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Editors
Albeena Shakil • Amitendu Bhattacharya • Dhurjjati Sarma

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Editorial

The articles included in this issue of the *IACLALS Journal* emerged from the 2020 IACLALS Annual Conference on 'Reimagi(ni)ng Identities in the Global South: Challenges, Transgressions and Articulations', organised in association with the Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, from 5–7 February 2020. As the dates would testify, this was the last offline conference before the merciless onslaught of the pandemic which has since irrevocably altered the basic dynamics of our lives and, at the same time, initiated newer dimensions of thought and engagement with issues of global and local importance. The pandemic also unleashed a kind of 'levelling effect' as it subjected the Global North and South alike to the challenges of curbing the menace of the virus as well as finding a 'sustainable' solution for its eradication. So, these articles, revised and expanded in the midst of a global lockdown, deal with the repositioning of 'identities' within the Global South, with particular emphases on issues of gender, memory, disability, violence, resistance, spatiality, and so on. They provide crucial insights into the normative behavioural and societal codes delimiting the scopes of engagement with these issues, and, at the same time, put forward newer patterns of transgression and subversion vis-à-vis the accepted borders and binaries.

In the present volume of the journal, both Ayesha Irfan and Mukul Chaturvedi engage with memory as a viable mechanism to deal with oppressive regimes, while Someswar Sati brings to light similar dynamics of cultural imperialism vis-à-vis mitigating disability by means of transnational charity campaigns. Swati Moitra and Shinjini Basu delve into the precolonial South Asian past to reflect upon the formation of peripatetic identities, thereby critiquing the 'posited' binaries between the 'global and 'local'. The three articles by Sarbajaya Bhattacharya, Hiya Chatterjee, and Srinjoyee Dutta explore various facets of the 'female' identity, explored respectively through performance, female bonding, and critiquing 'sexual difference' imposed upon identities. Both Anil Pradhan and Shehnaz Kabir focus on 'queer diaspora', while Indrajit Mukherjee extends the discussion on diaspora to question imagined notions of 'homeland' vis-à-vis first- and second-generation migrants within South Asia. Huzaifa Omair Siddiqi talks about a new philosophical movement called 'subcontinental philosophy' which provides a redress to, and, in the process, suggests an alternative to the postcolonial critique of

caste. Fuzail Asar Siddiqi focuses on highlighting the 'fragmented' and 'untranslatable' aspects of human identity which refuse to be subsumed within the overarching discourses of globality. Deepanshu Mahajan, in his article, discusses Hindi Theatre to reveal how the genre and its practitioners responded to the cultural, and also 'hegemonic', buzzwords like tradition, folk, and modern across the 20th century. L. Gitarani Devi, on her part, carries out a highly poignant critique of violence and its impact on childhood and its representation as 'resistance' through literature. Ved Prakash extends the discussion of marginality and violence through his discussion of the significant role played by Dalit Camera in enabling articulations from the margins. Manmeet Sodhi critically studies the potential of 'subjectivity' in resisting 'subjugation' of the body. Sohini Saha examines the changing dynamics of the relationship between health and masculinity with reference to the *bayam* (exercise) culture in Bengal.Upamanyu Sengupta engages with the Foucauldian notion of 'heterotopia' to critique the imagined binary between the 'forested land' and 'inhabited land', and calls for the reimagination of the forest as a heterotopic space. Dealing with selected fictional works based on the Sundarbans, Ankana Das deals with the human–nonhuman dialectic centring on the 'agency' of the Tiger. Jaya Yadav, in her article, problematises the twin ideas of 'homeland' and 'migration' within the Global South as replete with complex concerns of gender, class, race, and ethnicity.

As editors, we would like to thank all the contributors for the timely submission of their revised articles. We are also grateful to the peer-reviewers who have immensely enriched the value of the submissions through their insightful comments and suggestions. On this note, we tender our sincerest apology to all the contributors for the delay in bringing out this issue of the journal, and we are therefore thankful to all of them for persisting in their belief in our commitment towards enabling this issue to see the light of day. We convey our respect and gratitude to all the office-bearers of the IACLALS for reposing their faith on us. We tried our best to ensure editorial consistency and correctness in our efforts to fine-tune the articles in accordance with the prescribed stylesheet of the *IACLALS Journal*. We seek your indulgence for any inadvertent errors that might have escaped our attention. We hope that this issue maintains the high academic standards already set by the previous issues of the *IACLALS Journal*, and we look forward to the constructive comments and suggestions of the honoured readers. Happy Reading!

Albeena Shakil
Amitendu Bhattacharya
Dhurjjati Sarma

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Rememorising Toni Morrison: Myths, Music, Oral Tradition, and Memory in Morrison's Works

Ayesha Irfan

Abstract: Toni Morrison is the first Black American writer to have won the Nobel Prize in Literature 1993. Beginning her career with her debut novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison explicates the problem of overcoming the inherent ethnocentrism or the cultural chauvinism within the Western or Euro-American literary tradition. The African–American writers' challenge was to overcome the quintessence of Blackness in American literature that stood for absence, negation, even evil, that had to be reversed, if the Black self is to be understood as presence, affirmation and valuable. *The Bluest Eye* can be seen as a direct confrontation between the Big and Strong father of the White text, and the broken spirited Cholly, the father in the Black text; this makes clear to the readers, the inadequacies of the White cultural values, embodied in the children's reader, in representing the Black self. Through her works, Morrison also attempts to fill in the cultural void that she perceives exists in the wake of historical transition. She has achieved the artistic endeavour of making her fiction both print and oral literature, to make her stories appear oral, meandering, spoken, fluent, and musical. Her novels *Jazz* (1992), *Beloved* (1987), and *The Bluest Eye* draw upon the oldest literary tradition of oral storytelling and assimilates Black aesthetic forms like Blues and Jazz. She foregrounds Black mythology in her fiction, like the belief in ghosts in *Beloved*, the myth of the flying African in *Song of Solomon* (1977) where Morrison merges the Greek, Biblical and African–American oral traditions, or the Brier rabbit and Brier fox tales from Africa,[1] in the *Tar Baby* (1981). In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison demonstrates how folktales, folk-wisdom and the general beliefs are adapted to the present-day situations. Morrison, in *Beloved*, explores the mother-child bonding during slavery. She demonstrates how slavery damaged this relationship and denied a woman her basic rights.

Keywords: Rememorise, Oral tradition, Jazz, Myths, Trauma

Toni Morrison is one of the greatest American writers; with her career spanning more than six decades. Her gift to us is an exceptional body of work calling out to the world against oppression and inhumanity. Her literary oeuvre includes

eleven novels, several children's books, plays, and even an opera. With great commitment to her people, and her aesthetic responsibility to her art, Morrison engages with the major issues faced by the Blacks in the American society, that is, of race, gender, apartheid, and class discrimination. She is the first Black American writer to win the Nobel prize in 1993. Beginning her career with her debut novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison explicates the problem of overcoming the inherent ethnocentrism or the cultural chauvinism within the Western or Euro-American literary tradition. This is the enduring and dominant literary tradition against which any writer, critic or novelist of African–American tradition struggles to maintain their own literary value and readership. It is a tradition that dates back to Plato's *metaphor of the soul*. It is a tradition in which Blacks are a sign of absence since the time of Plato.

African–American literature has received a significant revitalisation in the past few decades, with Black writers making a mark in the field of literature, or in music, and winning noteworthy awards and accolades. Beginning with the New Negro or Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, when there was a significant spurt in Black writing, and publishers were interested in publishing African–American writers. The Black writers came out with a very splendid body of literature, and also compiled several significant anthologies of African–American literature. *Reading Black: Reading Feminist* by Henry Louis Gates, *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, edited by Toni Cade, and Angela Davis's *Women Race and Class* are just a few significant anthologies in the field of Black Feminist literature. The African–American writers' challenge was to overcome the quintessence of Blackness in American literature that stood for absence, negation, even evil, that had to be reversed, if the Black self is to be understood as presence, affirmation and valuable.

For centuries, Blacks in America have effectively undermined the White logos by signifying or improvising upon the meaning of the conventional White understanding of the word. Forced to live in a state of incarceration, with political restrictions preventing the Blacks from educating themselves, or having familial or community integration, their situation did not permit them to express themselves explicitly, and, therefore, the earliest Black writings, we see, were compelled to adopt a dualistic approach. The Blacks started manipulating White man's language in a way that would allow Black meaning to be secretly imbued in the language of the master. This veiled strategy of using language is also evident in the literature that they created. In *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B. DuBois examines, how the slaves were able to turn the words of the oppressor's own songs, against them, in obscure, half-articulated language. Regarding the use of exclusively Black theories for interpreting Black literature, Gates (1997: 2, quoted in Jablon, 1997) comments:

> I once thought our most important gesture is to master a canon of criticism, to imitate and apply it, but now I believe that we must turn to black tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to our literatures.

In one of her essays, speaking of transforming the Western literary canon, and redefining its political intention, Morrison writes:

> Canon building is Empire building, Canon defense is national defense. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature and rage of criticism, of history, of history of knowledge, of definition of language, the universality of aesthetic principals, the sociology of arts, the humanistic imagination, is the clash of cultures. And all the interests are vested.(2000: 132)

The Bluest Eye signalled a shift in the structure and emphasis of contemporary literature. Women began to occupy more central roles as subjects, the diversity of the Black community came to be more diligently explored. The relationships between Blacks, rather than between Blacks and Whites, became more significant topics of deliberation for African–American writers.

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* has problems of self-definition as its theme. In this novel, Black girlhood assumes tragic disposition when it borrows identity models from the precepts of White culture and from the spiteful parental mirror. Morrison believes that Black girls growing up in the White society often experience the malady of internalising the assumption that an aesthetically pleasing image is what constitutes the necessary precondition for receiving warmth and security. If the cultural or patriarchal voice in the mirror emanates unkind messages about the women's self-evaluation, it has still unkinder things to convey to Black women, living in a society where White cultural values overshadow everything else.

> The concept of beauty as virtue is one of the dumbest, most pernicious and destructive ideas of the Western world (Morrison 1978a: 94).

Quoting from *The Bluest Eye*,

> Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green- and -white house. They are very Happy…see mother. Mother is very nice, mother will you play Jane? Mother laughs, Laugh Mother, laugh. See father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile father, Smile. (1993a: 1)

It is never explicitly stated in the book that the anonymous author of these children's books, and the card-board characters that the book exhibits are white. It is nevertheless clear, since the ethos that they embody is white. 'They are very happy' is a clear idea of the Western culture, which is to say White culture.

The Bluest Eye can also be seen as a direct confrontation between the Big and Strong father, of the White text, and the broken spirited Cholly, the father in the Black text; this makes clear to the readers, the inadequacies of White cultural values, embodied in the children's reader, in representing the Black self.

Through her works, Morrison also attempts to fill in the cultural void that she perceives as existing in the wake of historical transition. Morrison perceives that there is a void in the lives of those Black Americans who seem to have lost touch with the oral tradition of storytelling that once nourished a sense of their kinship and identity and helped enrich their lives. As a Black woman, she also brings a feminist consciousness into her work that enriches it further. She has achieved the artistic endeavour of making her fiction expressive through both print and oral literature, to make her stories appear oral, meandering, spoken, fluent, and musical. To accomplish this, Morrison turns to folktales, gossip, music, myth, and other manifestations of oral tradition, so that the stories can be read in silence; but at the same time, one can hear them as well. Reflecting upon the process of reclaiming the richness of Black speech in her writing, she reflects: 'I have to rewrite, discard and remove the print quality of language and put back the oral quality, where intonation, volume and gesture are all one' (1984: 328).

Morrison says that peasants do not write novels because they do not need them. They have a portrait of themselves from gossip, tales, music, and some celebrations. She demonstrates the African–American novels' endeavour to replace the celebrated forms of Black cultural wisdom and aesthetic forms; its diction integrates significant aspects of Black oral tradition that transmits African–American cultural values. Morrison (1984: 340) argues that 'the novel is needed by African–Americans in a way that it was never needed before…we don't live in place where we can hear those stories anymore, parents don't sit around and tell their children those classical, mythological, and archetypal stories'.

Her novels remind the readers of their significant role in filling up the vacuum in Black American history by perpetuating the story of Black Americans. For Morrison, the community collectively takes on the responsibility of passing from one generation to another those mythologies, stories, and assumptions that one ethnic group that is culturally coherent and has not joined the larger mainstream keeps intact for their survival. Her novels use all the forms of Black expressivity, including myths, folktales, and music. To read Morrison, one requires alternative approaches to history, religion, ancestry, culture-specific concepts of time, and philosophical ideas of time that are often opposed to the traditional Western perceptions.

Her novels *Jazz* (published in 1992), *Beloved* (published in 1987), and *The Bluest Eye* draw upon the oldest literary tradition of oral storytelling and assimilate Black aesthetic forms like Blues and Jazz. She foregrounds Black mythology in her fiction, like the belief in ghosts in *Beloved*, the myth of the flying African in *Song of Solomon* (published in 1977) where Morrison merges the Greek, Biblical and African–American oral traditions, or the Brier rabbit and Brier fox tales from Africa,[1] in the *Tar Baby* (published in 1981). She uses these folktales from African–American culture to enrich her fiction and

to reclaim Black aesthetic forms. She successfully transforms the elements of orality and storytelling within myth and folklore into a literary narrative and connects the mythic and folkloric prototypes to contemporary situations. Morrison reclaims African–American history and culture from the oral tradition, for history of slavery is basically oral.

