It is that women should have liberty of experience: that they should differ from men without fear and express those differences openly. . . . Be encouraged to think, invent, imagine and create as freely as men do" (32-33). It is this difference that alone would bring in a difference to women's lives. Ayah fights to bring the man and woman relationship on an equal footing where there is no hierarchy of binary oppo-

sitions like high-low, superior-inferior, man-woman. She copes with her own suffering and wins her freedom as an individual. She is able to shake off the shackles of patriarchal norms and has gained control on her life. Here what Shashi Deshpande says in her "Afterword" to *Shakti*, is worth-noting: "What we need is to make ordinary women understand the possibility of power, of being able to control their own lives. And to have this power, not as mothers, not as devoted wives but as ordinary women, as humans" (319).

IV

Two obvious conclusions can be inferred from the discussion: the deadweight of patriarchal and hegemonic sway on women is awful and only a few women are able to resist such power structures and carve out their destiny. The role of women in *Cracking India*, for instance, emerges paramount. By sheer dint of their energy, they uplift themselves from the margins of periphery to the centre-stage during the period of communal holocaust. In the two gynotexts, the novelists concentrate in their female characters what the feminists feel is very important a woman to realize her individuality and the feeling of self-worth. The novels demonstrate that 'domestic tyranny of men' over women is as bad as 'the royal tyranny of kings' over their subjects and there is every need to shake off such tyranny.

In *Riot*, Kadambari, whose beautiful sister, Sundari undergoes trauma because of domestic violence, is very emphatic when she observes: "This is the real issue . . . violence against women. In our homes" (249) Priscilla Hart subscribes to the viewpoint and puts forward a solution: "Women need to resist their subjugation." In *Cracking India* Ayah cuts through the irons of such subjugation. Her refusal to admit the defeat, despite physical and emotional mutilation and her determination to probe into future alternatives imparts her character certain dignity for which feminism stands about. Further, in her grand finale, we can find the deconstruction of the general sign of man—represented by ice-candy man—as it exists within the metaphysical tradition. She blazes a trail with her quest for identity with all fortitude, proclaiming 'we-men.'

The leadership has to show to the people, both the majority and the minority, the real face of their anxiety and fears and bring out the falsity of communal analysis and solution. If people understand

and identify the social, economic and political dimensions of problems, as Sudhamoy in *Lajja* and Devdutt in *Tamas* do and if "democracy protects the multiple identities" (Tharoor 45) of people, women can conduct their lives with all decency and decorum and can live in harmony with themselves and with their counterparts.

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Summoning up Remembrance of Foregone Days with Poignancy: A Study of Ruskin Bond's *A Town Called Dehra*

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When can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's deathless night,
And weep afresh love's long-since-cancelled woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight.[1]

Ruskin Owen Bond was "an orphan" of the Raj. He was, in reality, an orphan after his father's untimely death. It hardly mattered even though his mother was alive. The way his stepfather treated him badly pissed him off. In spite of the unbearable loss and consequent sufferings he experienced, he has not been mawkish and maudlin nostalgically. He is, of course, nostalgic in his present memoir *A Town called Dehra* and also defines the "nostalgia." He, on the other hand, exhausted the happy and unhappy days of his early life, writing his first famous novel *The Room on the Roof*.

He has made some of his friends, acquaintances and above all his grandmother immortal characters in his short stories, novels and memoir. Ruskin did not feel himself at odds while living with bibiji, the first wife of his stepfather. It was probably an adjustment that had come up out of Indian culture and the miserable life which he had spent in the foreign land. While he was away in the alien land (England was an alien land to him), he had longed to return to India especially in the lap of Himalayas. Since then he has merged himself with the Indian milieu and environs and he has since become a prolific writer.

It is often argued about which category Ruskin Bond belongs, whether he is an Indian writer, or Anglo-Indian or British. Though he was born of the British parents in India and brought up by his British grandmother, he never considered himself British; he could never merge with the Britain environment during his stay in England for four years. He suffered from homesickness there and was impatient to return to his old friends and milieu of the Himalayas. My paper argues that though Ruskin Bond appears an Anglo-Indian, as a writer he is worthy to be ranked with Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Kiran Desai, Akil Sharma, Rohinton Mistry and Vikram Chandra. Can any lover of English literature deny that Ruskin's characters are Indians? No one can do so!

Ruskin Bond has, to his credit, more than five hundred short stories, novellas, novels, critical essays. He has also edited a few books. Ruskin Bond's period of creative writing spans almost fifty-five years now. He has written for adults and children as well. He is currently writing the story for Vishal Bhardwaj's next film, "The Seven Husbands," and a collection of short stories for adults (tentatively titled *Five*), he is also writing the children book titled *Mr. Oliver's Diary*. In his own words in the interview given to the Indian Express, "I am not a bad writer."[3]

The paper focuses on *A Town Called Dehra*. The memoir is set in Dehra. It is captivating and exciting. Though the book mirrors the early days that Ruskin spent in Dehra, the mention of the cities like Delhi and Mussoorie is made. Written in the classical and traditional prose style, it is not coached in bombastic words or prose. The elegant prose style captivates and the book is charmingly readable.

There runs a kind of parallelism and resemblance between David Copperfield and Ruskin as far as their painful experiences of the childhood and boyhood are concerned. Both David Copperfield and Ruskin suffered an irreplaceable loss of one parent in their early childhood. David was born when his father had closed his eyes on this world and Ruskin lost his father at an early age. Shortly after her husband's death, David's mother remarried Mr. Murdstone and consequently David was neglected both by his mother and stepfather when David returned after a long stay at Peggotty's brother at

Yarmouth and from school in London, he found an infant brother. The same excruciating experience Ruskin went through; shortly after his father's untimely loss, his mother remarried and one day as he returned from school, he found an infant brother. Ruskin was also treated and neglected badly by his stepfather. David's mother died when he was just a kid. David remembers mournfully his mother's death: "I was informed that my mother was dead. I broke out into a desolate cry, and felt an orphan in the wide world. . . . My brother also died a few days after my mother's death."[4]

Ruskin was in a real sense, an orphan like David Copperfield shortly after his father's death and later on followed by his grandparents' death. Ruskin's mother was alive for a long time but of no avail to him. Anyone can understand how painfully Ruskin must have reacted to his father's death as he received the sad news from his teacher: "One day my class teacher sent for me. . . . As soon as my unfortunate teacher started on the theme of God wanting your father in higher and better place, as there could be no any better place than Jacks Hill in mid-summer. I knew my father was dead and burst into tears."[5] Because of this so far explained similarity and resemblance between the characters of David Copperfield and Ruskin Bond himself, the well-known storyteller Ruskin Bond revisits the classic and reads *David Copperfield* now and then.

A Town Called Dehra is full of interesting and absorbing episodes—the fight between a cobra and mongoose that subjects you to horripilation from fear, outdoes Kipling and nothing in *The Jungle Book* comes close to this. Even the great columnist Jaithirth Rao agrees that the description of the fight between the cobra and the mongoose is the finest he has ever come across. Among the trees and plants that Ruskin has loved, was a banyan tree in which he had arranged to sit himself, propping himself up against the bole of the tree with cushions taken from the drawing room and would go on reading the treasure of books his father had left behind for him. Among the books that he read were *Treasure Island, Huck Finn, The Jungle Book, David Copperfield*, English comics like *Wizard and Hotspur*, the novels of Edgar Wallace, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Lauisa May Alcott. Ruskin's sitting in the banyan tree and spying the world below that passed by the tree reminds us of the boy

sitting in the tree, "Birch"—the poem by Robert Frost. It was a hot summer day. Ruskin was sitting in the banyan tree as usual and to his horror what he saw was the fearsome and frightening fight between the cobra and the mongoose. Ruskin describes the fight very lucidly and visibly in which the mongoose overcame the venomous snake cobra. A jungle crow and myna were the two spectators. As long as they were merely spectators, they were safe, but the moment the jungle crow started interfering, the snout of the cobra came heavily on the crow and was flung away forcefully in the corner of the garden where it lay dead within a few seconds. However, the myna escaped the snout and remained a mere spectator.

> The cobra was weakening and the mongoose, walking fearlessly up to it, raised himself on his short legs, and with a lightning snap had the big snake by the snout. The cobra writhed and lashed about in a frightening manner and even coiled itself about the mongoose but to no avail. The little fellow hung grimly on, until the snake had ceased to struggle. (63)

After the untimely sad demise of Ruskin's father, he was allowed to stay in the school hospital for sometime. When his headmaster saw a pile of the letters Ruskin's father had sent him, he promised Ruskin that he would keep his letters safe in his custody and that he should collect them as the school broke up for holidays. The insensitive headmaster was too callous to remember the letters. He had lost them. For the first time in his memoir Ruskin Bond tells us: "I don't suppose he meant to be unkind but he was the first man who aroused in me feelings of hate." (7)

Ruskin Bond has a deep respect for womankind, for while describing her sensual appeal, he is never scabrous. Ruskin Bond is capable of seeing a strange sort of beauty which a few odd spirits ever will or can be made to see. He has passionate intensity of vision and an attribute that of design or construction. His description of woman's features is quite appealing. How romantically and nostalgically he describes the first real kiss he had with the beautiful young girl Doreen, and how he went into raptures and ecstasy over the kiss.