Morrison clearly makes a distinction between rememory and memory. Memory is a steady recollection of moments and knowledge one readily recalls. Rememory, on the other hand, addresses the recollection of painful memories that a person does not wish to confront or has deliberately forgotten, or in Freudian terms, 'repressed'.[2] On multiple occasions in the novel *Beloved*, Seth's mind recalls these repressed moments like her mother's mutilated body, or the death of Beloved. Rememorising, in Morrison's terms, is also the revival of Black aesthetics that is suppressed due to White narcissism. Within the Black musical traditions like Blues and Jazz, myth and folklore play a significant role in healing the wounds, and restoring the communication that has been lost between them. Repossessing Jazz, and the black traditional and cultural forms, Morrison believes, can accommodate a collective African–American identity, for it is vital for the survival of the African–American identity, because music and myth function as a communal storehouse.

Morrison's third novel *Song of Solomon* is the one which brought her national recognition. *Song of Solomon* received the National Book Critics award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters award. It was the first book by a Black author since Richard Wright's *Native Son* (published in 1940) to be on the book of the month club main selection (Books in this selection were selected and endorsed by a panel of judges; in 1936 the same panel selected Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, at this time Mitchell was an unknown writer). *Song of Solomon* explores the reclamation of past as a slow process of dismantling imposed cultural constructions and reconstructions from the remains. Significantly, the vehicle Morrison uses for this purpose is language itself—names, words, disjointed phrases, a song, which decoded from semantically distortive contents and interpreted anew within the context of its genealogy, correspond fully to a signifying historical narrative. As Morrison (1993b: 109) noted, 'Language is holy, to denigrate a culture you first denigrate its language…you screen it, filter it, until it accommodates itself to the presiding language.'

In her concern with the oral tradition and with using the narrative fiction for cultural transformation, Morrison creates American counterparts to the African griots, the village storytellers, who, according to Alex Haley, embodies how human ancestry goes back to the time where there was no writing. As he noted, 'the memories and mouths of the ancient elders was the only way how histories of mankind got passed along' (Haley 1977: vii). For Morrison, these ancestors are not just parents, they are timeless people whose relationship with characters is benevolent, instructive and protective. They provide a

certain kind of cultural wisdom. *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* have, at their centre, a story that changes with every telling, and is narrated in the same prototype as the call and response patterns which are developed in the play and work songs, and are related to the group and communal nature of art.

For Morrison, the Black fiction should be both print and oral literature. To combine both these aspects, the stories could be read in silence, but one should be able to hear them as well. Toni Morrison noted in an interview with LeClair (1981: 124) noted, 'It should try deliberately to make you stand up and feel something profoundly in the same way that a black preacher requires his congregation to speak, to join him in the sermon, to behave in a certain way. To stand up, cry and accede to the change and modify upon the sermon being delivered.' Baby Suggs in *Beloved* is a similar unchurched preacher, whose message is love. She asks her Black neighborhood to gather together and tells them to embrace their battered and broken selves, and to try and love themselves, in spite of all the humiliation and indignity that they have suffered.

Referring to the myth of the flying African in *Song of Solomon*, Morrison (quoted from Le Clair 1981: 122) writes:

> It means Icarus to some readers, fine, I want to take credit for that. But my meaning is specific, it is about black people who fly, that was a part of folklore of my life, flying was one of our gifts. I don't care how silly it may seem. It is everywhere, people used to talk about it, it's in spirituals and gospels. Perhaps it was wishful thinking, escape, death and all that.

Pilate in *Song of Solomon* is the cultural emissary, a character who familiarises Milkman with his African heritage, and the names of his forefathers, the clue to this is embedded in the Sugarman songs that she sings. Milkman learns that the allegorical riddle which has led him from Sugarman, to Charlemagne, to Shalimar, and finally to Solomon, holds a secret to his true lineage, and rekindles in Milkman a long-subsumed desire for flight.

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison demonstrates how folktales, folk-wisdom and the general beliefs are adapted to the present-day situations. Solomon, the central character, leaves his loved one, including Jake, whom he tries unsuccessfully to carry with him. The failure of Solomon's efforts to take Jake along with him serves to emphasise the individualistic nature of the mythic figure's flight. And while the narrative suggests that the children of the legendary Solomon do not consider themselves as unfavourably affected by this. They, in fact, sing songs in his praise, celebrating his accomplishments, but his mate Ryna, who bears his children, is so aggrieved at her loss, that she goes mad.

Pilate keeps her name that is inscribed upon a small piece of paper suspended from her ear in a metal box. It is quite significant that her name was written by her father, who is uneducated. At the same time, it suggests

that the original text and the song, to which Milkman's explicatory quest for his heritage aspires to, are in fact pre-lexical or oral, and therefore beyond the margins of the literate world or the White field of power. Pilate is also Milkman's tutor, the fragments of the Blues song that Pilate sings at birth, death or while doing her work is the essential text that enables Milkman to realise his goal and reclaim his roots. Before he can learn to unravel this truly Black text or his oral history, he must discard the linguistic bondage into which he was born. Pilate's role in the novel is that of a guide, a Pilot, as her name suggests, and a griot. She is the guardian of the cultural and familial lore, or her family history that is being passed on to the generations, encrypted in the Blues song that she sings.

Milkman in Shalimar enters the terrains where his parents spent their youth, and he comes out revitalised as a new spirit. In coming to grips with his self, Milkman learns that he cannot evade his racial and cultural identity. He can now interpret and understand the lore that he discovered tersely encrypted in Shalimar folksong about the flying African. He is in fact the spiritual and biological heir of Solomon, who revolted against slavery, with his attempt at flying back to Africa. This history is recorded in Pilate's Blue's songs about the Sugarman that he heard for the first time when he visited her as a boy. He now hears the same, in the Shalimar's children's game: 'Jake the only son of Solomon…/ Solomon done fly/ Solomon done gone/ Solomon cut across the sky/ Solomon gone home' (Morrison 1978b: 311).

The strongest influence on the development of Black women narratives derives from the storytelling tradition. One of the essential aspects of Morrison's work is the use of rememory. Her novel *Beloved* is a beautiful narrative about the survival of the heritage of slavery, on the power of rememory, and collective memories kept alive through the oral tradition. Through this novel, Morrison demonstrates a cerebral interest in the celebration of Black women's strength. Their values and beliefs stem from a desire to correct the wrongs that have been inflicted upon the Black women, as in the cases of Baby Suggs and Sethe, who weave their dreams into myths that allow them to recover their past.

In *Beloved*, trauma expresses itself in the dysfunction of memory. The inability to remember and narrate, or place it in times, is itself a symptom of the inseparability of occurrence. This explains Seth's desire to run away from her past. But she comes to terms with herself, and her traumatic past, when she narrates to Beloved these stories in the form of rememories about her relationship with her African mother, or her days at the Sweet-home.

Morrison, in *Beloved*, also explores the mother-child bonding during slavery. She demonstrates how slavery damaged this relationship and denied a woman her basic rights. *Beloved* is based on a true incident that Morrison encountered when she was editing the 'Black Book,' a scrap book of Black history. In a sensational case, Margaret Garner, a runaway slave killed her

daughter, rather than allow her to be returned to slavery. Garner was tried not for attempting to kill her child, but for the real crime, 'of stealing the property' (herself and her children) from her master.

To write the African–American history was a difficult task for the literary historians, with no written records but only folklore and oral history to rely upon. They had to reconstruct their history from the memories of their ancestors. To quote Gates (1987: 100)

> Slavery's time was delineated by memory and memory alone. One's sense of one's existence therefore depended upon memory. It was memory above all that gave shape to being. What a brilliant substructure of the system of slavery. For the dependence upon memory made the slave first and foremost, a slave of himself or herself, a prisoner of his or her power to recall. Within such a time machine, as it were, not only they had no fixed reference points, but also his or her own past could exist only as a memory without support.

In *Beloved*, the black characters that we encounter are completely illiterate. They are not allowed to read and write; moreover, they feel that nothing important to them could be put down on paper, a few can only write their names. Sethe can recognise only seventy-five written words; these were the details of the crime committed by her in the newspaper.

Talking of Morrison's narrative technique would be incomplete without a reference to music. Not sure that language can convey the truth, the narrator hopes that another medium like music will be more successful. As Henry Louis Gates points out:

> Few musical traditions have had more modern master's then the African–American tradition from Blues to rhythm and Blues, from Soul to Rap, from ragtime to Jazz. While many black writers have used musician's and music as theme and metaphor for their writing, none have attempted to draw upon Jazz as the structuring principal for an entire work of art until Morrison's novel 'Jazz' set in Harlem of 1926, so near to the Black literary movement known as the new negro or Harlem renaissance. (Gates & Appiah 1993: 53)

Through the meticulous use of Jazz idiom, Morrison in her novel *Jazz* relates the story of Joe Trace, a fifty-year-old sample-case beauty-products salesman, and his wife Violet, a hairdresser. *Jazz* is made up of rhythmic paragraphs, subsection, sections which together compose a musical score. As Gates points out:

> What precisely Morrison does is to oralize print. She also uses language instrument to try out some daring modes and techniques of play to create the informal pattering of Jazz. Elements of blues, march, rag, spirituals and hymns all get fused into the matrix of jazz. (Gates & Appiah 1993: 55)

The orchestral part of Jazz music mostly comprises saxophone, piano, clarinet, guitar, drums, and so on. Jazz music is a combination of melody, rhythm,

and harmony, with a basic theme composition which provides for large-scale improvisation.

In her novel, Morrison has deftly fused musical elements as per the requirements of her narrative so that the readers, while reading it, experience something similar to a Jazz performance. Initially, in the novel *Jazz*, we have an omniscient narrator who introduces the basic theme or composition—the love affair of Joe and Dorcas, which comes to a shocking end, when Joe shoots Dorcas dead at a dance party, because she left him for Acton. The narrator informs us that, at the time when Joe meets Dorcas, he has been living in a bleak house, where his wife sleeps with a doll under her pillow. She talks only to her parrot that chirps, *I love you*. In various stages of improvisation, the voice, while recounting the complex stories of Joe, Violet, Golden Gray, True Bell, Dorcas, and Felice, allows each character to come forward, and make their own creative bid at improvising upon its respective story. This is made possible through the devices of monologues, interior monologues, flashbacks, reveries, and introspection.

Morrison also highlights the Blues tradition through the simple use of call and response device. For e.g., there is this little girl who, while taking out her baby brother in her wicker-carriage, suddenly remembers to pick up a record to be played for a friend, and she runs inside the apartment, meanwhile asking Violet to mind the baby. The childless Violet, who momentarily suffers from yearning for the baby, picks it up and walks away. A crowd gathers around the empty carriage, and the anxious crowd reacts:

> She who?Somebody asked…who took him?...
>
> Who misraised you?
> Call the cops. (Morrison 1992: 20–21)

These terse question and answer phrases sound like the voices in a chorus based on call-and-response patterns.

> The novel *Beloved* too borrows from the Blues tradition:
>
> I am Beloved and she is mine…she smiles at me and it is my own face smiling…your face is mine…she smiles at me…she is the laugh; I am the laughter. Beloved you are my sister… You are my daughter… You are my face… You are mine… You are mine… You are mine… You are mine. (Morrison 1987: 214–217)

It is Morrison's intentional use of repetition, as a literary device, that foregrounds the musicality of her novels, and their structure resembles the Jazz and Blues solos composed by African–American musicians, and that she cherishes so much. Central to both Morrison and African–American Jazz musician's strategy is to structure their work by using the technique of improvisation and repetition. Snead (1981) observes that,'without the organizing principal of repetition, true improvisation would be impossible, as

an improviser relies upon the ongoing recurrence of the beat'. The African–American musicians create forms which repeat themselves to accomplish new improvisations. One of the most important structures is known as the riff,[3] the repeated melodic phrase around which solos are constructed.

Morrison, in her novels, often uses the style of the riff to generate the musicality in her novels or to reconstruct the jazzy prose style of her novels; the three Jazz concepts that Morrison uses—riffs, extension phrases, to emphasise the riff, and antiphony(the response part of call and response)—these point to the melodious and jazzy prose style of fiction. Morrison embeds the musical riffs with dialogues, and these dialogues candidly become the basis of a character's solo expression.

Morrison's novels work like the ghost of *Beloved*; they evoke the painful memories of the past, torments one's conscience with this guilt and eventually helps in purging the painful burden of this past.In spite of the fact that Morrison is truly grounded in the Black cultural tradition and social concerns of the Black Americans, her work transcends the narrowly prescribed conceptions of ethnic literature, while exhibiting universal mythic patterns and overtones. In her death, we cherish her works and hope that she will continue to be our muse and guide us whenever there is oppression and tyranny around us.

Notes

1. The Brer Rabbit is a trickster figure originating in African folklore and transmitted by the African slaves to the New World, where it acquired attributes of similar native American tricksters. Brer or Brother, Rabbit was popularised in the United States in the stories of Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908). Morrison's *Tar Baby* borrows from the myth of Brier Rabbit and Brier Fox.
2. Rememories is associated with Repression.Repression is the unconscious blocking of unpleasant emotions, impulses, memories, and thoughts from your conscious mind. Introduced by Sigmund Freud, the purpose of this defense mechanism is to try to minimise the feelings of guilt and anxiety.
3. Riff: The riff is the central component of Jazz improvisation. It is a figure musically speaking, a foundation you could walk on. A short phase repeated over the length of chorus, more or less like an ostinato, in classical European musical notation.

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Trauma, Memory, and Mourning: Maternal Activism in the Global South

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Abstract: Despite their rootedness in different contexts, the resistance, politicisation, and mobilisation of women against state repression and violence have given birth to powerful human rights movements in countries of Global South which appropriate the ideology of motherhood and transform maternal citizenship into an instrument of empowerment against state violence. This article focusses on two movements: Association of the Parents of the Disappeared Persons (Kashmir) and Madres de Plaza de Mayo movement (Argentina) and traces how women contest enforced disappearances, a deliberate strategy of the state, to induce terror in prolonged situations of conflict. Drawing on the testimonies of the mothers, the article examines the practices of everyday gendered resistance and how women employ maternal frames skillfully to both mobilising women and drawing media attention (Goss & Heaney 2010). United by the trauma and collective grief, the public rituals of mourning and memorialisation by the mothers is an unsettling presence in the political and social imaginary of the state as they persist in their quest for justice. While the article examines how Global South despite being a contested category, points to resistant imaginaries and possibilities of lateral solidarities, it also reflects on the limitations and tensions embedded in essentialising maternal activism.

Keywords: Maternalism, Mourning, Performative, Solidarity, Trauma

Introduction

Critical scholarship on Global South focuses on how a Global South subjectivity is formed and enables an understanding of struggles and experiences of subaltern groups in a framework that moves beyond boundaries of nation state. While it clubs together very diverse political, economic, and social experiences and nation states under an overarching comparative category, according to Mahler's analysis, a deterritorial employment of the term Global South draws attention to global struggles and solidarities that take shape from collective and common experiences of oppression under an ever-expanding phenomenon of global and liberal capitalism (Mahler 2017). For Mahler, the

term Global South signifies the 'resistant imaginary of transnational political subject, when the world's Souths mutually recognise one another and view their conditions as shared' (Mahler 2017). As a critical concept, it helps in understanding solidarity politics and creation of networks among grass roots movements as there is a mutual identification among oppressed groups. Enforced disappearances across countries of Global South has seen massive maternal mobilisation against state repression and violence and mothers continue their quest for justice for their disappeared children. As a deliberate strategy of terror, enforced disappearances, have been used in many Latin American countries like Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and closer home like Sri Lanka, Philippines, and India in prolonged periods of conflict. In her acceptance speech at the Rafto Memorial prize 2017, Parveena Ahanger, founder member of APDP, Kashmir, claims solidarity with the mothers of the disappeared around the world. Building lateral solidarities gives strength and visibility to the movements.

> I know that this is also a struggle for many mothers like myself around the world. Some of these mothers include the Madres de Plaza de Mayo from Argentina, mothers in the Philippines, mothers in Sri-Lanka. I accept this award in the name of all these mothers as I accept it for the families and mothers of Kashmir. And I say to you all — that all these mothers are iron ladies — we have been fighting for our children — and we will fight from beyond the grave. (Kashmir Lit 2017)

The problem of enforced disappearance is systemic in many of the countries of the Global South asit involves the deliberate act of 'disappearing' an individual. The person is abducted through state-sponsored agents or groups of individuals who act in connivance with state authorities where the victim inexplicably 'disappears'. The Report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues describes enforced disappearance as a deliberate form of terror.

> As a strategy, it draws particular strength from the mystery surrounding the identity of those responsible and from the anguish over the fate of the disappeared person which it perpetuates. The apparent irrationality involved in causing someone to disappear without allowing the family even to find out why, eliminates in practice the normal frame of reference inherent in the rule of law. (1986: 39)

The problem of disappearance is not only that it slowly paralyzes the society because of the uncertain future of the disappeared, it also renders the family members helpless because they do not know where the person had disappeared. The clandestine nature of abductions, which occur mostly at night, minimise the possibility of witnesses. That the disappeared person has no recognised legal and physical status makes it difficult for the families to seek any legal counsel and seek protection of law. The state does not hold itself accountable towards the dead nor does it accept any responsibility for finding the person who has disappeared. The recourse to any legal action,

like the petition of habeas corpus, which is responsible for safeguarding individual liberty, does not work in the case of such enforced disappearances, as these victims of enforced disappearances do not fall into the category of either political prisoners or dead persons.

Disappearance as a unique and effective strategy of terror was used extensively throughout Latin America during the dictatorial regimes in the 1970s and the 1980s. In the countries of the Southern Cone, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay, tens of thousands of persons were illegally detained, tortured in secret detention centres and many disappeared without a trace. It is estimated that nearly ninety thousand persons disappeared during these repressive regimes (Fisher 1989). Under the Doctrine of National Security,the military dictatorship systematically eliminated 'enemies of the fatherland' which included popular leaders, university students, teachers, civilians whom so ever they suspected to be a subversive (Fisher 1989). In the Central American countries, especially Guatemala and El Salvador and the Andean regions of Peru and Colombia the pattern of disappearance was radically different. Disappearances and human rights violations in the Central American countries occurred in the backdrop of internal armed conflict and counter insurgency and impacted the underprivileged, poor and indigenous populations. As a result of this, the rural areas were hugely depopulated, and the peasant population was forced to flee to the neighbouring Honduras and Mexico. When we come to the problem of disappearance in India, especially in the context of Kashmir, the phenomenon is part of an ongoing political conflict since the rise of militancy in the valley, and a large number of innocent men and young boys, mostly civilians, have become victims of enforced disappearances (Husain 2019). Also, most of these victims are from socially and economically underprivileged sections of society whose families continue to live in fear of prevailing political and military violence (Husain 2019). Although India is a signatory to the International Convention for Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances since 2007, the convention has not been ratified yet and hardly a few such cases of enforced disappearances in Kashmir have been examined so far. While the problem of disappearance has significantly subsided over the years, and the numbers have come down, the fight for justice continues by the families who have lost members and are still hopeful of finding them. Also, given that the disappeared person has no defined legal status and is not documented, the challenges of pursuing legal struggle remains very tough. While the state completely extricates itself from the fate of the disappeared person, family members run helplessly to find them by filing complaints.

APDP (Association of the Parents of the Disappeared)

The activist mothers from Kashmir who form Association of the Parents of the Disappeared Persons (APDP) keep the public attention focussed on the 8000 to 10,000 Kashmiri men disappeared by the security forces since 1989,

in what is one of the longest running conflicts in South Asia. Parveena Ahanger's life changed forever when her son, Javed Ahmed Ahangar, was abducted on August 18, 1990, from his uncle's home in Batalamoo area in Srinagar. Sixteen-year-old Javed had gone to study at his uncle's place and never got back home. While searching for her son, Parveena met many such mothers whose children had gone missing and were in a similar situation as hers. The collective search and struggle of the mothers led to the formation of APDP with Ahangar becoming its founder member and playing a key role all along. Over the years, APDP has grown into movement of the families of those whose children were subjected to enforced disappearance. Parveena Ahangar's human rights activism evolved in her long struggle with other women and during the course of their struggle APDP has documented thousands of disappearances since 1989. Women like Parveena who were content to be mothers and housewives took to streets to protest against the political repression and disappearances. On the 10th of every month, APDP mothers have their monthly sit-in protests at Pratap Park in Srinagar. For the last three decades, the mothers have been following a rigorous ritual. They arrive in small groups with the pictures of their disappeared children and all the documents related to their search. After their usual chatting, the ritual performance of their mourning begins which includes loud lamentations, songs, eulogies and weeping. The songs are replete with maternal images like 'I will rock you my darling, where did you hide my crescent moon' (Zia 2019: 66). These protests are joined by other family members which include children of the disappeared, wives of the disappeared, also known as half widows. Oftentimes, there is presence of media at the site of protest and the mothers do not mind repeating the tale of their suffering as it gives visibility to their movement. Through their struggle, the APDP mothers have been able to collectivise the sufferings of the people whose children have disappeared and challenged attempts of the state to privatise and individualise sufferings of the people. As Ahanger says, 'To highlight the disappearances issue, a campaign at local, national, international level is needed. Though the state didn't stop the disappearance, it helped to reduce the crime at large' (Kashmir Life 2009).

Keeping alive the memory of disappeared is an important objective of APDP struggle as 'there was a threat that the issue of the enforced disappearance will fade out from the collective memory as older parents of the victims were dying' (Rather 2018). In order to evade forgetfulness and continue their struggle for justice, APDP has been publishing an annual calendar since 2016, which they have chosen to call a 'memory document' (Sofi 2019). With the objective of preserving the memories of the of the disappeared, the calendar includes a beautiful collection of sketches drawn from the photographs from the disappeared persons also giving details surrounding the nature and location of their disappearances. The calendar also cherishes

their life by including poetry on the themes of loss and memory by young Kashmiri poets. A tribute and a testimony, the calendar is a reminder that the disappeared persons survive and live on in the collective memory of the Kashmiri people. Also, the calendar 'frames suffering in the way that enforced disappearance is not the exception but systemic. It connects the issue of enforced disappearance with the larger political reality of Kashmir' (Rather 2019). Since the state denies any involvement with fate and future of the disappeared and choses to sidestep the problem, the APDP has taken up the responsibility of relentlessly pursuing the matter with international bodies, rights organisations and raised the issue of justice and repartitions. The APDP has also taken the responsibility of pursuing the cases ofnearly 7000 unmarked and mass graves with the State Human Rights Commission and also called for forensic examination including DNA testing (APDP 2018).

Madres de Plaza de Mayo Movement (Argentina)

Though there are several women's movements that emerged in Latin America in response to the repressive regimes,the ones that predicated themselves exclusively on the ideology of motherhood, is the Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo movement in Argentina that evolved following the long period of repression and gross violations of human rights during the Dirty War. Like APDP, the constant struggle of the Madres movement is to keep alive the memories of the disappeared because as one of the mothers, says 'to forget the past, to have no memory is a danger for the country, because what happened will happen again' (Fisher 68). There are political, pedagogical and ethical reasons to keep alive the memories of the disappeared. Remembrance matters for the future. 'Mothers have this memory, this pain and we are working for the future so that the new generation won't live thorough what we have lived through, so people won't disappear, aren't tortured and kidnapped' (*ibid*.: 152). The Madres also have a ritual performance of their meeting on Thursday every week, wearing housecoats, slippers, white headscarves, and carry the pictures of their disappeared children, to the Plaza de Mayo, a central place in Buenos Aires. The white headscarves that the Madres initially wore were nappies on which they embroidered the names of their disappeared children. Not only did the scarves went on to become a symbol of the mothers' identity as a political group, it also symbolised maternal care and commitment towards their children. The mothers refused to go into mourning by wearing a black mantilla and remained hopeful of the return of disappeared children.

Dismissed as *las locas* (mad women) by the military, the Madres built a community of grieving mothers, who despite being traumatised by the loss of their children, gain strength from their collective identity. While Madres have kept alive the memories, the civilian governments engage in acts of passive forgetting by attempts at memorialisation that seek to contain the

painful memories of the past. The military tried to institute *Ley de Olvido* (Law of Forgetting) which meant that if any person goes missing for a particular time period, then they could be considered legally dead by the state. The Madres disrupt the attempts at this ideological closure by the successive civilian governments and their testimonieschallenge and represent an 'unburial, an unearthing of the truth that translates into an invasion of the space occupied by official history' (Sternbach 1991: 94). As the Madres continued with their efforts, another group called, the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo evolved which wanted to track down the children of women who were abducted by the dictatorship while pregnant. The Grandmothers have met with considerable success in their efforts (Arditti 1999). Such has been the strength of the Madres movement that they continue to march on the 24th of March, a day designated to the memory of the disappeared, called, Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice (el Dia de la Memoria) demanding truth and justice for the disappeared persons.

Diana Taylor points out, with reference to Dirty War, that the 'disappeared' by their very ontological nature, embody a crisis of representation. They are present in public sphere as 'pure representation' and it is a 'struggle to represent the absent bodies'. Taylor articulates the dilemma of representation as she poses the question: 'How do we hold on to the significance of the "real" body even when it slips into the symbolic realms through representational practices?' (Taylor 147: 1997). In the absence of 'real' bodies, the *desparecidos* become a site for struggle. While for the security forces they are the subversives, for the mothers they are 'disappeared'. The struggle of the Mothers as pointed out in their testimonies is to contend with this problem of representation for in their fight for justice they are not satisfied with the physical 'traces' of the disappeared; dead bodies or the bones of their children. For them, the memories and the ideals of the disappeared have greater significance than the physical traces. The issue of exhumations becomes very crucial for that is the only way to have some traces of the disappeared. However, there were disagreements within the Madres movement over issue of exhumations and the movement finally split in 1986 (Fisher 1989). Even in APDP movement, the issue of exhumations is a vexed one because the government continues to deny the existence of mass graves and claims that what exists are the unmarked graves. According to APDP, the problem of exhumation is difficult to deal with, because in many situations where exhumations have been carried out, it was discovered that the victims of enforced disappearances died in encounter killings at the hands of militaryand then categorised as a foreign militant who would be buried in unmarked graves (Vij 2011). The APDP activists feel that mass exhumations would lead to a closure of the problem of disappearance and no justice would be given to the families of disappeared.

Ideologies of Motherhood

The 'performative' nature of the mother's identity in both instances has attracted national and international attention and unsettled the confidence of state authorities. Paul Connerton has highlighted that the memory of groups is 'sustained and conveyed' by commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices. According to him, 'commemorative ceremonies are commemorative in so far as they are performative; performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit and habit cannot be thought of without a notion of bodily automatisms' (1989: 5).