> Doreen must have been eighteen or nineteen. I could not help noticing that she had lovely legs and full sensuous lips that I longed to kiss. However, came the midnight hour—it was new year's Eve and the lights went off, and while everyone sang 'Auld Lang Syne,' Doreen gathered me in her perfumed arms and planted a long sweet kiss on my hungry lips. It was my first real kiss and I savour it still. (23-24)

Ruskin does one better than Kipling in respect of the description of Kim's journey from Pinjore to Simla as he describes and names plants, tress, flowers and birds and they come alive as his intimate friends. Ruskin's love of nature is as appealing and striking as that of Wordsworth. He portrays the characters from Dehra, Mussoorie and Landour—places surrounded by the snow-capped hills and green dense forests—some of the trees antediluvian. His rustic characters can be compared to that of Wordsworth. He is familiar with the names of trees plants, flowers and birds. He regards them as his friends on his long solitary walk. He reminisces that in the 40s and 50s, the courtyards and backyards of houses in Dehra were full of the different trees and flowering plants and the streets were lined with the trees. Almost all trees have been cut down and replaced by the jungle of the concrete buildings in Dehra. He mourns the loss of the trees. This mourning exudes his love of nature and environment. He names trees and flowers such as neem, mango, eucalyptus, jacaranda, amaltas, lichi, guavas, jackfruit, papaya, poinsettia, bougainvillea creeper marigolds and potted palms. When Ruskin unexpectedly saw masses of bright yellow California poppies, his heart thrilled and leapt up as Wordsworth's did, the moment he saw the endless line of daffodils. "They stood out like sunshine after rain, and my heart leapt as Wordsworth's must have, when he saw his daffodils. I found myself oblivious to the sounds of the bazaar and the road." (169)

Ruskin is nostalgic, wistful and yearning as he reminisces the loss in terms of his parents and grandparents' death. He defines nostalgia: "But there is no harm in indulging in a little nostalgia. what is nostalgia, after all, but an attempt to preserve that which was good in the past." (119) He indulges in little nostalgia and remembers the unforgettable loss: "My father went away soon after that tree planting. Three months later, in Calcutta, he died. . . . My

grandparents sold the house and left Dehra. After school, I went to England. The years passed, my grandparents died, and when I returned to India I was the only member of the family in the country." (200) Ruskin clothes his personal feelings and emotions of nostalgia in delicious words and expression. The style is forceful, moving and full of eloquence. *A Town Called Dehra* is in a delectable prose.

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An Insight into Indian Nation: Mahasweta Devi's "Fisherman" and "Knife"

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Mahasweta Devi, the winner of several national awards like Sahitya Akademi, Jnanpith, Padmashree and Raman Magsaysay, for her powerful satiric plays, fiction and short stories along with her activist work for the justice to the marginal, dispossessed, tribal communities in India. Hers is the literature of praxis, not aimed at the posterity but the era we breathe in. She is one of the great Indian writers of our time who write not for art's sake but for the sake of exposing the evils inherent in the socio-economic and political system of the postcolonial Indian nation which has ironically failed to deliver even after six decades of Independence. After all,

> in practice, such 'independence' may come to be seen as superficial, firstly because the dominance of the power of the European concept of the nation in the minds of those who led the struggle for independence often meant that the new postcolonial states were closely modelled on that of the former European powers. (Ashcroft 193)

Hers is the writing marked with social consciousness and commitment, with a strong urge to improve the socio-economic and political conditions of the contemporary India. As a writer, Mahasweta Devi emerges as a champion of the proletariat, landless labourers, peripherals, the poor and the subaltern class of Indian society.

This paper attempts to study the writer's short stories "Fisherman" and "Knife" from a national perspective to explore the dark realities in the life of a nation. For, the "story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled structure of the public . . . culture and society" (Jameson, 67).

The short story "Fisherman" ('Dheebar' in original Bengali) is set in Bengal of the 1970s which has a subtle reference to the spectre of barbarous anti-Naxalite offensives resorted to by the police to mow down the youths who were suspected of being politically affiliated with Naxalism. This is the story of a dispossessed, illiterate tribal, Jagat Shah, a fisherman who owns his net but no tanks to fish. The tank he used to fish in is owned by a landlord, called Mr. Ray. The master has stopped breeding fish in the tank and settled abroad. The landlord has provided Jagat with two rooms to live with his wife and his only son Abhay. Thus, owing to the changed circumstances, Jagat does not catch fish; he hires his net when asked for. Poultry coop built by his wife, Bhamini, is the only means to support his family. It is suggestive when Jagat says, "But the waters of Raypukur now conceal different wonder" (*2*). Every other day, Jagat is summoned by the police to the tank Raypukur not to catch fish but to fish out the corpses of the young boys from the tank waters. "As it breaks through the surface, its silent protest poisons the air; the stench of rotting flesh carries quickly on the breeze" (2). Jagat is paid seven rupees per corpse by the police. Jagat can't believe that "anything is possible without money" (2). He believes that everybody gets money—the killer, the killed and the one who brings the corpse to the surface of the water. It seems "all are part of one enormous cash transaction" (3) working behind the massacre. "The value of money, the price of human lives, both so cheap these days" (2).

Jagat is not afraid of the deep waters, the snakes, the big fish, even the dead bodies lying in the tank water. But he feels scared of the living men; "The world is becoming loveless" (3). Every dead body brought to the surface drives him to get drunk, the only 'eccentricity,' the one 'uncivilized habit' in him. Otherwise he is a man of human sensitivity. Daroga-babu, i.e., the police inspector threatens Jagat of the dire consequences if the names and numbers of the corpses are disclosed to the society. For, the killers are more dangerous than the killed ones. But Jagat is told by the police that the youths dumped at the bottom of tank are "more dangerous than the tigers in the forest, more deadly than the snakes in their holes" (4).

Convinced of the dire consequences, the fisherman buries the truth in his heart.

His son Abhay has had technical education, but he is jobless. He has neither money, nor an influence to get a job. Daroga-babu intends to make use of Jagat's poverty and simplicity. He wants Abhay to become an informer of the police to crack down the targeted ones. Though full of love and affection for his parents, he has become a stranger to them. He is not like other boys trendy and fashionable. They cannot imagine their only son to bring a wife and fill their home with joys of grandchildren. Like Daroga-babu and landlords, Jagat cannot think of sending Abhay to some other good place to do a good job. Abhay is frustrated. He regrets why he had education which is of no use to fulfill the dreams of his poor parents. He urges his father to stop the deadly work he is doing. For, he knows that his father does not know the ruthless plot operating secretly. One day Abhay too is brought to the police station, questioned there and released only to be surreptitiously killed and dumped in the deep waters of the tank at night. Jagat never thought that one day he will find the dead body of Abhay dumped in the tank which he does not bring to the surface. He cannot guess who killed Abhay and why. But next day Daroga-babu suddenly disappęars and is found killed by Jagat, dumped at the bottom of the tank tied with a cloth of Abhay. Jagat once again emerges with no corpse to the surface, and smiles. For, he knows, "No parents come to the police station or the morgue in search of their sons. What amazes Jagat is that no one even weeps aloud in grief these days" (*3*).

The story has no direct mention of the Naxal movement. But Sumanta Banerjee, like any Bengali reader familiar with the decade of the 1970s, is just right in reading the story against the backdrop of the movement:

> it would be obvious from her (Mahasweta's) subtle suggestive notes that the bodies dumped into the tank by the police were of those young boys suspected of political affiliation to the Naxalite movement. . . . It was a common practice with the police in those days to round up young boys in cities or villages, and surreptitiously kill them if they were suspected of any Naxalite connections, and then dispose of their bodies in some distant place to pass off their killings as cases of unac-

> counted murder. In Calcutta, the blind lanes and alleys provided the police with ideal spots for dumping these bodies. In the villages, the tanks were the dumping spots, as described meticulously by Mahasweta. (Bait, xiv)

The story is marked with paradigm of dialectics of the dominance and resistance between the oppressor and the oppressed, the central and the peripheral, the capitalists and the socialists, the haves and the have-nots. But nobody triumphs. Daroga babu and his police dumped several suspected youths like Abhay at the bottom of the tank, but eventually he too had to disappear from the world. The story is remarkable for its revealing the rash apathetic approach and lack of vision on the part of government to solve the problem.

Against the backdrop of the "Fisherman," it shall be worthwhile to have a glance at Mahasweta Devi's another story called "Knife" which deals with the politician-police-gangsters symbiosis in the socio-political life of West Bengal after the 1970s when the Naxalite movement had been temporarily hushed up or suppressed, joining hands with the landlord politicians and their goonda elements in society. Thereafter, these landlords and their mafia dons have become the rulers and controllers, intending to take their pound of flesh from the common masses. They are at the helm of affairs, vested with the political powers.