The motif of performativity is important as a metaphor through which the women's activism unfolds and takes shape. In the context of gender, Judith Butler (2003: 98) has explained that it is a 'performative accomplishment, which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief'. The women use socially accepted subject position, motherhood, to customise an activist identity. The framing of maternal activism in both the cases draw on the patriarchal ideology of mothering and motherhood which is considered prescriptive for women across cultures (Rich 1976, O'Reilly 2014). Women appropriate the ideology of maternalism to legitimise their entry into public domain and represent a domesticated yet a defiant picture of motherhood, a motherhood that has been 'injured', by the disappearance and loss of the child.

The cultural discourses around motherhood and mothering in the both Indian and Argentinian context idealise motherhood as the most cherished of women's role. In Latin America, the Roman Catholic Church and various Virgin cults performed a major role in consolidating the dominant ideologies of motherhood. The entry of women into public domain though necessitated by political circumstances was to a large extent legitimated by religious comparison. This served as an effective opposition to the military which predicated itself on promoting Christian family values. Diana Taylor points out with regard to Madres movement in Argentina that women's identification with the Virgin gained significance during the Dirty War especially in relation to the 'disappearances'. The grieving mother, as symbolised by Mater Dolorosa, was adopted by the Madres as a performative identity by the mothers who in search of their children suffered as Virgin Mary who lost her son to save the human race. This shared experience gave them strength to continue their struggle.

In Parveena's Ahangar account and that of other mothers of APDP, what emerges clearly is that they also use her maternal identity to legitimise their activism. At the heart of performative politics, of APDP women, is the notion of *asal zanan*, as discussed by Ather Zia (2019: 68) in the context of Kashmiri Muslim women. *Asal* means good, *zanan* of course is woman. The ideal of a 'good woman', as passive, caring and loving will find resonance in many cultures, but in this context, it also means 'not being seen' — women who shun any kind of public appearance. However, women like Parveena find

themselves in an ethical conundrum when faced with challenges of a public protest, which rests on a politics of visibility. Distraught with grief, Parveena gives up her *burkha* as she runs to various places in search of her son. She sees herself not as a woman, but a mother who has a 'mission'. She says 'the govt has wounded my womb; they have scarred me. I do not care if my face or hair is showing' (*ibid*.: 74). She also invokes famous Kashmiri poet, Lal Ded, 'Tell me did the pious Lal Ded stay inside to search for her god. She roamed the streets naked. I am a *metch* (crazy) too, searching for my son' (*ibid*.: 77). By invoking Lal Ded, Parveena ensures maternal affect permeates her activist persona and somehow cancels her femininity. Constrained by their cultural and social circumstances, women like Parveena Ahangar, who were confined to domesticity, make an entry into the public domain as grieving mothers. These women who were compelled to observe purdah, as a mark of feminine honour and virtue can now abandon it and 'attain a public identity while retaining the status of *asal zanan*' (*ibid*.: 68).

Maternal Activism

As we have seen, maternal activism in the APDP struggle and the Madres movement foreground three keys areas—how mothers create a collective identity based on motherhood and transform into human rights activists, build coalition networks with human rights organisations in other countries, and the emergence of a 'politics of visibility' grounded in the public spectacle of mourning (Zia 2019). As is evident in both cases, the central aim of maternal activism is to raise awareness and keep alive the issue of enforced disappearances which the governments want to erase from public memory. Both the Madres and the APDP mothers take part inaction programmes like organising mass protests in public places, reaching out to media so that their protests find visibility, conduct performances to educate people about the problem of disappearances and through all these efforts they continue to demand justice. Also, the women's appropriation of the persona of motherhood, as a performative identity, foregrounds that maternal activism is not rooted in biological experience of mothering, instead it is based on a public and collective performance of motherhood to draw attention to the problem of disappearance and demand justice for the families who have lost their children. The 'socialisation of motherhood' and expanding its role outside the realm of domestic sphere is perhaps is one of the most significant aspects of these motherist movements. Maternal activism thus transforms women's private experiences of grief and trauma into political expressions of strength and agency. As Andrea O'Reilly (2010: 24) has noted, 'maternal activism, in rendering the personal political, blurring the boundaries between the private and the public, and in inverting traditional gender roles, both disrupts and dislodges the gender essentialism… that grounds and structures modern patriarchy'. Based on an ethics of care and foregrounding a relational self,

maternalism may offers a radical potential for a more inclusive, less violent world by focussing on social injustice, exclusion (Ruddick 1989).

While maternal mobilisation has been empowering and mothers have kept alive the issue of disappeared, imposing a homogeneity around the identity of gender is inadequate as meanings attributed to maternalism and mothering vary in different contexts. Also, maternalism as an ideology has been critiqued by feminist scholars arguing that it essentialises womanhood and is detrimental to the women's activism in the long run. The concept of motherhood has been conceptualised widely and variously by women's experience of mothering in Black communities, Indigenous nations, and non-Black communities of colour (Collins 2007; Harvard & Anderson 2014; Malacrida 2009). The marginalisation of queer, indigenous, as well as mothers with disabilities who face sterilisation abuse, and forced abortion are rooted in the negative stereotypes of mothering and do not conform to dominant patriarchal assumptions of motherhood. In the Indian context, questions caste, class, ethnicity and religion add a diversity of meanings and practices that underlie women's experiences of mothering and their marginalisation in a patriarchal society ridden with upper caste and class privileges.

Conclusion

Aware of the tensions embedded in the essentialist notion of motherhood, gendered resistance in particular and employing maternal frames in particular has spawned in the recent times and has become a force to contend with (Reilly 2010, 2014; Gumbs et. al 2016). More recently, in the Indian context, mothers have been at the forefront of civil society protests—Thangjam Manorama's mothers in North East who protested against the extrajudicial killing of Manorama, Najeeb Ahmed's mother who relentlessly searched for her 'disappeared' son, Rohith Vemula's mother whose son was victim of caste prejudice and committed suicide, Payal Tadvi's mother who also blamed caste-based discrimination for her daughters suicide, Nirbhaya's mother who lost her daughter to gruesome rape, and finally grandmothers and mothers of Shaheen Bagh who became the face of anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests—all mothers from marginalised communities contesting state power and authority. In such a context, when maternal affects permeate women's activism, does maternalism, despite its limitations, offer a paradigm for civic activism and mobilisation, towards a politics of peace and inclusion? Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'strategic essentialism' provides a way to address the impasse between maternalism as both empowering and limiting while analysing women's agency. Strategic essentialism, according to Spivak, allows the possibility to engage with an essentialist notion of identity category, albeit provisionally, as a strategy to organise collectively for political purposes (Grosz 1984). While Spivak cautions against the application of the concept, it can be useful as a strategy for the sake of achieving political goals. The mobilisation

of women as mothers by the Madres movement in Argentina and the APDP mothers in Kashmir to contest the issue of enforced disappearance has kept alive the memories of the disappeared in the social and political imaginary of the state and resists any closure by authorities. It is precisely for these strategic reasons, that despite culturally laden and contradictory associations of maternalism as an ideology, its political charge becomes empowering for women.

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Representing Transnational Charity and Disability in the Global South: The Case of *Smile Pinki*

Someshwar Sati

Abstract: Transnational charity campaigns pertaining to disability tend to partake in an insidious process of cultural imperialism. This becomes evident when the ideological underpinnings of documentaries on the above are uncovered and examined. This article takes Meghan Mylan's 2008 Oscar-winning short film, *Smile Pinki*, as a paradigmatic example of such a documentary and argues that the film through the depiction of successful treatment of Cleft lip in the developing world thanks to metropolitan charitable intervention, in fact, legitimises such interventions and repackages long-standing colonial hierarchies of power between the West and the Global South in neo-colonial forms.

Keywords: Global South, Transnational Charity, Disability, Imperialism, Ableism

Introduction

7 July 2013,a 12-year-old girl from a remote small village in India, clad in white, confidently steps out onto the centre court of Wimbledon to flip the coin, for the men's singles finals between Andy Murray and Novak Djokovic. She performs the toss, happily waves towards the crowd, and shakes hands with the officials and the two finalists, before posing for photographs. This young Indian girl with a beautiful smile is Pinki Sonkar, the beneficiary of a life-changing Cleft lip surgery performed in 2007, at the G.S. Memorial Plastic Surgery Hospital in Benaras, with the financial assistance and medical support from a New York-based charity foundation called 'The Smile Train'. Thanks to the transnational assistance offered by the American foundation, Pinki's labial deformity has been rectified through a simple surgical procedure, and her life has been transformed for the better. From being a depressed and lonely outcast with a highly stigmatised physical deformity living on the periphery of rural India, post-surgery she becomes a confident and vivacious

globetrotting young girl, with a beautiful smile, normalised and reintegrated into the social mainstream. Her inspiring journey through life has in fact been captured in the Oscar-winning short documentary *Smile Pinki* (2008).

Produced and directed by the American filmmaker Meghan Mylan, this 39-minute-long celluloid narrative is a feel-good story of overcoming disability in the global South. The successful surgical treatment of Cleft lip in India is, however, problematically depicted in the film, as being exclusively dependant on the benevolent and humanitarian gestures of the global North. Pinki's operation may have been carried out at a hospital in Benaras, but the surgery was made possible only with financial and medical support from 'The Smile Train'. Those living in the developing world, however, need to be weary of such apparently benign altruistic motivations and their supposedly politically neutral representations. *Smile Pinki* in fact re-inscribes long-standing paternalist relations between a needy and disabled South and its abled and generous Northern counterpart, helping in this way to maintain and even perpetuate an asymmetric relation of power between the two. The ensuing article, therefore, seeks to unearth and interrogate the various discursive strategies that allow the documentary to promote, rationalise and legitimise transnational disability interventions in the global South, expose the colonial resonance of these strategies and explore the neo-colonial impact that they have on the constitution of contemporary forms of identities and the relational structures of power. The article also uncovers the existing ideological intersections between the discourse of imperialism and ableism to hint at the potential role disability studies could play in deepening our understanding of postcolonial realities and the possible contributions that postcolonial studies could, in turn, make to enhance our consciousness of the experience of disablement. What follows is a sustained and substantive critical engagement with the poetics and politics of Mylan's narrative of disability and transnational charity.

The Promotional Feel

At the outset of the film, the audience is introduced to sweet-faced, 6-year-old Pinki and the shy 11-year-old Ghutaru, two children with Cleft lip and the various forms of ostracisation and social exclusion they are subjected to in their village. The narrative then tracks the fortunes of their lives, as they move from the village to the hospital in a town in the hope of having their deformity surgically repaired. The story concludes on a triumphant note with the film documenting and even celebrating the life-changing impact that this simple operation has had on the lives of the two children and their respective families. Both Pinki and Ghutaru prior to the operation were hesitant to attend school for the fear of being socially excluded, mocked and jeered at by their peers. However, after the surgery, the two are now going to school in their respective uniforms, actively participating in class discussions and happily playing with their classmates.

This triumphant and inspiring narrative of overcoming disability is however marked by a heavy promotional feel. Notably, the opening shot of the documentary carries the following caption:

> The Smile Train created this film to raise awareness about the plight of millions of children who are suffering with clefts. Every year we provide free Cleft surgery for hundreds of thousands of these children.

More than creating awareness about children with Cleft lip in India, *Smile Pinki* documents the efforts of the transnational charity. Although never explicitly stated, the implied hope of the film appears to be that it will become a sustainable medium of fund collection for the charity. Even Pinki's father, Rajender Sonkar, expressed the hope that the film would inspire people to help children whose family cannot afford a Cleft lip surgery. Predictably, nearly 40 minutes later, the film draws to a close with an appeal for charity,

> To help a desperate child who's waiting for a cleft surgery please visit www.thesmiletrain.org. There are millions of children who need our help and we need yours.

The above caption presents us with the promotional synopsis of the documentary, leaving little doubt about the intended intension of the film. It is a matter of no coincidence that *Smile Pinki* was sponsored by 'The Smile Train'.

'The Smile Train', largest Cleft lip and palette non-profit organisation in the world, offers free corrective surgery for children affected by the deformity. In 2013, this organisation was chosen as the charity partner to perform the toss at the men's single Wimbledon finals, and Pinki was chosen to represent the New York-based charity on this occasion. During her stay in London, she also took part in many other events associated with the tournament.

'The Smile Train' thus not only helped Pinki to transform her facial appearance, but it also enabled her to enlarge her public persona. After the Oscars, 'The Smile Train' even sent Pinki on a tour to the USA to share her story and evoke charitable sentiments in potential donors. Pinki in fact, has been empowered to transform the lives of hundreds of thousands of children with Cleft lip across the globe as the star fund-collector for the American charity.

The once-disabled but now normalised Indian subject appears to have entered into a voluntary partnership with the American organisation, helping it to collect donations to support its medical ventures in India. The unquestioned voluntary nature of this partnership tends to disguise the different ways through which imperialism is reproduced in and through these projects. The following section reveals the various discursive strategies that allow imperialism to take cover in and even take over the narrative of Pinki's story.

Debasing the South

Smile Pinki promotes and rationalises northern charitable interventions in the global South through a wide circulation of deeply moving images of disability from the remote rural regions of India. Throughout the narrative, the screen remains perpetually crowded with highly discomforting shots of the thoroughly deformed faces of children with Cleft lip.

Labial disfigurement, in this sense, is introduced as a birth defect common in the global South. The irony of the whole situation is that, Cleft lip and palette are physical deformities that can easily be remedied through a simple surgical procedure. Unfortunately, Pinki and Ghutaru, like 4 million other children with Cleft lip living in the Third World, have to live with their bodily disfigurement and its disabling social and psychological consequences, simply because their parents are not even aware of the possibility of a corrective surgery. To make matters worse, the operation lies well beyond their meagre earnings. It is in this context that the opening shots of a social worker Pankaj—travelling around rural India, handing out flyers advertising the extraordinary services provided by the G. S. Memorial Plastic Surgery Hospital for children born with Cleft lip and palette—acquires great relevance and significance. Pankaj informs the villagers that the hospital offers free surgery to such children and assures their parents the prospect of a better and normal life after the operation.

But prior to the operation, the life of these children is portrayed as being a living nightmare. The very sight of their severely disfigured faces in the mirror floods their eyes with tears. But what really makes them cry is the maltreatment and social exclusion meted out to them. Often described as monsters, these children are considered to be burdened by both their families and society at large. Predictably, it is difficult to get them married; parents are usually ashamed of such children and even hide them from society, wishing that they were dead. Many of these children are disposed off as parents even leave them to die. Mothers giving birth to children with Cleft lip are often cursed, castigated, and even abandoned. Images of these complex social realities that devalue the existence of children with Cleft lip are thus foregrounded throughout the film and turned into reductive master trope of the debased character of Indian society.

The various instances of maltreatment and social exclusion of these children and those associated with them discursively constitute India as a society that comes across as not being fully human. Simple minded as they may be, the rural folk perceive the Cleft lip to be a taboo and a punishment from God. The villagers repeatedly try to explain the birth defect as being caused by a bad omen or an inauspicious celestial occurrence. ‘There was an eclipse when the child was in the womb’, is a refrain that runs throughout the documentary. The voice of the doctor, however, provides a rational counterpoint to traditional beliefs. Cleft lip within the discourse of medicine is attributed to prenatal

malnutrition. The figure of the malnourished mother at once brings into play the images of children with Cleft lip and ignorant, poverty-stricken villagers that outline the predicament of life in India and figuratively capture the backwardness and helplessness of a developing society. The statistics of the total number of Cleft lip children in India and the Third World are periodically evoked throughout the film to constitute the global South as a public health nightmare. The repeated references to the unusually high number of children in India living with this facial deformity combine with the various instances of social exclusion experienced by them to send out one clear message — India is undoubtedly the home of disability, yet it is not a country meant for the disabled. The next section argues that a discourse of transnational charity relies heavily on a highly problematic rhetoric of ableism.

Inscribing Ableism

In a sense, *Smile Pinki*, from being a narrative of disability, also becomes a narrative about India and, by extension, the global South. This narrative progression is admirably captured by the sequence in which different posters of the documentary appear. The original one, which came out in 2008, the year the film was released, focuses exclusively on Pinki's face and her Cleft lip. The second one, which came out in 2009, immediately after Mylan received an Oscar for it, introduces a picture of Benaras onto the margins of the earlier poster. Another poster, also released after the award ceremony, allows the image of Benaras to share equal space with the picture of the facially disfigured girl. In *Smile Pinki*, disability thus, from being exclusively a materially embodied experience of deviant corporeality, becomes a metaphor for a place and a set of negative connotations associated with it. The disabled body here stands not only for India, but also for everything that the society represents—ignorance, poverty, inhumanity, malnutrition, and other forms of social and cultural debasement.

The documentary does indeed invite its audience to read disability metaphorically, as an analogue for a debased society. Dwelling on the metaphorical usage of this phenomena, Claire Barker (2011: 7) poignantly observes that 'the metaphoric usage of disability, signals a critical disengagement with the materiality of embodied difference', effectively erasing 'disability from view, precluding its analysis as a socially significant phenomenon or a politicised aspect of identity' (ibid. 3). Mylan to her great credit, in the documentary, analyses disability as a socially significant phenomenon and provides us a peep into the materially embodied experience of disablement. She, however, does not allow the phenomenon to become 'a politicised aspect of identity'.

Smile Pinki, in fact, also stabilises other deeply problematic notions of disability. First and foremost, Cleft lip is portrayed in the documentary as the sole defining feature of the children's life and identity. Notably, one of the disabled children in the film is called Ghutaru, which literally means, 'a bad

palette'. But, more problematically, the documentary is premised on the unquestioned assumptions that disability itself is an unmitigated tragedy, causing great pain and suffering to the children afflicted by it. The experience of disablement is further aggravated by the stigma attached to the phenomena, leading to the social exclusion and ostracism of disabled people. The implication is that, the tragedy needs to be urgently alleviated by any possible means. The legacy of tragedy on the film is, therefore, manifested through the telos of cure.

Significantly, the film objectifies the experience of disablement not only as a knowable but also as a solvable problem, amiable to corrective surgery. While the portrayal of the experience of disablement as necessarily tragic upholds the pressing urgency of finding a solution to the problem, the easy availability of a corrective surgical procedure opens up the possibility of mitigating this tragedy exclusively through medical means. This narrative gesture collapses disability and impairment into a single category, thus suggesting that the two are the one and the same phenomenon. What gets sidelined in the process are the non-medical dimensions of disability. In other words, the film overlooks the need to effect a transformation in society's outlook towards this phenomenon. The primary objective of the film is directed at motivating and encouraging transnational assistance in the treatment of corporal difference.

Smile Pinki underscores both the knowability and the malleability of disability in ways that affirm the desirability of northern medical interventions. The message is that Cleft lip in India can only be overcome through a contact with the West. Predictably, the poster of *Smile Pinki* reads, '[S]he suffered for 6 long years waiting for a simple surgery that would change her life'; the subtitle of the film is 'A Real-Life Fairy Tale'. The fairy with the magic wand referred to here is obviously the northern Cleft lip Charity, 'The Smile Train'. The G. S. Memorial Hospital in Benaras, where Pinki undergoes her cleft lip operation, is not only funded by an American Cleft lip charity called 'The Smile Train', but it is also an organisation that trains other doctors to carry out this and other like operations. The documentary portrays disability as necessarily tragic in order to promote transnational charitable projects and interventions as an unquestioned and desirable humanitarian gesture, thus leaving no time to question the politics of such gestures when disabled children are suffering. The discourse of imperialism thus ideologically intersects with a highly problematic rhetoric of ableism. For this reason, it becomes important to decode these representations and reveal the different ways through which the ideology of imperialism and ableism reinforce each other in the film.

Affirming the North

Transnational charities working in the field of disability tend to promote, rationalise, and legitimise their campaigns by repackaging imperial relations

in neo-colonial cultural forms. 'The Smile Train' Cleft lip and palette campaign is no exception. Even a casual look at its online advertisement will help to unpack the above argument.

The animated advertisement of 'The Smile Train' opens with the image of a brown-skinned girl with a Cleft lip, playing with a doll. While she is sitting and playing alone in the foreground of the advertisement, the background is occupied by two groups of children playing with each other. There are two non-disabled girls to the left of the protagonist who keep on pointing towards her and whisper something about her. But when the disfigured girl approaches them for companionship, she is rudely turned away, leaving her sad and crying. At this point, a train arrives, and a white man, hallowed and shrouded in light, reaches out to the girl in darkness to donate money for her operation. The advertisement ends with the said girl playing with other girls. Because such images of disability in the Third World both motivate and legitimise First World charitable interventions, it becomes important to understand the significance of these representations and question the way in which discourses of disability and transnational charity mutually reinforce imperial designs.

Northern philanthropic campaigns have always imagined the Third World bodies as disfigured children in need of rescue and rehabilitation. Accordingly, 'The Smile Train' promotional drive conceptualises India as a disabled girl, desperate for help and assistance. The ad explicitly states, '[T]his girl was born with a cleft lip and a palette in the developing world, she can't eat or speak properly and suffers from a life of isolation and shame'. 'The Smile Train' charity campaign thus casts off the disabled as unfortunate people subsisting in the dark world of pain and suffering. By presenting their life as necessarily tragic, the online advertisement transforms the children with a Cleft lip and palette into objects of pathos of the charitable gaze. The implication here is that, these children are in need and deserve sympathy and charity. It is the moral responsibility of decent people to help them. The campaign appeals to the moral conscience of the northern non-disabled middle class, by mobilising in them, charitable emotions. The shock value of the images of the girl with Cleft lip and the treatment meted out to her, by the other girls; unsettle the target audience into pushing their hands deeper into their pockets.

The spirit of transnational charitable projects, may be regarded as being beneficial to the Third World, but the philanthropic zeal tends to transform the charitable gaze into 'a base symptom of social inequality' (Hughes 2012: 71). In this context, the flowchart projected towards the end of the advertisement becomes quite revealing; the white man in the top donates 'a heart' to 'The Smile Train' which then goes to a local doctor, who finally passes it to a disfigured girl in the lowest sphere. Although the charitable campaigns ostensibly seek to medically repair the lips and palettes of the disabled children, the giving of charity is a hierarchising act in which superiority

is attributed to those who feel it and inferiority is associated with those who are its target.

Predictably, while the imagined Third World body in the film is disfigured and symbolically shrouded in darkness, the white man who makes an appearance in the latter part of the advertisement is hallowed and inhabiting the world of light. What we find here is a set of discursive strategies which date back to the days of colonialism and surface up in the contemporary promotional campaigns of transnational charity organisations. Its profound colonial resonance also tends to grant authenticity and legitimacy to their various interventions and helps to maintain First and Third World power inequalities. In discourses of charity, the Third World is understood as the culturally primitive recipient of charitable and medically advanced technological interventions by the First World in which the Third World is rescued through transnational (Western) charity.

The North in the film is ascribed the power to know, name, identify, rescue, and grant life itself to the developing societies. The once disabled and now normalised body of the global South is in fact the most striking symbol of the power that the able and generous North enjoys over its needy and disabled southern counterpart. In a sense, the ideological orientation of the documentary neatly dovetails with the political imperatives of northern developmental interventions in the global South. In fact, it is the media representations of these interventions that have accorded an iconic status to the figure of the disabled southern body in the northern imagination. For all these reasons, the shocking image of an Indian disabled child in distress has great symbolic value for the northern middle-class audience who is easily unsettled into compassion believing in the rationale and legitimacy of transnational interventions.

Conclusion

What we find in *Smile Pinki* is a narrative of disability. The discursive strategies that lie at the heart of Mylan's narrative of disability and transnational charity relies heavily on a rhetoric of the affirmation of the North and the debasement of the South that dates back to colonial times and surfaces up in the contemporary media representation of the processes of development and modernisation in the global South, thereby re-inscribing a paternalistic relationship between the developed and the developing world and helping to maintain an unequal power-relation between the two. *Smile Pinki*, in this sense, partakes in an ongoing insidious process of cultural imperialism.

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Syed Alaol's *Padmabati* and Migrant Identities in the Early Modern Bay of Bengal Region

Swati Moitra

Abstract: The early modern Bengali poet, Syed Alaol, writes of his encounter with the Harmad or Portuguese pirate ships that operated out of the Bay of Bengal coast thus, '*Kahite bahul katha dukhha aapnar/ Rosanga ashiya hoilo raj asowar*' (It pains me to speak of my circumstances/ And thus I was brought to Rosanga and became a royal horseman). Alaol's journey 'here'—that is to say, to the city of Mrauk U or Rosanga, the capital of the Arakan kingdom—as a slave, and his eventual rise as the renowned court poet who would adapt Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmavat* to Bengali, is the staple of literary histories. Indeed, reading the *Padmabati* (c. 1651) reveals a Bengali poet in Arakan, one who was well-versed in Bengali as well as Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, and Awadhi. Literary studies in India have long since grappled with the complexities of such 'linguistic environments' (in Sujit Mukherjee's words) in which multiple languages and their literary traditions impact each other, while contemporary scholarship such as Ramya Srinivasan's recent work on the Padmini legend explores the reimagination of the *Padmavat* narrative as it traverses the subcontinent in space and time. As we recast the past in the Global South in the light of connected histories and the rich body of Indian Ocean historiography, addressing—among other things—the question of slave trade and slaving practices in South Asia, new insights emerge into the early modern Indian subcontinent's ties with Central Asia, East Africa and the Arakan region. This essay, placing Alaol—minister's son, slave, court poet—at the centre, seeks to explore the implications of such connections for literary studies in our fragmented times.

Keywords: Literary Multilingualism, Syed Alaol, Arakan, Migrant Narratives, Padmavat

Introduction

The map of the southern part of Asia, as we see it now, is divided into multiple modern nation-states, from India to the small island nation of East

Timor. The waters of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean bring them together, despite the 'areas' of 'area studies' marking a 'sharp distinction between "South Asia," on the one hand, and "Southeast Asia," on the other: the line between them [running] right through the middle of the Bay [of Bengal]' (Amrith 2013: 1). The regime of international and maritime borders demands passports and visas, permits and fishing licenses. It defines the way trade is conducted and human mobility is made possible, albeit with disruptions from forces like that of pirates or migrant boats. Prior to the emergence of the modern nation-states of Southern and South-eastern Asia, networks of travel functioned in very different ways. They were determined by land and maritime trade routes, by the interests of regional leaderships and the merchant networks operating out of the region. Sunil Amrith, speaking of the Bay of Bengal region, observes,

> The Bay of Bengal was once a region at the heart of global history…. For centuries the Bay of Bengal was crossed by troops and traders, by slaves and workers. It was a maritime highway between India and China, navigable by mastery of its regularly reversing monsoon winds. As European states and armed chartered companies expanded into Asian waters from the end of the fifteenth century, the Bay became a crucial arena in their competition with each other — and with their Asian rivals. Portuguese advances were reversed in the seventeenth century by the growing power of the Dutch and the English. By the dawn of the eighteenth century, the English, Dutch, and French East India companies had footholds all around the Bay's arc of coasts. (2013: 1)

The borders were ever-shifting, as the regional powers in the Bay of Bengal region—the kingdoms of Ava and Arakan (in present-day Myanmar), the kingdoms of Tippera, Ahom, Manipur, and the Bengal Sultanate—jostled among themselves take control of the trade routes, while also dealing with the behemoth that was the Mughal Empire and its interests in the region. The port of Chittagong formed a frequent bone of contention. After a brief period of vassalage to the Ilyas Shahi Sultans of Bengal, the resurgent kingdom of Arakan claimed Chittagong in 1459. Arakan would continue to hold the port until the Mughals wrested it from them in 1666.