The story is a tongue-in-cheek account of the politician-gangsters-police troika systematically institutionalized in the socio-political life not only of West Bengal but the whole Indian nation. It is a bitter reality that several youths, even educated, have come to join the world of dons, mafias and *mastans* like 'Germany, Sachcha, Baba, Bota, Paolon' (19) who work for the politicians in their illegal affairs, and in return get protection from the police, the *thana babus* who are ultimately controlled by the politicians. These dons resort to extortion from the common masses. Whenever any activity like dealing of properties, marrying off daughters, selling goods in the market or collecting your pension money takes place, these dons must get their share. When the gangster, Germany abducts a thirteen year poor girl Phulbanu who is raped and murdered, the police arrests a rickshaw-puller condemned to die in prison without trial. After the murder of the don Germany, it is the poor, peripheral slum-

dwellers who start leaving the town Anantpur, apprehending their arrest, though not guilty of his murder. These dons believe in their 'freedom' and 'struggle.' And they get it. To them, freedom means "the black marketers . . . should be given the 'freedom' to carry on their business as long as the controllers get their commission from them. . . . Their 'struggle' is for capturing the orbits of control and chunks of business" (xviii). The goondas have their own political colours ranging from tri-colour to red. Support from the local police station is not to be taken for granted since that is dependent on various other factors. "One of the determining factors is the will of two political parties; which controller is currently the champion of which party? Since all five of them provide paybacks to the thana, the police do not really believe in controlling the *controllers*" (15). This is the paradigm of socio-political life where the politics is criminalized and the crime politicized. Naturally, the common masses have no trust in the politicians and the police. People come on the streets, form the 'Citizens Committees' to protect themselves against the atrocities wrought by the politicians-gangsters-police syndrome. And the poor common masses are pitted against the rich landlords. They do not get their freedom from the atrocities and extortion of the troika. As a result, the feeling of insecurity and alienation begin to emerge in their hearts. The feeling of social exclusion leads to class consciousness which poses a direct threat to nation and nationalism. The same conditions of disparity and discrimination conducive to the feeling of social exclusion and alienation leading to the class consciousness are witnessed in Aravind Adiga's famous novel *The White Tiger*, narrating "that India is two countries in one: an India of Light and an India of Darkness" (14).

The fisherman Jagat with his family represents the lives of the dispossessed subaltern class pitted against the oppressor, capitalist landlords and Daroga-babu representing the government and its police force which get extended to assume a murkier form and colour in its troika of politician-gangster-police in the story "Knife." It seems that the Indian nation stands divided between the central and the marginals. Their interests are constantly at war with each other. And it is the commonality of interests that determines the notion of nationalism. To the capitalist central people, nationalism abounds in

protection of their own interests even at the cost of the interests of the marginals. Naturally, the notion of nationalism of the Central cannot be the same for the marginals. Nature of nationalism is determined by the class which is responsible for it, because:

> At different times different classes constitute the 'nation' and give expression to nationalism. What class or group would play this role at a given time depends upon the circumstances of history and the structure of society. It may often happen that the so-called national interest of the moment is actually against the real interests of the majority of people (Jayaprakash, 289).

Nationalism precedes and preserves the nation. And any breach of nationalism leads to the collapse of a nation. 'Although nationalism had been exposed by Marxist theory as a bourgeois social formation that masked capitalism, its necessity as a stage in the freeing of the world's worker had been recognized by Lenin . . . in 1919.'

Mahasweta shows the existence of class consciousness and the social exclusion, squarely evident in the Indian nation which marks the breach of nationalism. The class of people which suffers the pangs of injustice and inequality in the system thinks the given system is against them and their interests, and ultimately they start mobilizing to build a counter system which leads to a chronic conflict in the life of a nation. Once the strife is set to unroll, the means and methods of a movement are let loose unbridled, sometimes unaimed at its initially avowed ends. No movement can be judged from its methods, but its roots, its history must be traced to find a solution. Naxalism is a blot on our democracy. After six decades of Independence we have just allowed the problem to take its own course and to get aggravated to squeeze under its octopus grip the whole Indian nation. V.S. Naipaul rightly calls 'India, a million mutiny, now.' That the dumping of the suspected youths like Abhay in the tanks or encountering them in the blind alleys is not going to offer any solution to this issue is now time tested over a long span of four decades.

Like Jameson, Mahasweta also believes in representation of private individual experience as allegorical of the public and national destiny. Obviously, we have failed to establish the enshrined princi-

ple of our Constitution—the Socialist, Secular Republic State, justice, social, economic and political to its citizens, and assuring the dignity of human life. Our political system stands reduced to a "*fucking joke*" (TWT, 137). The end of colonial era, it seems, simply executed the transfer of political sovereignty from the British to the local elites. The socio-economic justice is still a day-dream in the lives of common masses, especially the subalterns. To conclude, one believes: "More importantly, perhaps, postcolonial states were often tied to former colonial administrative, legal and economic systems that limited their independent action" (Ashcroft, 194).

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Cultural Assimilation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH

Jhumpa Lahiri is an important short story writer of the present times. She has gained much name and fame by her first collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies*. She was honoured with the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for this collection. After this collection she switched over to novel writing and wrote a novel entitled *The Namesake*. The novel also got much success and the famous film producer and director Mira Nair has made a film on this novel. But once again Jhumpa Lahiri switched over to short story writing which seems to be the natural mode of her creative expression. Her second collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* was published by Random House India in 2008. As a matter of fact, the plot of Lahiri's stories and novel revolve round the Indian characters and more so the Bengali characters. Indian characters living in America face a lot of problems when they come in contact with American culture. Lahiri's characters strongly stick to their tradition and get success in retaining their Indianness. The oriental culture is strong enough to negate the onslaught of the occidental culture. Indians living in America always remember their motherland and even create a mini-India there. This has been the theme of Lahiri's first collection of stories *Interpreter of Maladies*. But the publication of her second collection *Unaccustomed Earth* brings a change in theme. The stories revolve less around the dislocation, Lahiri's earlier Bengali characters encountered in America and more around the assimilation experienced by their children—who while conscious of their parents' old-world habits, vigorously reject them in favour of American lifestyles and partners. This paper focuses in the theme of cultural assimilation by discussing some of the stories of this collection.

The stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* are divided into two parts: Part one contains five stories, including the title one, and the second contains three stories, revolving around the same two protagonists, Hema and Kaushik. The stories describe middle class professional, often academic, mostly Bengali families or individuals in US, and are narrated from the perspective of children or adults who have grown up outside India. The title story *Unaccustomed Earth* is about a retired Bengali father, recently widowed, who visits his daughter, Ruma, now a mother, in Seattle. After the death of her mother, Ruma thinks it her moral and social duty to look after her father. But she is unable to perform her duty as the American culture is totally different from the Indian. There is the concept of nuclear family in America: husband, wife and their children. They don't welcome any outsider in their family. This cultural conflict in the mind of Ruma becomes obvious in these lines: "She knew her father did not need taking care of, and yet this very fact caused her to feel guilty, in India there would have been no question of his not moving in with her. Her father had never mentioned the possibility. . . . Ruma feared that her father would become a responsibility, an added demand, continuously present in a way she was no longer used to. It would mean an end to the family she'd created on her own: herself and Adam and Akash." (6-7)

On the other hand, the father celebrates his liberty after his wife's death by going on a world tour: "How freeing it was, these days, to travel alone, with only a single suitcase to check. He had never visited the Pacific North-west, never appreciated the staggering breadth of his adopted land." (7) During these tours he met a Bengali lady Mrs. Meenakshi Bagchi who was a widow. Being the only two Bengalis in the tour group, naturally they're engaged in a conversation. They start eating together, sitting next to one another on the bus. Because of their common appearance and language, people mistook them for husband and wife. Initially there was nothing romantic; neither of them was interested in anything like that. He enjoyed Mrs. Bagchi's company, knowing that at the end of a few weeks she would board a separate plane and disappear. But after Italy he began thinking of her, looking forward to receiving her emails, checking his computer five or six times a day. This is a clear

symptom of the fact that he had developed a romantic relationship with Mrs. Bagchi and he was waiting earnestly for the next tour to begin. He would soon see Mrs. Bagchi again in Prague. This time, they'd agreed, they would share a room. But before this tour, the father decided to visit his daughter Ruma in Seattle.

Ruma tried her best to provide a homely atmosphere to her father. She even proposed to receive her father from the airport itself. But the father did not want to give any trouble to Ruma and he came to her house by a hired taxi. Not only that, at Ruma's house, he did most of the kitchen work which is totally alien to Indian culture. In fact, self-reliance is the key-word of American culture. No one wants to be dependent on anyone. The father has spent a major part of his life in America and he has also adopted this American trait in his personality. Even after the death of his wife, he wants to enjoy life in his own way. His only son has gone to New Zealand for job and his daughter Ruma is leading a married life. So he does not want to disturb the life of his children. He goes on the European tour to enjoy himself. But Ruma discovers her father's new-found love and his zest for travelling only after his departure. The story presents the emotional distance between father and daughter, which prevented them from sharing each other's emotions:

> He (Ruma's father) did not want to be part of another family, part of the mess, the feuds, the demands, the energy of it. He did not want to live in the margins of his daughter's life, in the shadow of her marriage. He didn't want to live again in an enormous house that would only fill up with things over the years, as the children grew, all the things he'd recently gotten rid of, all the books and papers and clothes and objects one felt compelled to possess, to save. (53)

A moment earlier, he (Ruma's father) imagined his grand son, Akash one day turning his back on his parents, Ruma and Adam, as he did on his father. A sense of nostalgia grips his mind.

> He imagined the boy years from now occupying this very room, shutting the door as Ruma and Romi had. It was inevitable. And yet he knew that he too hard turned his back on parents, by setting in America. In the name of ambition and accomplishment, none of which mattered any more, he had forsaken them. (51)

Thus we see that the Indian characters of the story have fully adopted cultural traits of America. Americans are very much career-oriented. They forsake their parents for the sake of their career and ambition. Many years ago, the father also did the same. He forsook his parents in India and came to America to fulfill his ambition and now the same thing has been done to him by his only son Rumi who has gone to New Zealand for job. The father does not want to become a burden on his children after the death of his wife. That is why, he decides to live in his own place and lead his life in his own way. Self-dependence is also an important trait of American culture which has been adopted by the father. Thus, the story *Unaccustomed Earth* presents a good example of cultural assimilation.

The second story *Hell-Heaven* also presents a very good example of cultural assimilation. The story about a Bengali family, now settled in America, is narrated by the young girl Usha. Usha's father is a professor doing research most of the time in his institute. His wife is simply a housewife doing the household work and going for shopping in the evening. Her life is almost barren, without any enthusiasm. She spends her time with her daughter Usha, whereas her husband remains busy with his books in his department. Just then a young Bengali chap named Pranab Chakraborty enters her life. Pranab Chakraborty was from a wealthy family in Calcutta and had come to America to study engineering at MIT. He became a regular visitor to the house of the narrator as he belonged to Calcutta and was a Bengali. The appearance of Pranab brought a dramatic change in the behaviour of the narrator's mother. The narrator observed this change:

> Before we met him, I would return from school and find my mother with her purse in her lap and her trench coat on, desperate to escape the apartment where she had spent the day alone. But now I would find her in the kitchen, rolling out dough for luchis, which she normally made only on Sundays for my father and me, or putting up new curtains she'd bought at Woolworth's. I did not know, back then, that Pranab Kaku's visits were what my mother looked forward to all day, that she changed into a new sari and combed her hair in anticipation of his arrival, and that she planned, days in advance, the snacks she would serve him with such nonchalance. (63)

The narrator could easily guess the romantic affair going on between her mother and Pranab. Afterwards Pranab came in touch with an American girl named Deborah. Slowly and steadily, Deborah replaced the narrator's mother from the life of Pranab. Soon the marriage between Pranab and Deborah materialized. The narrator's mother gave her consent to their marriage, thinking that soon the American girl would divorce Pranab and in this way Pranab would come to her again. It was a very tough situation for the narrator's mother as her heart was broken by this marriage. She was seriously thinking of committing suicide, but changed her decision for the sake of her family. At the end, Pranab left his wife Deborah and fell in love with a married Bengali woman, destroying the two families in the process. Generally Indians are very honest and sincere in their conjugal life, while Americans go on changing their partners like their shirts. Pranab being an Indian imbibed the American trait and left his wife. He developed a new relationship with a married woman which is totally immoral from Indian point of view.

The narrator Usha was greatly allured by the American lifestyle. She wanted to wear jeans and shirt. As she grew up, she imbibed the American traits. She started drinking beer and kept boyfriends also. She is totally opposite to her mother. There is no conflict in her heart and mind. She did everything boldly. Yet she did not want to share her secrets with her mother: "I began keeping other secrets from her, evading her with the aid of my friends. I told her I was sleeping over at a friend's when really I went to parties, drinking beer and allowing boys to kiss me and fondle my breasts and press their erections against my hip as we lay groping on a sofa or the backseats of a car. I began to pity my mother; the older I got, the more I saw what a desolate life she led." (76)

But at the end, she has to reconcile with the fact that her daughter is not only a child of India but a child of America as well. The narrator Usha remarks: "My mother and I had also made peace; she had accepted the fact that I was not only her daughter but a child of America as well. Slowly, she accepted that I dated one American man, and then another, and then yet another, that I slept with them, and even that I lived with one though we were not married. She

welcomed my boyfriends into our home and when things didn't work out, she told me I would find someone better." (81-82)

Thus we see that both Pranab and Usha fully adopt the traits of American culture and enjoy their life. They have no regards for the traditional Indian values and as such there is no conflict in their mind between the cultures of the East and the West.

The third story which I have taken up is *Only Goodness.* In fact, this story is a beautiful example of cultural assimilation. The American culture seems to be so attractive and glamorous that the younger generation of India imitate and adopt it almost blindly. Sudha, the elder sister, first introduces her brother, Rahul to alcoholism, later on tries to free him of this habit. She wants to give an American upbringing to her kid brother, which she did not get in her own childhood, by buying toys, setting up room for him, putting a swing set in the yard etc. But as he enters college, she introduces him to alcohol, a habit he acquires disastrously.

> She went to a local liquor store, helping Rahul divvy up the cans between his room and hers so that their parents wouldn't discover them. After her parents were asleep she brought some cans into Rahul's room. He snuck downstairs, bringing back a cup of ice cubes to chill down the warm Budweiser. They shared one cupful, then another, listening to the Stones and the Doors on Rahul's record player, smoking cigarettes next to the open window and exhaling through the screen. It was as if Sudha were in high school again, doing things she once hadn't had the wits or guts for. She felt a new bond with her brother, a sense, after years of regarding him as just a kid, that they were finally friends. (128-29)

Meanwhile, Rahul's drinking habit proved to be a great hindrance in his career. He could not pass his examinations and was finally thrown out of the college. Along with drinking, he had developed a new habit i.e. dating girls. During the process of dating, he came across a woman named Elena who was thirty eight years older than Rahul. Once Rahul invited Elena to his house and divulged his intention before everyone that he wanted to marry Elena. This shocked and surprised his parents. At last his father said: "That's not possible. You are only a boy. You have no career, no goal, no path in life. You are in no position to be getting married. And this

woman," their father said, registering Elena's presence only for an instant before turning away, "is practically old enough to be your mother." (154-55)

Sudha moved to London to study Economics, and eventually married an Englishman, much older than her. Rahul goes away from his home and her life for some years. Later, when she gets a letter from him, she immediately responds and invites him to her home in London. The story is about a sister and her guilt conscience, who tries to renew her attempts to free her brother of the drinking habit for which she is solely responsible. Since old habits die hard, Rahul's boozing nature not only spoils his life, but compels Sudha to force him out of her house when he nearly kills her son, Neel, by leaving him in the bath tub. Thus, the story centres round Rahul. Indirectly Jhumpa Lahiri tries to convey the lesson that mad imitation of the American and western way of living leads us nowhere and at last one ends up one's life and career as an utter failure like Rahul.

Thus, we see that Jhumpa Lahiri presents cultural assimilation in her collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth.* The sons and daughters of immigrants are not nostalgic about India. They are born in America and feel proud of leading American style of living. Their parents exert some pressure on them for respecting the traditional values of India. But the younger generation does not feel any attachment with India except with their own parents. Instead they consider themselves as sons and daughters of America where they live.

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New Criticism: Basic Premises and a Tool of Teaching/Learning

SUBHASH CHANDRA SHARMA

New Criticism has been a landmark creed in the history of literary criticism. Literally speaking, New Criticism is not new as its nomenclature conveys. It was born and nurtured during the late twenties and early thirties of the twentieth century and reached fruition during the 1940s and 1950s. Also known as formalistic, textual and ontological criticism, New Criticism received its name from a lecture, "The New Criticism." Kenneth Burke, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, R.P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, William Empson, I A. Richards, T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis are the leading lights whose theory and practice paved the way for the rise of new critical creed. New Criticism opened up new vistas of analysis and understanding a work of art with its newly discovered tools. For a proper perspective, it is imperative, both for the teacher and the learner alike, to be well versed in the basic premises of New Criticism.

New Criticism broke new ground in the elucidation and appreciation of a work of art, especially poetry. It construes a work of art, especially a poem as "qua" poem, an object in itself, primarily as poetry and not any other thing. It treats a poem at the ontological level, regards it as "the thing in itself" with a definite entity of its own, separate both from the poet and the socio-cultural milieu in which it is produced. New Criticism, thus stands in sharp contrast to Sociological or Marxian Criticism which assume a close and causative relationship between society and literature and between society and writer, art and the artist being the product of the society and historical circumstances. Unhampered by extraneous considerations, New Criticism concerns itself with the "words on the page," "the text" rather than with the study of the source and social circumstances. The basic premise being the inherent self-sufficiency, autonomy of a work of art and as such its meaning, merits and demerits lie therein.

Further, the New Critics suggest that a poetic work has both form and content with an "organic unity" constituting its structure. A close reading of the text is a *sine qua non* for the comprehension of its structure and the meaning embodied in it. Words, images, rhythm, metre, symbols and sound effects constitute the form of poetry and their ambiguities and inter-connections with each other and one another convey the idea of its structure and meaning. The worth of a work of art lies in the totality of its structure and not outside it, i.e., in the mind of the writer or in the responses of the readers. The text is more important than both the writer and the reader as it will outlive both. So the New Criticism emphasizes the "organic unity" of structure and meaning. The two are not to be separated for proper critical study of a text. The tendency to separate the two has been called "the heresy of paraphrase" by Cleanth Brooks.