These regional tussles for control were accompanied by increasing European presence in these waters and these lands. The Portuguese were among the first Europeans to operate in the Bay of Bengal region. Their control over the region may not have lasted for long, but they left behind a steady stream of merchants, pirates, mercenaries, and other free (at times, rogue) agents that would go on to play a major role in the region. The Dutch East India Company followed the Portuguese, whose presence in the Arakan was primarily defined by their interest in the purchase of two products: rice, which Arakan produced in great volume, and slaves. These waters, thus, were as turbulent in terms of its political and social life as the Bay of Bengal is in its physical life.

Caught up in this turbulence was the protagonist of this essay, the early modern poet Syed Alaol. The son of a minister to Maljis Qutb, the ruler of Fatehabad in modern Bangladesh, Alaol was trained in the linguistic and literary traditions of Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and Bengali. On a boat journey across the countless estuaries that criss-cross the lower Bengal delta, Alaol and his father were intercepted by Luso-Arakanese pirates. His father was killed, and Alaol was enslaved and taken to the Arakan capital, Mrauk U (Mohyaung)—or, as he called it, the city of 'Rosang' or 'Rosanga'. At Rosanga, Alaol served as a horseman and a bodyguard, but eventually, his talent was recognised by Qazi Magan Thakur, the great patron of arts at the Arakan Court. Through a series of complex historical negotiations—starting with the twenty-four-year-long exile of King Narimeikhla in Bengal, and his return to the throne in 1430, with armed assistance from the Sultan of Bengal—Bengali had increasingly become a language of influence in Arakan. As Thibaut d'Hubert (2014: 56–57) has noted,

> Until the first decades of the seventeenth century, the Bengali language was restricted to the realm of administration and no literary text produced before this period is available today.... when the local power claimed its Arakanese Buddhist identity, Bengali Muslims felt the necessity to support the composition of literary texts.… the status of Bengali in Arakan, both as an administrative and a literary language, appears to be connected to communication and mediation.

Syed Alaol found himself with a commission to write Malik Muhammad Jayasi's Awadhi epic, the *Padmavat* (1540), in the *payar* cadence. Alaol's *Padmabati* (1651) would go on to become the best-known of his works. This essay seeks to consider the *Padmabati* of Alaol as a narrative of the turbulent waters and the perils of migration. In the process, the essay will ask pertinent questions about identity and belonging, about migration and heterogeneity that now cast a long shadow on these regions in the South and South-East Asia. The following section of the essay will lay out the literary–historical concerns that drive this enterprise, which will then be followed by a discussion of the migrant character of Alaol's Bengali epic.

Literary History and Migrant Languages

Literary historiography in India has long since grappled with the complexities of linguistic environments (Mukherjee 1975) in which multiple languages and their literary traditions impact and overlap with one another. It has sought to develop methodologies to engage with the same. Early literary historiography in India—modelled on histories of English literature—was 'fitted into' a sequence of ancient/medieval/modern periods, with Sanskrit as the parent language, 'even if the ancestry of each language did not lend itself comfortably to such treatment' (Mukherjee 1975: 180). This 'fitting in' faced intense questioning in the scholarship of a diverse body of scholars—whose works

now form the staple of undergraduate/postgraduate syllabi—questioning the theoretical unity (Ahmad 1992) of an 'Indian' literature and proposing models for the study of the same. These models—be it Sujit Mukherjee's (1975) extensive proposition to collaboratively map the *itihasa* of Indian literature, or Ganesh Devy's (1992) charge against literary critics for cutting themselves off from the past in an act of colonialism-induced amnesia—strained against the narrowing down of the complexity of India's literary cultures/histories and strived to capture the fluidity of India's literary cultures. From Mukherjee's 'globe of Indian Literature circumscribed by parallels of longitude in forms of [the] separate histories' (1975: 24) of various Indian languages, to Aijaz Ahmad's emphasis on the diverse 'forms of belief and utterance' that have 'travelled through and across linguistic ensembles' (1992: 256), metaphors of travel, cartography, and geography in general abound in the aforementioned theorisations of literary historiography in India. Literary scholarship in India, however, did not announce a 'spatial turn' (Soja 2008, Tally 2014, Barrows 2016) as such, despite the abiding influence of figures such as Michel Foucault and Raymond Williams in India's undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. It would not be an exaggeration to argue that Aijaz Ahmad's concern, writing in 1992, about the relative underdevelopment of literary historiography in India remains pertinent till date.

Over the years, literary scholarship in India has embraced the emergence of postcolonial studies and literary theory as fundamental aspects of the discipline, leading to remarkable developments in the studies of literatures of hitherto marginalised/oppressed groups, as well as studies of literatures other than British. Papers on Indian literature (in English/in translation) have now entrenched themselves in the curriculum across Indian universities. Many departments of English, in the meantime, have discarded the study of 'history of literature' altogether, while others such as the University of Calcutta retain old-fashioned papers designed to introduce Indian students to the history of British literature. In recent years, a rich body of work has emerged in newer arenas such as the study of the book and print culture, both in India and abroad. It is 'grounded … in the history of material productions, ideological struggles, competing conceptions of class and community and gender, elite offensives and popular resistances, overlaps of cultural vocabularies and performative genres, and histories of orality and print', as Ahmad (1992: 265) urgently sought to witness in his discussion of literary historiography in India. It is however undeniable that some pertinent questions about literary historiography, addressing complex linguistic environments wherein multiple languages and their literary traditions impact and overlap with one another—posed with some urgency by scholars such as Mukherjee, Devy, or Ahmad—increasingly fell by the wayside. Furthermore, departments of Comparative Literature in India remained insufficiently funded. Revisiting some of the aforementioned concerns, this essay argues, poses some interesting challenges

for our scholarship in the light of the emergence of the spatial and digital humanities. It confronts us with new questions keeping in mind the growing interest in literary multilingualism and announcements of the multilingual turn (Bonomo 2017), and the increasing popularity of world literature. The emergence of thriving arenas of study like the Indian Ocean region offers insights into the circulation of objects and people in transnational contexts. It is necessary to consider the potential for thinking in terms of trans-regional histories and what that might mean for the study of the heterogeneous literary environments of South and South-East Asia.

Syed Alaol's *Padmabati* serves as an important case study in this regard, given that the Arakan Court in the mid-17th century might be understood as an archetypal example of a linguistic environment in which multiple languages and their literary traditions impact and overlap with one another. It is one that is located well outside the borders of what is India today, or what would be deemed a part of any of the 'Indian' empires in the pre-colonial period. Myohaung or Rosanga, the capital, presents a diverse linguistic environment akin to the famed port cities of South Asia such as Surat and Calicut. One of the best-known passages of the *Padmabati* is Alaol's catalogue in the *Rosanga Barnana* or *The Description of Rosanga* section of the introductory *Stuti Khanda* or *The Book of Praise*, that of the diverse groups that populated mid-17th-century Rosanga: Arabs, Egyptians, Syrians, Abyssinians and Ottomans, Mughal and Pathan warriors, ethnic groups and tribes from various parts of present-day India, Englishmen, Portuguese, and the Dutch, and so on. The cosmopolis that is Alaol's Rosanga attracts and accommodates people from the farthest reaches of the Islamic world to the nearby kingdoms populated by indigenous communities. The placement of the *The Description of Rosanga* at the very onset of the poem firmly locates Alaol's poetics and his *Padmabati* as part and parcel of this diverse linguistic environment.

Alaol, furthermore, allows for a voice that remains almost absent in literary history, that of the captured and enslaved Bengali in the age of the Harmad-Magh raids in 17th-century Bengal. There remain gaps in Alaol's narrative about his eventual rise to the good graces of his patron, whom he thanks profusely and constantly in the *Padmabati*. It is possible to surmise that it is his privileged upbringing as a minister's son and the skills he learned in the process that protected him from being sold to the Dutch East India Company and shipped to Batavia. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has pointed out, the Arakan king had categorically forbidden the Dutch from buying any slave who 'knew a trade',

> …if the slave was an artisan, and knew a trade (*ambacht*), the Dutch could not purchase or export him or her. Narapatigyi, in his audience of 10 July 1642, reiterated this principle bluntly: "I do not want that craftsman should be sold to you, or taken out of the land." (1997: 225)

Enslaved Bengalis in the Arakan, regardless of whether they were shipped to Batavia and elsewhere by the Dutch or not, were not necessarily writers, or even literate. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to claim Alaol as a representative voice of the enslaved Bengalis in the age of the Harmad-Magh raids in Bengal. Historians working on the Dutch slave trade in the Indian Ocean world have had to employ creative measures to reconstruct the lives of the transported slaves (for example Datta 2013, Chakraborty 2019). It would, however, be similarly inappropriate to overlook the conditions of Alaol's journey to the diverse linguistic environment of the Arakan Court. Recent scholarship on Alaol, such as Thibaut d'Hubert's (2014, 2018) extensive work on Alaol's poetics, displays considerable sensitivity towards Alaol's response to his 'changed' environment following his abduction and enslavement. d'Hubert (2014: 59) argues,

> From a cultural environment of Afghan nobles settled in the interior of Bengal in a fragmented political context, Aläol landed in a cosmopolitan harbor, wide open to the commercial network of the Indian Ocean. Such a shift must be taken into account in order to understand the choices and expectations that shaped his literary works.

d'Hubert painstakingly locates Alaol in the multilingual literary milieu of the Arakan court, paying considerable attention to his location within multiple literary traditions. Alaol's command over Bengali, Hindavi/Awadhi, Sanskrit, and Persian is evident in his 'complex textual transpositions of Hindavi and Persian narrative poems and narratives into Bengali' (d'Hubert 2018: 7–8). He locates two phases in Alaol's literary career—one primarily rooted in literary traditions rooted in Bengal and eastern India, and the other in Persian narratives—and marvels at the 'virtual absence of hierarchy among languages' (d'Hubert 2018: 9) in Alaol's poetic world. 'The Hindavi poet Jâyasî,' d'Hubert points out, 'is considered as a kavi-kula-guru (a master among all poets), and he is given as much praises as the classical Persian poet Nizâmî and the Sanskrit poets Kâlidâsa (ca. fourth century) and Bhavabhûti (ca. seventh century)' (d'Hubert 2018: 9). Such a location is integral to the reading of Alaol's *Padmabati* in this essay.

Ramya Sreenivasan's book, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Pasts in India, c. 1500-1900*, also engages with Alaol's *Padmabati* as a part of her discussion on the many narratives of Queen Padmini. Sreenivasan's tracing of the journeys of Queen Padmini's tale across history and geography underscores its circulation in a richly multilingual world. The legend is moulded and recast 'through the prism of the [authors'] central concerns' in the course of its many journeys (Sreenivasan 2007: 107). Sreenivasan's location of Alaol's *Padmabati* in this considerable body of Padmini narratives is a valuable scholarship in the context of this essay, which builds on the idea that the heterogeneous literary world of Syed Alaol and his *Padmabati* must be understood in terms of the many migrations that constitute such a literary

world. The following section of the essay will expand on the migrant character of the *Padmabati*.

The Migrant Character of Alaol's *Padmabati*

The migrant character of Alaol's *Padmabati*, as this essay has pointed out earlier, is established right at the onset of the poem in the *Stuti Khanda*, where the poet locates himself as an accidental resident of Rosanga—brought there not by choice, but by ill-fortune. The *Atma Parichay* or *Introduction* speaks of the circumstances that brought him face-to-face with a Portuguese pirate ship (*Harmader nouka*), the 'martyrdom' of his father, and his own suffering, '*Kahite bahul katha dukhha aapnar*/ *Rosanga ashiya hoilo raj asowar*' (It pains me to speak of my circumstances/ And thus I was brought to Rosanga and became a royal horseman) (Ghosh 2016: 92).[1] Rosanga, as this essay has also pointed out in an earlier section, is represented as a cosmopolis, that draws both accidental migrants such as himself as well as other seekers of fortune from the farthest corners of the known world. What is of note, however, is the emphasis that Alaol places on the *naval* might of Arakan, '*Nana barna nouka shaje*/ *Nahi shama kshiti majhe*' (Different types of ships prepare for battle/ There is no comparison to this anywhere else in the world) (Ghosh 2016: 85). This is an aspect of the poem that merits greater critical attention. For Alaol, Arakan's naval might is sufficient to merit a catalogue of the ships, which then leads on to the more discussed catalogue of Rosanga's diverse residents in the lines that follow. Alaol writes, '*Heno nouka adhipati*/ *Dukkhita janer gati*/ *Nripa sreshtha nripa mahashay*' (The sovereign of such ships/ A shelter for those that suffer/ Greatest of a kings) (Ghosh 2016: 86), linking Arakan's naval mastery with Rosanga's fortunes and cosmopolitan character.