The principles of New Criticism are basically lingual or verbal. It means that literature is conceived to be a special kind of language with its attributes defined by systematic opposition to the language of science and of logical discourse. It is this special kind of language and its use which sets a work of art apart from the ordinary and scientific uses of language—emotive and scientific—and assign the name poetic and scientific. The poetic use of language, confined to poetry, has two types of meaning as available in dictionary and connotative meaning is the suggestive meaning that words are charged with in the context of the text. Cleanth Brooks, one of the pillars of New Criticism, observes in his essay "The Well Wrought Urn": "The tendency of sciences is necessarily to stabilize terms, to freeze them into strict denotations; the poet's tendency is by contrast disruptive. The terms are continually modifying each other and thus violating their dictionary meanings."[1]

Hence, the study of words, their arrangement, placement and pattern are vital to understanding the meaning of the text. The words embody emotional, associative, situational and symbolic significance, apart from their literal meaning. That is why, of special interest and appeal to the New Critics is the use of literary devices such as "irony" and "paradox" employed by the poet to achieve a balance or reconciliation between dissimilar, even conflicting elements in a text. In other words, New Criticism concentrates exclusively on the language of poetry and accounts for its structure in terms of the layers of meaning the words are loaded with. Aptly observes Rajnath in

this connection, "The New Critics make a two-fold semantic division of language into denotation and connotation, the former being the literal or dictionary meaning which suffices, for example, in the scientific discourse and the latter the suggestive meaning brought forth by the poetical context."[2]

In a nutshell, New Criticism is an attitude to analyze a work of art, a poem, as a linguistic paradigm. It is ahistorical, anti-impressionistic and objective in the analysis of "words on the page." As New Criticism treats an artistic piece "self-contained," "self-referential" entity and banishes the empirical author from the text emphasizing that the poem is on the printed page, the characteristic method of the New Criticism is to have a "close reading" of the text which reveals new meaning on subsequent readings.

In the New Criticism each of its pioneers has propounded a basic principle to evaluate a work of art. Brooks' "paradox," Tate's "tension," Ransom's "texture," Blackmur's "gesture" and Empson's "ambiguity" are the yardsticks to judge a poetic work. In *The Language of Paradox*, Cleanth Brooks maintained: "There is a sense in which truth requires a language purged of every trace of paradox, apparently the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox."[3] So Brooks opines that every poem is built upon an irony or paradox. Science tries to stabilize terms, the poet continually wraps them in order to make them accurately fit his meaning. A poet approaches his subject indirectly by conjuring words and producing new combinations and thus accomplishes paradox and irony. To discover and resolve the paradox inherent in poetry, to reveal the irony a poem is built upon, literary criticism must concentrate on the method of close textual reading of the poem because "the language of poetry is the language of paradox." Cleanth Brooks also decries the tendency of literary criticism becoming an exercise at "Paraphrase of logical and narrative content" or "a study of historical and biographical material" or "inspirational and didactic interpretation."

Ransom is another leading light of New Criticism. His critical creed is primarily concerned with the "ontological" discussion of a work, i.e., to discuss a work of art as a thing in itself. In his brilliant critical commentary "The New Criticism" Ransom deals with T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards and Yvor Winters. He finds Eliot to be an example of the historical critic, Richards the psychological critic and

Yvor Winters a case of the logical critic. Ransom opines that it is not the paraphraseable content of the poem that the critic should be interested in; what is really important for him is the interplay of determinate with indeterminate meaning, the relation between structure and texture. The learned critic argues that in a poem there is logical meaning or structure and illogical meaning or texture. The structure includes the argument or development of the theme in a poem and the texture stems from the interaction of meaning and metre in it. Employing the image of a living room, Ransom reveals the relationship between structure and texture as also the distinction. He says, "The walls of my room are obviously structural, the beams and boards have a function, so does the plaster which is the visible aspect of the final wall. The plaster might have remained naked aspiring to no character and purely functional. But actually it has been papered receiving colour and design though they have no structural value and perhaps it has been hung with tapestry or with paintings for 'decoration.' The paint, the paper, the tapestry are texture. It is logically unrelated to structure."[4]

Thus if the room is a poem, the walls of the room are structure and the paint, the paper and the tapestry on the walls form texture. The poet's meaning consists of taking the structure or logical meaning and texture or local meaning together. And as the structure and texture lie in a text, "the text" becomes the be-all and end-all of New Criticism. Stressing this point, William K. Wimsatt and Munroe C. Beardsley in their critical commentary "The Verbal Icon" write, "A poem should not 'mean' but 'be.' A poem can 'be' only through its meaning—since its medium is words—yet it 'is' simply in the sense that we have no excuse for what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a fact of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once."[5] The two critics warn the readers against critical fallacies—"intentional fallacy" and "affective fallacy." The former is erroneous practice of basing interpretations on the expressed or implied intentions of author whereas the later refers to the practice of interpreting texts according to the psychological responses of readers which is equally erroneous. So, the affective fallacy is a confusion between the poem and results. It begins by trying to derive the standards of criticism from psychological effects of a poem and ends in impressionism and relativism.

Ransom further makes a distinction between the scientific and poetic language in the New Criticism. While distinguishing between the denotative nature of scientific language and the evocative language of poetry, Ransom identifies the aesthetic sign or "icon" with the object. Again, taking a clue from Charles W. Morris, the semanticist, Ransom distinguishes between sign and icon pinpointing that sign refers to an object but the icon resembles or imitates an object. That is, science makes use of signs while art employs icon, "Symbols are algebraic characters or words used technically as defined in dictionary, defined for the purpose of a given discourse in the discourse itself. But the aesthetic signs are 'icons' or images. As signs they have semantical objects or refer to objects but as iconic signs they also resemble or imitate these objects." (Ransom)

Another notable critic Allen Tate propounded his concept in a poetic text in his critical treatise "Tensions in Poetry." The 'tension' in a poem lies in the binary opposition of various ideas and qualities such as general/ particular, abstract/ concrete, and is akin to Ransom's ideas of structure versus texture. Tate evaluated a poem on the basis of its organisation of the oppositions or the establishment of tensions, more so when it involved irony and paradox—the actual language of poetry. For Tate "tension is "derived from looping the prefixes off the logical terms, extension and intension." The terms "extension" and "intension" imply concrete, denotative and abstract, metaphysical meaning respectively. Rajnath rightly and lucidly remarks, "The term 'tension' points to the balance of extension and intension which are identical with Brooks' denotation and connotation or Ransom's structure and texture respectively. The poet sets off denotation and connotation against each other for the creation of new meaning."

Apart from Brooks, Ransom and Tate, who may rightly be regarded as the three pillars of New Criticism, the contribution of Blackmur and Empson to New Criticism must be acknowledged. The concept of "gesture" as enunciated by Blackmur refers to the ways in which ideas can be absorbed by craft into poetic meaning and the relationship between ideas, imagination and craftsmanship. William Empson expounded the idea "ambiguity" as applied to a work of art. Ambiguity implies stating something in a way that its meaning cannot be definitely determined. Although ambiguity is often considered a flaw, especially in speech, it turns out to be a virtue

in literary works where the artist seeks to create multiple meanings or levels of meanings or to leave meaning indeterminate. Indeed ambiguity adds to the richness and complexity of literature where a single word or phrase can suggest or connote a number of different things. Empson identifies and describes seven types of ambiguity in his aptly named work *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Ambiguity in a poem is not only delectable but highly desirable. Each of the pioneers, thus, has a master-metaphor in terms of which he views the critical function and how it shapes, informs and makes the work meaningful.

Despite all the revaluation that resulted from the efforts of New Critics, it is their valuation of the poetry written by their own contemporaries that should count among the significant achievements of the New Critics. Both Eliot and Leavis maintained that one's ability to judge poetry must be demonstrated in telling a good modern poem from a bad one, for a poet is alive in his own age and writes not for posterity but for his own contemporaries and it enjoins upon us to read and understand his relevance to our own generations. New Criticism enormously extended the frontiers of criticism and demanded of the critic first-rate scholarship and fine sensibility. Above all, New Critics, in trying to pay attention to the work of their contemporaries, came to show a deep concern for their own writings, which is the business of responsible criticism. All this apart, let us count the conspicuous achievements of New Criticism as:

- It taught the generations how to read poetry and its revaluations in a new perspective.
- It focused attention on contemporary achievement as reflecting contemporary consciousness.
- New criticism enlarged the frontiers of criticism by showing the necessity for knowledge of other disciplines other than literature proper.
- It raised level of awareness and sophistication in criticism and developed ingenious new methods of analysis of poetry and its devices: imagery and symbol.
- It gave a place of pride to the readers and importance to his reading of responses to the text. For, it is the reader who decides how far the intention of the author has been realized in the text.

Above all, in its attitude to language New Criticism anticipated both structuralism and deconstruction.

All said and done, New Criticism, its limitations notwithstanding, has stood the test of the times. It has made critical inquiry more objective and scientific with its newly invented tools (read terms). In its approach to language, the New Criticism anticipated structuralism and deconstruction. The critical "monism" of the New Critics has its own value and validity, albeit, in limited sense. But the lasting contribution of New Criticism lies in its giving more importance to the text rather than its creator. The "word on page" "the text" constitutes the core, not the author or the reader. The text is the soul of the New Criticism. Nay, it should be at the core of teaching and learning any subject in the classroom. In case of language and literature, indispensability of text cannot be over-emphasized. Herein lies the immanent contribution of New Criticism at a time when students tend to resort to shortcuts and teachers taking recourse to "guides" and "help books" to complete the syllabus, the "text" has become the first casualty. As a result, teaching of language especially English in India which can be most fruitfully accomplished through literature has suffered immensely. The appalling standards of linguistic skills among students, be it vernacular or foreign, are there for us to see. If we really want to acquire linguistic skills of writing and speaking in a natural way, we have no option but to imbibe the fundamental principle of New Criticism—a close reading of the text.

NOTES

1. Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*. London: Methuen, 1968.
2. Rajnath, "The New Criticism and Deconstruction: Attitudes to Language and Literature," *Journal of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 1, No. 11, December 1984.
3. Cleanth Brooks, *The Language of Paradox*. London: Methuen, 1968.
4. J.C. Ransom, *The New Criticism*. New York: The Directions, 1941.
5. M.C. Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon*. London: Frederic Ongar, 1983.

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Book Reviews

Manju Roy, *The World of Malgudi: Dynamics of Creativity and Social Ethos in R.K. Narayan's Novels*, New Delhi, Serials Publications, 2010, 218 pp. Rs. 695. ISBN 978-81-8387-343-7

'Narayan is fascinating to read but difficult to write about' is the opening remark by an eminent scholar and professor of English, H.S. Ahulwalia, in his excellent foreword to Manju Roy's book *The World of Malgudi: Dynamics of Creativity and Social Ethos in R.K. Narayan's Novels*. The difficulty arises, Ahulwalia contends, mainly because of 'easy generalization' of Narayan's novels. Manju Roy, in her book, overcomes this difficulty to a great extent, with her insightful and intensive evaluation of each of the fifteen novels of Narayan in totality. This places her book as a class apart in the formidable corpus of Narayan's criticism. Manju Roy's book contains nine chapters besides Foreword and Preface in the beginning and Bibliography and Index at the end. Each chapter begins with a remarkable verse quotation that is appropriate to the sub-title of the chapter on one hand and holds the key to the ideas underlying the chapter on the other. The first chapter, Introduction, has three segments. In the first part, Roy presents a brief but absorbing account of Narayan's life and career, his complete works, his treatment of humour, his comic vision, his use of English language, his plot-construction and a comprehensive analysis of his art of characterization. Roy rounds up this segment with her observation that 'Narayan is, largely a traditionalist in the matter of characterization' (12). The second segment offers a kaleidoscopic account of the opinion of the critics—Western as well as Indian—and ends with Roy's reasoned defence of Narayan as a great novelist. The final segment portrays Malgudi as 'a microcosm of middle class South Indian society' (17) and closes with Roy's apt comment that through Malgudi, Narayan 'tries to reveal the universal in the particular' (19).

In the next seven chapters, Manju Roy presents a classification of all the fifteen novels of Narayan into seven groups. The grouping of the novels, pre-fixed by sub-titles, is a reflection on their chronological sequence and their thematic closeness. *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts* are grouped together under the sub-title 'A

Journey from Innocence to Experience.' Swami's life, Roy argues largely embodies the virtue of innocence; his 'is a world of inexhaustible joy, a world of sparkling and eternal sunshine' (42) whereas Chandran, who has sometimes 'a fleeting awareness of the larger irony of life and its ways' moves from the state of innocence to that of experience. *The Dark Room* and *The English Teacher*, two of Narayan's well-known novels, have been placed together by Roy under the caption 'Search for Identity.' Savitri's revolt in *The Dark Room*, Roy asserts 'is the revolt of a modern woman who is on the look out for her independent human identity' (56). *The English Teacher* along with *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts* forms a trilogy, and is remarkably evaluated as the 'story of a man of the world bearing sweet and bitter fruits of life' (62).

Roy considers *Mr. Sampath* and *The Financial Expert* as 'Novels of Upheavals,' perhaps because the protagonists in these two novels encounter the rise and fall, the ebb and flow of life in a magnitude that may unsettle the average *homo sapiens*. The key phrase governing *Waiting for the Mahatma* and *The Guide* is 'Tensions and Agonies of Modern Man.' The major characters in these two novels, Roy contends, fully represent the tensions and agonies of the 20th century men. *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* and *The Vendor of Sweets* have been sub-titled 'Eternal Struggle between the Good and the Evil.' The contrast between the two pairs of characters in both these novels has been duly highlighted by Roy. *The Painter of Signs* and *A Tiger for Malgudi* have been evaluated by Roy as 'Novels of Transformation.' Roy discovers parallel links between the story of Raman [The Painter of Signs] and that of King Santhanu in the *Mahabharata* (161) and between the story of *A Tiger for Malgudi* and the best of *The Panchtantra* or the famous Buddhist works Jatakas (165).

Narayan's last three novels—*Talkative Man*, *The Story of Nagaraj* and *Grandmother's Tale*—have been clustered together under the sub-title 'Ordinary Hero in an extraordinary Way.' Whereas Roy seems surprised at the lack of substantial critical response to *Talkative Man* even as the novel 'records the impact of the western ethos on Indians' (170), she expresses solidarity with Nandini Saha's view on *The Story of Nagaraj* as 'an icon of a Postmodern Malgudi' (186). *Grandmother's Tale*, in Roy's opinion, is a novel wherein

'Narayan has given his biography a fictional form' (186). Roy, later, discovers a parallel between this novel and the Savitri-Satyavan legend of *The Mahabharata* (192). In conclusion, Roy, recapitulating the main arguments criss-crossing the book, beautifully sums up Narayan's art of characterization highlighting the vast panorama of Narayan's characters, who sometimes go beyond Forster's classification of flat and round characters and are, to a great extent, similar to the characters in the novels of George Eliot. Roy's book ends with a fairly comprehensive bibliography and a truly informative index.

All the chapters of Roy's book are studded with wholesome approach and rich and valuable insights. A unique feature of the book is that it is scholarly and student-friendly. With its fabulous array of critical opinions on Narayan's novels and his art and Roy's balancing act of the mixed response, the book is sure to guide Narayan's scholars and students through 'many a treacherous academic minefield.'

This reviewer, nevertheless, wishes the author had taken some more pains to explicate the sub-titles of chapters with reference to the novels grouped under them and had been more meticulous in warding off the few printing errors she seems to have overlooked. The microscopic flipside notwithstanding the unmistakable impression that finally emerges from a close analysis of Manju Roy's book is that it is a valuable and refreshingly welcome addition to the ever-growing corpus of Narayan criticism and it assures us of great promises on the part of the author.

C.M. College, Darbhanga **Parmanand Jha**

Vijay Kumar Roy, *Aesthetic of John Keats: An Indian Approach*. New Delhi: Adhyayan, 2010. ISBN-978-81-8435-202-3. Price: Rs. 450. X+ 168 pp.

> Beauty is truth; truth, beauty—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The oft-quoted lines of John Keats in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" while describing the urn in particular are universally acknowledged in re-

spect of beauty without any reference to person or thing. These lines can stem from none other than an aesthete. In an age when various new schools of criticism and numberless theories are making way, a study on Keats seems cumbersome. But Vijay Kumar Roy's book *Aesthetic of John Keats: An Indian Approach* is a welcome addition to the world of literary criticism. Keats has since long been considered a poet of love, longing and loss but Roy's endeavours in this book provide an exegesis and insight to Keats's aesthetics.

The book divided into seven chapters introduces readers to Keats's life and his various works, in addition to making a comparative analysis of the major romantic poets' works. Major romantic poets, despite their long stay in this ephemeral world, could not outshine the mellifluous master of muse that John Keats was. Roy's book distinctly shows the artist's progression from sensuousness to sublimity.

Aesthetic of John Keats: An Indian Approach traces the poet's devotion to poetry as an art form wherein many rasas do make their presence felt in Keatsian world. Keats's unfathomable poetic flights are not only imaginative leaps but various strides 'to find the agonies, the strife of human hearts (Sleep and Poetry). Keats's aestheticism finds its manifestation in his scattered poems and odes which allow the poet and his readers to interpret whether they wake or sleep. Visible things for Keats act as instruments through which he discovers his real and ideal world of perfect beauty. Beauty exalts senses and transports the poet to a transcendental world.

Roy's book makes a smooth reading and prompts readers to unveil various threads embedded in the ever-refreshing flora and fauna of Keats's poetic world. What lends the book an additional charm is the Foreword written by Professor Pashupati Jha, an Indian English poet of love and longing. Though readers may find the book a bit costly yet they may get immense satisfaction in the paradigm that poetry often does not toe pleasure principle, rather it soothes the wounds of time and makes a balance between past and present. Roy's book would, of course, claim its niche in the plethora of volumes attracting readers' attention in the field of poetry and its critical canons.