The *Padmabati* retains this pre-occupation with seas and migration, even though Alaol remains faithful to the structure of Jayasi's *Padmavat*. The sea voyage of King Ratansen to Sinhala (*Bartrika Khanda*), and his eventual return with Queen Padmini (*Deshjatra Khanda*), are episodes of particular interest. Jayasi's Ratansen travels to Sinhala across the seven seas, each mythical sea described alongside their metaphysical significance. Alaol's Ratansen, making the same journey, crosses no such mythical seas. The turbulent waters he encounters are mundane in comparison, populated by large fishes and birds that prey on them. The narrative of the return voyage also follows Jayasi's plot. The Sea appears before the king dressed as an old mendicant, the returning ships are caught in a deadly storm, and eventually the kind daughter of the Sea (named Lakshmi by Jayasi and Padma by Alaol) rescues Queen Padmini. The shipwreck is described vividly,

> And then, suddenly, arrived the rain,
> It was as though the end times had come.
> The wind grew harsher and the rain stronger,

> It was dark and one could not tell the direction.
> The waves grew as tall as the mountains,
> Lifted the boats to the skies and then dashed them beneath.
> Boats fell apart in countless pieces,
> Scattering in many different directions.
> The king's boat, best made of all,
> Survived the waves longer than the others. (Ghosh 2016: 292)

Placing this episode alongside Jayasi's decidedly more placid shipwreck episode appears to suggest that if Jayasi's text is a product of a land-locked culture, then Alaol's is one wherein the waters reign supreme. Moulded 'through the prism of [Alaol's] central concerns' (Sreenivasan 2007: 107), the *Padmabati* centres the sea as a mercurial entity: now guileful, as it appears in the disguise of a mendicant; now vengeful, as it crashes down on the boats and drowns the human occupants; now merciful, as Ratansen and Padmini are spared the grief of being separated forever. The cosmopolitan glory and naval might of Rosanga is contingent upon the sea, which brings to Rosanga's shores migrants and merchants, pirates and priests and an occasional poet like Syed Alaol. Alaol's audience at Arakan was largely constituted by migrant Bengali Muslims from mercantile backgrounds. Ratansen's voyage to Sinhala, a lucrative trading outpost, bears echoes of their own sea voyages. If the shipwreck highlights the dangers and uncertainties of such journeys, then the unparalleled treasure that is Padmini herself offers a glimpse of the rewards one might hope to attain from the same.

The episode marking Ratansen and Padmini's departure from Sinhala (*Ratansen Biday Khanda*) marks an elaborate farewell ritual for the bride, with Alaol drawing upon familiar scenes from the ordinary Bengali household to paint a moving portrait of a Padmini made of flesh and blood. The metaphor of exile, centring upon a married woman's departure to her husband's home and featuring the familiar narrative of a woman's separation with her natal land, plays out throughout this episode. A tearful Padmini tells her female companions, '*Etodine chharilu Sinhal kabilash*/ *Bidhibashe hoilo mor dur deshe baash*/ *Pardeshi hoilu bole daya na chhario*/ *Abashya barek more smaran kario*' (Now I must leave the lap of Sinhala/ Fortune has sent me to a foreign land/ Do not deprive me of your kindness as I become a foreigner/ Do remember me every now and then) (Ghosh 2016: 285). Padmini fears being deemed a 'foreigner' (*pardeshi*), an outsider who has no claim upon the community or the ties of kinship she leaves behind at Sinhala, never to step foot on her native soil again. A couple of centuries later, another migrant poet employs a similar metaphor of a woman leaving her parental home to speak of the trauma and loss of enforced migration. Wajid Ali Shah's '*Babul mora naihar chhooto hi jaaye*' identifies Calcutta, the land of his exile, as '*piya ke des*'. Separated by centuries, both poets nonetheless anticipate the mark of the other on the figure of the migrant and the sharpening of fault lines over the figure of the migrant in our fractured present.

Conclusion

In a discussion of world literature as a category, Francesca Orsini (2015) makes a case for 'an approach to literature and space that takes multilingualism within society and literary culture as a structuring and generative principle and holds *both* local *and* cosmopolitan perspectives in view'. In this essay, I have sought to discuss Syed Alaol's early modern Bengali *Padmabati* as a migrant epic. I have considered the text as a product of an environment with multiple languages and their overlapping literary traditions. To this end, I have drawn upon the important scholarship of Thibaut d'Hubert, whose work on Alaol's poetics places an emphasis on his command over Bengali, Hindavi/ Awadhi, Sanskrit, and Persian and engages with the multilingual registers of his poetry. I have also drawn upon the scholarship of Ramya Sreenivasan, who places Alaol's *Padmabati* alongside a larger body of Padmini narratives that have historically circulated across India. Sreenivasan's study highlights the legend's adaptability in the face of local concerns, even as her tracing of its many journeys reveals an inherently multilingual literary landscape. I have further traced Alaol's own traumatic journey to Arakan's cosmopolitan setting as an enslaved Bengali caught in the Harmad-Magh raids in lower Bengal. Through close readings of certain episodes of the *Padmabati*, the essay has sought to highlight the migrant narrative at the heart of the poem.

Concerned as it is with questions of enforced migration and the pain of exile, Alaol's *Padmabati* offers a departure from Jayasi's narrative in its conclusion. Alaol's Sultan Khilji repents the death of Ratansen and goes on to adopt Ratansen's young sons as a mark of penance. In this union of the Turko-Afghan Sultan with the Rajput king's household, Alaol's *Padmabati* becomes a narrative of reconciliation. Questions about migrancy and belonging, in the present day, have taken centre stage in the parts of South and South-East Asia that Syed Alaol spent his migrant literary career in. Who is a good migrant, we ask again and again, and who is a bad one? Who belongs, and who is a son of the soil? Who has the right to own land, and who belongs in a state of statelessness? In the light of these burning questions of our times, revisiting Alaol's *Padmabati*, taking into account the conditions of Alaol's migration to Arakan and the complex linguistic environment therein, might offer some different perspectives about the connected histories and the connected fortunes of the people of the Bay of Bengal region.

Note

1. The translations from the *Padmabati* are by the author.

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Atiśa's Home and His World: Positioning the Local in the Global South

Shinjini Basu

Abstract: The 'Global South' is often seen as a geopolitical formation in which the south counter-balances the universalising narrative of the global. In this context the phrase 'South-to-South relation' is much used and abused both as a developmental paradigm and as a term of cultural exchange. But how does the local negotiate with this 'South-to-South' network? Does it get dissolved or expanded? South and South-East Asia have a long history of South-to-South economic and cultural networks. One cannot overstate the relevance of that history in an age of re-writing 'Indian' history as a state-sanctioned purification project undertaken solely from a 'national perspective', with 'national(ist) interest' in mind. But there is also the possibility of it being subsumed by that same nationalist historiography, becoming a vainglorious search for the imperial grandeur of ancient India or imposing an idea of cultural homogeneity across time and space. This article would use as its point of reference Sanmatrananda's *Nastik Panditer Bhita* (2017), arguably the first authoritative novel in Bengali based on the life of *Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna*, the 11th century Bengali Buddhist scholar and a towering figure in spreading Buddhism across Asia. One would argue that the text tries to avoid the trappings of a hagiography or of a trans-spatial 'South' dissolving all other cultural markers by injecting the 'local' as an important coordinate in mapping the trans-cultural journeys of *Atiśa*. At the same time, the local itself is cross-culturally and cross-temporally reconstructed, creating a historical intersection to accommodate counter-currents of cultural identity. One would try to see whether such a nebulous construction is capable of warding off the onslaught of nationalist/sub-nationalist tropes or does it fall back on some of the same tropes to sustain only a selective notion of a 'Global South'.

Keywords: Global South, South-To-South Network, Bengali Historical Fiction, Buddhism in Ancient India, Indo-Tibetan Relation

In a particular episode in Sanmatrananda's Bengali novel *Nastik Panditer Bhita* (2017), the Sumatran scholar Dharmakirti narrates the story of his life

in the form of a fairy tale to his disciple Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna, the 11th century Bengali Buddhist scholar. Maitra, the prince of a certain island-nation finds the metal idol of an unknown deity, brings it home, and starts worshipping. The country has been going through a drought for a very long time. After the arrival of the idol, the island has a miraculous year of prosperity, after which the islanders start worshipping the unknown deity. Then a monk comes and tells people that the idol is of the Buddha. Gradually the island, rich in minerals and other natural resources, starts attracting traders from all over the world, though till then the islanders were unaware of the worth of those resources. The prince comes to know about a beautiful princess, *Mahakaruṇā,* who is imprisoned in a place called Bodhgaya in Jambudwipa. Thousands of years ago, another prince had sought and found *Mahakaruṇā* in the same place. But when Prince Maitra goes searching for her, he comes to know that *Mahakaruṇā*'s palace is surrounded by some *rakshashas* from Simhala. The prince cannot enter the palace; he travels across Jambudwipa to reach *Mahakaruṇā* and finally finds his path at Nalanda, the great centre of Buddhist learning, under the tutelage of Sri Ratna. The prince goes back to his own island and starts preaching Buddhism there.

This story is clearly metaphorical. The island is the ancient Suvarnadwipa or Sumatra. Prince Maitra is Dharmakirti himself, who was a Sumatran prince before he became a monk. The earlier prince who had attained *Mahakaruṇā* is none other than Gautama Buddha himself. *Karuṇā* or compassion is indispensable to all schools of Buddhism. For the Mahayana school in particular, *Mahakaruṇā* or the great compassion is an important quality of the *Bodhisattva*— a person on the path of receiving *Bodhi* or complete enlightenment. The *rakshashas* are the older and stricter Theravadi Buddhist School who believed in nirvana as a solipsistic and individualistic enterprise based on complete renunciation of the world. For the Mahayana School nirvana cannot be achieved merely through individual asceticism; personal nirvana is attained through collective engagement. In northern and eastern India, Theravadis were already losing ground to the Mahayana sect and were being pushed outside India, to Sri Lanka. So, for Dharmakirti, a Mahayana scholar, Theravadis are the *rakshashas* or demons. As Buddhism gradually becomes the religion of power, patronized by kings and merchants, it plays an important role in spreading Indian maritime and mercantile activities in South-East Asia leading to the commercial exploitation of the natural resources of this region. In a single narrative, Dharmakirti brings together the history of the spread of Buddhism in South-East Asia, the history of sectarian differences within Buddhism, and the political and economic relations between India and other South-East Asian countries. But the story also gives us a leeway to look into a certain projection of the Global South and how the regional and the local find their place in that projection.

Sanmatrananda: The Monk and Scholar-turned Storyteller

Trained as a statistician, Sanmatrananda used to be a distinguished educationist and a monk at Ramakrishna Mission, the Hindu monastic order. He spent his life as a monk, a teacher, a librarian, and a philanthropist in various parts of India and became the headmaster of the Ramakrishna Mission School in Agartala, Tripura. However, he left the Mission in pursuit of his literary aspirations. He published his first collection of stories *Dwa Suparna* in 2014, followed by two other story collections *Kathabastu* and *Bhamati Asrumati* (2015). His collection of essays on Buddhism, *Araktasunadar Mukhasree*, was published in 2016. In Sanmatrananda's works, the past is often revisited through characters caught in the maelstrom of history yet overlooked or left behind by its Grand Narrative. *Bhamati Asrumati*compiles two stories — Bhamati, the wife of the scholar Bachaspati Mishra, is the protagonist of the first story while Prasannaleela, the mother of two philosophers Asanga and Basubandu is the central character of the second story 'Asrumati'. His novel *Chhayacharachar* (2018) explores the political and intellectual milieu of 16th century northern India through the life of Madhusudan Saraswati, the Bengali commentator on *Bhagwat Gita. Tomake Ami Chute Parini* (2019) is about a critical moment in the life of the Buddha when he was still Prince Siddhartha. It studies Siddhartha right before the attainment of Bodhi as his life intersects with the lives of Sujata, a young village girl and her husband Sudas.

Nastik Panditer Bhita: Atish Dipankarer Prithibi, translated literally as 'The Home of the Atheist Scholar: The World of Atiśa Dīpaṃkara', is arguably the first authoritative novel in Bengali based on the life of Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna, a towering figure in spreading Buddhism across Asia. In this article I would try to see how a rendition of the life and times of an 11th century Buddhist monk is fraught with concerns relevant to the discourse of the Global South — a term that gained currency only in the 1980s.

The Global South: Its History and Politics

The concept of the Global South initially emerged to denote developmental discrepancies across the world. The Brandt Commission Report of 1980 titled 'North-South: A Programme for Survival' proposed wide-ranging economic reforms, lowering of trade barriers, uninterrupted flow of the global capital purportedly to lift the impoverished hemispherical South from penury. Throughout the 1990s, with the expansion of globalisation these became universal developmental goals. In 2003, the United Nation's Developmental Programme 'Forging a Global South' firmly established this compound term in the policy circles. It is often seen as a geopolitical formation in which the south counter-balances the universalising narrative of the global. While the Global South has been expanded in the realm of culture to forge regional commonalities and partnerships, such culturalisation of the term camouflages

the politico-economic tensions caused by the imposition of a global hegemonic model on regional or local life forms. What is also clear from this brief survey is that the term does not envisage global finance as a single and unidirectional flow into the hemispherical South. Rather, it propounds a regional replication of the same global model of circulation of capital in the form of South-to-South collaborations. The replication is not without frictions; but frictions are dissolved in a celebratory narrative of cooperation and mutual benefits.