I.I.T., Roorkee **BINOD MISHRA**

Sunil Sharma, *The Minotaur*. Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2009, Pp.318, Rs 995, ISBN 978-81-8152-282-5

The post-Independence era and the past few years have seen a massive flourishing of Indian English writing in the form of new fiction. Any society in a whirlpool of change breeds many negative feelings like alienation, anxiety, insecurity, fear etc. The literary energy of Sunil Sharma's debut fictional wonder, *The Minotaur* has competent narrative force to demolish the existing literary boundaries and redefine postmodern fiction in India and its concerns. Sunil Sharma is a literary fictionist whose shorts about the moral poverty of the emerging urban India are already being appreciated and commented upon by the national and international critics. He offers a synthesis of different genres in his rich and eminently readable debut novel *The Minotaur*. He does not talk about outdated ideologies deliberately, it seems of the urban ghettos or the shocking poverty of India in his first novel that could have got him an instant global recognition but rather chooses to give a literary account of the 20th century's dominant ideologies of capitalism, communism, colonialism and nationalism. It is a difficult assignment any way for any writer but Sunil manages to deliver the message in this well-crafted and fast 'flash' narrative that wilfully bends the conventional forms in a restive quest for a new mode of accentuation that reminds us of Picasso who did the same for his age, with his series of bold paintings on the theme of the Minotaur. The novel is inspired by the great Spanish painter and the mythic creature Minotaur. It is an account of the noble search for a poverty-free world by a young highly-intelligent doctor in a third-world nation, his rise and fall as a dictator and flight from that raped burning famished poor nation into the unknown. Constantine Caesar, the hypnotic protagonist, becomes what political charismatic heroes always become in history so far—cruel despots and mass murderers. He lands up in an island and sets up his hedonistic empire on that pristine primitive island till one day a radicalized native kills him on Ides of March. It happens the way it was forecast by an old Egyptian female oracle. It oscillates between the literary past and the present, moving from epilogue to the crucial moment. The action opens on an island in the Pacific, initially thought to be a virgin one, by the stranded survivors of the great escape from their own burning third-world nation, in their lux-

ury plane. It deliberately places the action after the epilogue, as the former marks a decisive break in the lives of the survivors and a new lease of life and a new beginning of a new career for Constantine Caesar who declares himself as the Monarch of all he surveys on that fateful morning. The descent into absolute madness starts for the great Caesar from that moment onwards. Then, in the middle of the narrative, a disconnect is achieved, by making Caesar recall his Presidency years—and the background leading to that, the most riveting part of the narrative. So, it experiments with the linearity of the novelistic time, where crucial ruptures coalesce into a single unit of remembered past. The Oracle in the narrative again challenges the traditional linearity of time by consciously disrupting the consistency of time and space continuum.

It is not historical in the received sense of the literary term and its critical usage. Yet, it deals with some time-specific political realities and recent systems that are definitely 20th century and very relevant. For me, every novel is historical in the sense that it reflects the major preoccupations and the moral concerns of the age in which it originates. The best utopias mirror their age most faithfully. This novel is an account of the ideologies of the last century, especially, capitalism, Marxism, socialism and fascism on one single vast literary canvas that needs to be appreciated by the critics and readers alike.

The aim of creative process in serious Off-Broadway literature is same: to put the age in right perspective by challenging the dominant master narratives or the prevailing political ideologies as the popular viewpoints of the ruling elites and creatively, convincingly produce the alternative viewpoints of the same set of harsh realities, and, to make sense of the life forces, behind the operation of these ideologies that allow a couple of men to rule over the masses for long.

The novel is a historic continuum, as it creatively examines the concept and discourse of power as it has been constructed over the rolling ages and centuries and its tame justification in ruling ideologies of organic art, literature and philosophy. It debunks the myths and shows that the real driver of the historical evolution is the common man, not some charismatic hero or leader.

The Minotaur is a fascinating novel about our strong belief systems and a perceptive comment on the 'bloody' denouement these

searches finally tend to take under the relentless logic of history. It shows that the lust for unbridled power in the name of a free republic or socialist haven can be counterproductive to the dictator and lead to violent uprisings by the brutalized masses. The people power is final arbiter in history that can smash any oppressive political system, a fact sadly overlooked by the great leaders of the world so far. The novel recalls the power of the mighty dictators and highlights the impermanence of adult world-view. Among the book's many tropes and themes are those of loss, subjectivity, and the problem of perception. We thus move from the speed of the tri-syllabic 'Minotaur' to the forced lugubriousness of "To one dead deathless hour."

The Minotaur, showcase of elegant craft, is a signal debut work by a promising Indian voice for which the entire reading world is a big inviting canvas. It pushes the limiting boundaries of acceptance. The form is dynamic, the tone pluralistic and the story engaging. It makes references to many iconic texts of the last century in a thought-provoking exchange of ideas or as a creative engagement with them for eliciting further insights into the nature of human realities. Intersexuality does not impede here but facilitates the flow of the events and controlling the prevailing ideas behind them. It is a lyrical meditation on literature, culture, politics and philosophy of ideas that has animated human discussions and mental horizons so far. It is a searing critique of all those powerful power discourses of the past that talk of justice and equality of human beings but later come to deny the revolutionary effects of those very master narratives to the people down below. It celebrates the people power by saying that humble human agency can bring down the most formidable and fearsome totalitarian systems by conscious resistance and revolt. The robustly optimistic and historically-grounded novel of Sunil Sharma revives the European genre of the philosophical/ political novel and through this happy revival of an old literary form favourite of Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Sartre, Camus or Mann, comments artistically on the main civilizational preoccupations of the last century as a whole. The fresh-look novel is a good read for those who want intellectual nourishment from a work of serious art in an age where anything serious is suspect in popular imagination. This narrative wonder is pure dynamite in the reading world!

Seva Bharati Mahavidyalaya **JAYDEEP SARANGI**

after hours falls asleep
exhausted
on an empty stomach;
motherhood is a bliss—
is a kitty-talk tomorrow
with a framed Madonna
smiling in the backdrop.

In the nearby narrow lane
a school boy is whacking
his brains out
to write an essay on
charity begins at home.

And in the town hall
a raging debate goes on
on our glowing culture
and the glorious history;
present is lost in the past.

PASHUPATI JHA (Roorkee)

My Dove

The dove of my longing
sanctified in the sanctum of serenity
wings towards
the sky of solitude—
the planet of safety.
She flutters
because of the winds
and cold.
Underneath her flight
there are only humans
no nations.

She radiates
hues of non-depictable truth
that consecrates
the emptiness of her surroundings.

The leaf that she carries
is from the evergreen tree
of never-ending hope.
The psalm of her silence
greets the emergence
for a cheerful tomorrow.

Flight of My Dove

I am
often greeted by the bursting flutters
of my dove
while rambling the rayless resort
of the fears
from the scamps of my surrounding.

I hear
some unknown voice calling her
to be above the confusing cries
of mindless feverishness
and the hounds of alienation
from the houses of infamy.

I see her
fleeing from the blinding fog
of human conceits
blank eyes
facing blank walls of the present
half-blossomed flowers
of the youth of aspirations
meaningless pledges of our leaders
and above all
those concerns which lie
in the locker
of the anchored ship of memories.

A soothing glow

from a fireplace of compassion
that would radiate
the redness of young lips
burning the decaying stems
of the buds of the past,
should entice my dove
before the last star of the evening
bids her farewell
for ever.

STEPHEN GILL (Canada)

EWE

(My child)
On an enlightened night.
Somebody seemed to speak to me.
Through the shadows of the
Hallowed sparkling bright light.
The shining stars in silent,
Confluence with the merging moon,
Holding embracing the light of life,
Stands motionless for a while,
Night drew her close to me,
She came to me,
Hurling the heaven behind,
For the infinite air is unkind.
Full of life and azure mirth,
My innocent ewe smothered.
In the best and befitted hour,
My heart she kissed, with a longing desire,
She came to my lap full of pleasure,
Her mewlings and mutterings,
Did regenerate my years forever.

PUNITA JHA

The Expired

One-Act Play

R.P. SINGH

Characters

Hastings: A young man, who has been murdered on December 6, 1857.
Alice: A young girl, who has been murdered on December 6, 1857.
Jay: A drunken man.
Mallika: (alias Reebu) A drunken woman.

Scene 1

(*Place: A solitary road connecting Lucknow Cantonment and Lucknow Sadar. A moon-lit December night, the blows of icy wind look like spraying the silvery dust. A bigger grave in the roadside Cemetery. An owl hoots at regular interval. Suddenly there emerges a crater in the grave. A couple is seen there. Their appearance suggests their European lineage. The sound of music band echoes from a distance. It becomes louder. Whistling and crackers' sound emerge out of the cacophony. Hindi filmy clichés also post their presence. With a commendable agility, the couple throngs out of the grave. A preserved peace may be noticed over the countenance of the couple. The man (Hastings) is 20 and the lady (Alice) makes it barely 16-17. Both are tied up together with a rope of chequered loincloth which encircles their waist line. The man lovingly caresses the lower lip of the lady with his right index finger.)*

Alice: Come out first.
Hastings: (*comes out of the trap with an exemplary agility)* OK, Alice, just one minute (oooh yea!) Take it.
Alice: Hastings!
Hastings: Add something more, Darling.
Alice: What to add? What remains? (*in falling tone)*

Hastings: No. No. no. no . . . no. (*blows a flying kiss).*
When voice falters.
Sinews sink,
Youth gets tender,
Lieutenant cold.
Then . . . then . . . then . . . then. . . . nothing.

Alice: No kidding Hastings. no.

(*Hastings wants to kiss Alice. Suddenly both of them become invisible. A mild sound of violin is heard. A duet is heard playing in the voice of Hastings and Alice).*

With a ray of hope we live,
We—small lamps.
Fiery, fiery— howling Earth
Sinking blood
Sinking blood (*falling tone)*
Sinking blood (*falling tone)*
But we march ahead
We march ahead
Oh our light's string
Oh, lo!
Oh, lo!
Lo!
Lo!
Attend to us
For—Sunny tomorrow,
For—Funny enviro.
Sunny tomorrow,
Funny enviro,
We live,
We kiss,
We live—we live.
Oh my love.
Oh my love!
Just see your dove
See
See
A rose-petal dew

Waiting eternally.
For sucking the dawn gently.

(*Suddenly Hastings is heard sobbing)*

The voice of Alice: Oh Hastings! Be optimist.
The voice of Hastings: I am, I'm fine.

Scene 2

(The music band and the accompanying marriage party approach near. It carries approximately 150 men, women and children. The groom is riding a white horse. The horse is attracted to a slim-mare grazing in the field. The horse stands still for a while and the next moment jumps over. It is an unexpected event for the groom. He fell down from the saddle. Now the horse is seen chasing the mare. Following the mare, it enters the grove along river Gomti. Suddenly dense fog envelopes the environment. The Baratis find something unfavourable and make haste towards the city carrying the groom. A Barati couple—Jay and Mallika initerated in wine can't make the pace with the Barat and fall down along the road. Mallika is in a bit improved sense in comparison to Jay.)

Mallika: (*Shuddering Jay)* Jay! Jay! We are fallen in a roadside pit. Get up soon. Oh God, save us from infamy.

Jay: Mallika, we are swimming. See Baby, swimming. How cute a nymph you are. You are taking a back stroke. Yes . . . Mallika, we are reaching the gate of *El Dorado*. See Reebu, See, That's glistening like *El Dorado*.

Mallika: Yes, Jay. Glistening. It is glistering. But . . . don't you see a little tilt. OK we finally reached.

Jay: But . . . your promise Reebu? Promise. Do it before reaching.

Mallika: Jay. Did I refuse? You are the only soul to me. Everything that is mine, I offer you Jay.

Jay: Almighty! What a benevolent chap you are! Your countless mercy! God my brother. Oh great! Oh great! . . . This wine, this Mallika and that my wedded witch. A paradox *yaar*. A stone in comparison a pulpy to raspberry.

Mallika: The first time you have uttered sense Jay, the first time. You've stolen my words. My dear Jay, my Jay *Bhayya*.

Jay: *Bhayya* explicit and . . . .? . . . implicit. Fill up the blanks.

Mallika: Ha—Ha—Ha.

(*Jay sings, Mallika follows.)*

The centre of gravity—this wine.
Lustre of universe—this wine.
Equilibrium of natural forces—this wine.
80% of human corpus—this wine.
This is the source of—
All joys given on Earth.
All knowledge bestowed upon us.
You—this wine.
Me—this wine.
God—this wine.
All are drunkard.
Nature
Knowledge
System
Relation—
Drinking Factor.

(*Jay approaches the vicinity of Mallika. His eyes burn the desire of lust. Make physical advances but due to over-intoxication fails. Suddenly he swoons. Mallika is shocked. She gets up, shudders the limbs of Jay.)*

Mallika: (*Kicking Jay)* Bloody Scrape crow. Cold-loin-pimp. (*Mutters and walks with faltering steps. The owl starts hooting.)* Oh, save me! Save me! (*Suddenly she screams and swoons).*

Scene 3

(*Hastings and Alice are seen sitting on the platform of the grave. The milky moon is fading.)*

An anonymous voice: The silent invitation, oh! in air—
How calm nature! With limbs fair.
Seducing moon just sucking up the tar.
Why should then we keep a far?

Oh
Why?
Why?
Why?
Lo—Stir in blood!
The naughty air
The haughty breath.
But the aging night unfulfilled.
The unsuccessful lot,
Unsuccessful!
Why?
Hesitation,
Why?
Feeble, fickle—souls.
Just fate
Just fate
Just fate
Thousands moonlit nights rolled
for quenching their desire's call
Poor cupid doing Sisyphus' job
Desire—an unfulfilled lot
Desire—an unfulfilled lot
Desire—an unfulfilled lot.

Hastings: Opportune moment Alice. May like to grant me favour for your proximity.

Alice: Hastings, Damn you take permission. I am yours. Only yours-the eternal extension of your soul.

Hastings: I see.

(*Hastings wants to embrace the lad. The next moment, both of them get invisible.)*

The voice of Hastings: The blow of fate! Irony. The cruelty of the fierce nature. What else can I call it, Alice? Say something, I'm sinking, Miss Ireland.

The voice of Alice: What to add Hastings? More than one thousand eight hundred twenty five rounds. More than it multitude in amorous spring, innumerable times, it happened—I strove to lose myself in you, Hastings! Nothing, Hastings,

Nothing. Only a haunting remembrance abounds. What else? Only remembrance. Our Cambridge days! What to add (*sobs).*

(*An old brown donkey brays at a stretch, only sobbing is heard for ninety seconds. It follows Beethoven's symphony. Suddenly an owl howls.)*

The voice of Hastings: Alice, keep patience. OK, let's see. Remember. Do you remember Hyde Park London? You remember? Don't you? Come on . . . Recall November 1856 . . . we were in London.

The voice of Alice: (*in choked throat)* Yea.

The voice of Hastings: Then what happened? Tell me? Tell me?

The voice of Alice: W . . . a . . . t? Hyde Park, the statue of a gallant riding a sturdy steed.

The voice of Hastings: Oh, y—e—a. My baby remembers! Physical Energy—Hyde Park, London. Yes, do you remember the lines of Patrick Galvin from 'Christ in London'?

The voice of Alice: Hush! Ye know everything. Me not? Mr. Omniscient? That's what, you want a tag. Hasty Pasty. Listening to me, I'll read *verbatim.*

The voice of Hastings: My sweetheart!

The voice of Alice: *"Tonight with London's ghost*
I walk the streets.
As easy as November fog
Among the reeds."

The voice of Hastings: Against my throbbing heart.

(*Again Alice and Hastings are visible on the stage.)*

Hastings: Ok, one more, just tell me. Do you remember 'To His Coy Mistress'?

Alice: Oh, so sweet (hurls a flying kiss). It was the *mantra* of life. Dear buddy. The best poem ever composed. The master minded Andrew—Andrew Marvel. Alas! Had we lived it, lived this poem. Whenever you read it, I simply took it as a flirting tool. Dear Haste, would you please recite it once more with that sweet old charm.

Hastings: (*in serious tone)* Oh so. Just wait. But what's the use now? Its utility is expired.

Alice: So what? We shall roll up in past. We shall live our past.

Hastings: Ok.

Listen.

Had we but World enough, and Time,
This coyness Lady were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long Loves Day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges side
Should's Rubies find: I by the Tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood:
And you should if you please refuse
Till the Conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable Love should grow
Vaster than Empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine Eyes, and on thy Forehead Gaze.
Two hundred to adore each Breast:
But thirty thousand to the rest.
An age at least to every part,
And the last Age should show you Heart.
For Lady you deserve this state;
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I alwaies hear
Times winged Chariot hurrying near:
And yonder all before us lye
Deserts of vast Eternity
Thy Beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble Vault, shall sound
My ecchoing Song: then Worms shall try
That long preserv'd Virginity:
And your quaint Honour turn to dust;
And into ashes all my Lust.
The Grave's fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hew
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,

And while thy willing Soul transpires
At every pore with instant Fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,
Rather at once our Time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chapt pow'r.
Let us roll all our Strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one Ball:
And tear our Pleasures with rough strife,
Thorough the Iron gates of Life.
Thus, though we cannot make our Sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

How's it Baby. . . . you relish? Oh come on, what's up?

(*Alice is not seen on the stage.)*

Hastings: Oh Alice! Alice! Alice! (Screaming)

(The curtain falls slowly.)

The Invisible Anonymous voice: Long 152 years ago. The poor love birds died. June 1856. Alice hailed from Ireland and from Belgium was he. Both met at Cambridge. Love vegetated. The next spring—they sailed to India at the invitation of Justin, Alice's friend, a Magistrate in British government. Justin hatched a conspiracy. Extinguished the life flame of the love birds in the shivering sixth night of December. The official newsman told, "The flames of Mutiny are not extinguished still."

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