Even though the term is relatively new, there has been a long history of South-to-South economic and cultural transactions. Invocation of that past is important to bust the myth of ancient India's intellectual superiority based on its cultural isolation. In *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*, David Arnold details how, over centuries, there existed a network of sharing cultural, scientific and technological knowledge between the Indian subcontinent and its neighbouring regions —'from the Middle-East and Central Asia to China and Southeast Asia, and in fields as diverse as agriculture, architecture, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, metallurgy, textile-production, shipbuilding and armaments' (Arnold 2004: 4). Buddhism has been an intrinsic part of South and South-East Asia's history of South-to-South economic and cultural networks. The fairy tale of Dharmakirti treats Mahayana Buddhism reaching Sumatra as the ur-moment of the contact between India and Sumatra. That contact leads to 'the progressive development of Suvarnadwipa in trade and international relations' (Sanmatrananda 2017: 115, translation mine) says Dharmakirti. He continues, '…there was a lot of superstition and regressive practices in this country. With the spread of the Buddhist consciousness those practices were gone…when a less developed country comes in contact of a more developed country, initially the less developed country gets benefitted. My travel to India had served that purpose' (Sanmatrananda 2017: 115, translation mine). While the novel offers a cursory nod at the history of South-to-South cultural exchange, Atiśa's haloed travel to Tibet is shown to be propelled by similar civilisational burden as that of his teacher. In this way, a convenient vision of the Global South contributes to a congratulatory revision of the Indian past. In the subsequent sections of this article, I would retrace Atiśa's steps between these two histories in order to locate his home, his *bhita* in a world of shifting coordinates.

Nastik Panditer Bhita: A Warped Narrative that Travels Time

The novel moves through multiple layers of time. A box carrying a bronze icon of the Buddhist deity Tara Devi, a string of prayer beads and an 11th century scroll written in Sanskrit and Tibetan by an unknown author is found in the Vikrampur region of present-day Bangladesh. A group of archeologists in Calcutta is intrigued by the eclectic nature of the scroll, especially a cryptic poem it contains. They suspect that the author is Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna.

The search for the author leads to Vajrayogini village of Vikrampur, Bangladesh. The young archeologist Amitayudh finds a mound which is supposed to be the location of Atiśa's home. However, entry into that mound is through the basement of a very old house that now belongs to a Muslim gentleman Motaleb Miyan. In that basement, Amitayudh discovers another strange manuscript titled 'Karunkuntalkatha', written in archaic Sanskrit. Through a vortex of interconnected scrolls, the novel travels back to the 11th century and traces many facets of Atiśa's adolescence and adulthood — how Chandragarbha, the young prince of Vajrayogini, leaves home in search of knowledge, is initiated into the tantric cult of Vajrayana Buddhism, then turns to sramanic Mahayana Buddhism, becomes a great scholar, is named Dīpaṃkara or 'Reservoir of Light', and later travels to Tibet. Another important layer in the time-scape of the novel is the 13th century — a transitional period in the history of the Indian subcontinent marked by the expansion of Islam and several military expeditions undertaken by different Islamic powers making gradual inroads in this region. Chag Lochaba, a Tibetan monk, comes to India in the 13th century looking for the story of Atiśa's life. Atiśa is not the only one connecting these different strands of time. Sanmatrananda does not even consider Atiśa to be the subject of the novel. The subject, according to him, is 'the eternal feminine that has remained immersed in our collective subconscious since the dawn of creation' (Sanmatrananda 2017: 7, Preface, translation mine). She serves as the link connecting the present with various pasts—as the playmate of the young prince Chandragarbha, as a *yogini* who gives Chag Lochaba a glimpse into Atiśa's tantric past, as a village girl of contemporary Vajrayogini, and ultimately as *Mahakaruṇā*, the spirit of great and universal compassion.

Literary Predecessors of Sanmatrananda's Atiśa in Bengali

Buddhism and Atiśa are not new to either historical reconstructions or narrative projects in Bengali. There have been a few biographies of Atiśa such as *Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna* (1954) by Alaka Chattopadhyay, *Atiśa Dīpaṃkara* (1997) by Ekram Ali, and *Atiśa Dīpaṃkara* (2009) by Gauri Mitra. As far as fictional portrayals go, by far the most well-known is the one in Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's historical novel *Tumi Sandhar Megh* (1958) in which Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna is a minor but important character. Sanmatrananda uses an episode from this novel to create a field of intertextuality. In Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's entire oeuvre, the Buddhist past of India recurs both as a period of unification and purification—culminating in a civilising mission that can integrate the 'uncivilised and untamable Hun' into what he considers the Indian (essentially Hindu) mainstream in a novel such as *Kaler Mandira* (1951) or serve as basis of political alliance against heathen foreigners in *Tumi Sandhar Megh.*

Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay is an important point of reference because the continued popularity of his historical narratives helps provide cultural

legitimacy to blatantly Islamophobic tropes that are now the staple of the majoritarian political discourse and therefore are too close for comfort. Cross-referencing Bandyopadhyay gives Sanmatrananda the scope to appeal to the existing cultural memory of his readers and extract immediate recognition. But he also deviates significantly in his portrayal of Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna. Bandyopadhyay portrays Atiśa not just as a monk or a scholar but as a political operative with keen interest in weaponry to fight against the *Yavanas* or foreigners. Chased by the army of Nayapala, the Pala king of Magadha, the retreating army of the Kalachuri king Karna ransacks Vikramaśilā Vihara. Atiśa is in charge of the *vihara* or monastery. He negotiates a truce between these two gullible kings and proposes marriage between the son of the Pala king and the daughter of the Kalachuri king. He has a larger political vision: '…if these heathen scoundrels are not tamed in time…the great civilisation of *Aryavarta* will drown in blood' (Bandyopadhyay 1958: 235, translation mine). In a later chapter of the novel, a few Arab merchants are identified as representatives of these 'heathen scoundrels'. The episode of reaching a compromise between the kings is there in *Nastik Panditer Bhita*as well, both as a peace measure and a grand plan against the *Yavanas*—'…a truce between these two would serve as resistance against the *Yavanas* for some time' (Sanmatrananda 2017: 210, translation mine)[1] In Bandyopadhyay's narrative, Atiśa is confident that such Machiavellian manipulation is the only way of delivering his moral obligation to the long-held codes of cultural purity of the *Aryavarta*— the land of the Aryans. However, in Sanmatrananda's narrative, Atiśa is torn by self-doubt — 'Is this the conduct of a monk? Or is this diplomacy? This is not an unadulterated peace initiative of a monk; this is political strategy' (Sanmatrananda 2017: 210, translation mine). While Bandyopadhyay takes pains to accentuate Atiœa's masculinity, Sanmatrananda goes in the opposite direction where Atiśa's search for meaning ends with him dissolving into the figure of *Mahakaruṇā*. *Atiśa*, depicted as the embodiment of *Mahakaruṇā* —the manifestation of the eternal feminine is a far cry from the martial monk of *Tumi Sandhar Megh* and requires not just a different form of telling but a very different historical vision.

The Politics of Colonial Bengal's Tryst with History

In Bengal, the development of a historical consciousness and production of historical discourses with unparalleled immediacy in the 19th century are looked upon as unmistakable signs of colonial modernity. Historian Sumit Sarkar writes, '... it remains undeniable that the impact and imposition of Western historiographical models through English education and British Indian scholarship created a widespread sense of a tabula rasa. Pre-colonial texts, since then, have always figured as "sources" to be evaluated by modern Western canons, not as methodological influences' (Sarkar 1987: 6). This sense of tabula rasa, a vacant pre-colonial historical space created the temporal

anxiety of the colonial modern (to be understood primarily as the privileged domain of Hindu, upper-caste male), resulting into his repeated attempts at history writing.

If a sense of a lack of history caused despondency of the colonial modern, it also opened a possibility of recovery on a narrative plane by investing history with the political functionality of nation-building. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) was one of the most vocal proponents of the necessity for Bengalis to write their own history. He was also one of the earliest to treat history not as an objective scientific discourse but as a subjective political one. In an article published in the Bengali literary journal *Bangadarshan* edited by Chattopadhyay himself, he writes, 'The creation or development of the history of a community is the cause of national pride: history is the foundation of social science and social ambition. A nation without history is doomed' (Chattopadhyay 1874: 330, translation mine). The project of writing history becomes a thinly-veiled political project of writing 'us' into selfhood. However, every construction of 'us' requires a 'them' to consolidate itself. In another article, Chattopadhyay sets the cultural binary in clear terms: 'According to us the real history of Bengal is not present in a single book written in English. If there is anything at all, then it is the meaningless documentation of the indolent life led by the Muslim Badshahs and Subadars' (Chattopadhyay 1880: 337, translation mine).

In Bengali, the word *jati* may mean a nation as well as a community or caste and Chottopadhyay frequently uses this word in its dual meaning. In his formulation of history, one meaning of *jati* seamlessly slips into the other. The use of the first-person plural in the quoted passage is interesting. It immediately links writing history with forging a communal identity. The pronoun is simultaneously fluid and exclusive. Who is included among 'us' and who is not is clear in the next line: 'Those who accept the words of the boastful, equivocal, Hindu-hating Muslims without proper reasoning as history are not Bengali' (Chattopadhyay 1880: 337, translation mine). Chattopadhyay actively participates in this project of (re)writing the history of the nation in terms of Hindu revival against tyrannical Muslim rulers through his historical novels such as *Durgeshanandini* (1865), *Rajsimha* (1882), *Sitaram* (1887), etc. Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Maharastra Jivan Pravat* (1879) and *Rajput Jivan Sandhya* (1879), Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's *Swapnalabdha Bharatbarsher Itihas* (1895) follow a similar template. Even if one finds occasional departures from the template, such as Rabindranath Tagore's *Rajarshi* (1887), it prevails well into the 20th century Bengali historical narratives, from Abanindranath Tagore's *Rajkahini* (1910) to the historical novels of Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay which often portray the Hindu and Buddhist past of India as one of peaceful cohabitation and continuity, interrupted only in the 11th-12th century by the Muslim invaders. Such claims are factually wrong but have been used as ideological tools for the otherisation of Muslims.

The Global South as a Narrative Strategy to Contextualise the Past in Contemporary India

Even though he writes about the past, Sanmatrananda locates his novel firmly in the here and now with all its political immediacy. Through a character named Shaon, he inserts himself into the narrative field. Shaon is not a major character in the novel; being a linguist, he serves as a mediator between the past and the present as he tries to decode the text of 'Karunkuntalkatha'. Like Sanmatrananda, Shaon too is a renegade monk of an organisation closely modelled on the Ramakrishna Mission. After leaving the order, Shaon returns to the quotidian life he once renounced with the awkwardness of an outsider. There is an insurmountable lapse of time that he tries to measure by using some of the most traumatic events of recent times—mob lynchings in the name of cow-protection, state repression on the campuses of higher education, suppression of dissent, media trial of the dissenters—as signposts. Though Shaon criticises the excesses of nationalist chest-thumping, he, and through him presumably, the author claims political neutrality. Such a position seems rather untenable in these fraught times. Yet, it has an undeniable aura of benignity that can legitimise his reading of history as impartial and authentic.

The decision of placing Atiśa's life and his journey within the Pan-Asian history of Buddhism rather than in a narrow nationalist frame is therefore not just a literary decision but a carefully calibrated political one. This way Atiśa can retain the advantage of an outsider, just like the author. The Global South too draws its legitimacy as a developmental paradigm from its claims of being apolitical even as the movement of the global capital is smoothened by its accommodation within the dominant political narratives of the region. History frequently gets evoked to establish the Global South as a continuous trans-national engagement. Like the Global South of today, the South-to-South collaborations of the past too had hegemonic goals, they too were about resources, used to regionally replicate a master narrative, often resulting in conflict, as evident in the story told by Dharmakirti. In their retelling, those conflicts are usually co-opted in the fairy tale ending of progress and development. Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna, both as a life lived and as a narrative experience, helps us to delve deeper into that fairy tale to see not just patterns of cooperation but also of coercion and colonisation. The placement of his story in the deterritorialised matrix of South-to-South network accords it a historical vantage point over and above the myopic view of cultural nationalism. However, the search for continuities leads to an understanding of history that sees cultural transactions such as those portrayed in this novel as examples of a freer, collaborative, cosmopolitan past disrupted by the intervention of some common enemy — an alien to this established network of exchange and collaboration. Even as he challenges the imposition of a single history and brings multiple perspectives to it, by identifying a single moment of disruption

and a singular cultural 'Other', Sanmatrananda's historical narrative uses the same cultural stereotypes as the cultural nationalists he denounces.

Locating Home in a Dislocating World

Walter Benjamin says that 'Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously' (Benjamin 1968: 255). The 'angel of history' prefers to collect the tatters of the past ruin in order to 'awaken the dead' (*ibid*.: 249). To contest historicism then is to forego the security of the pastness of the past. The dead cannot be awakened if they are confined to the sepulchre of the past; tunnels need to be dug through the mobius strip of time to make them part of the experience of the living. Those tunnels go through the home, the *bhita*, the place of birth. Sanmatrananda, writing at a time charged with ideas of belonging and non-belonging to a homeland, knows that the girth of the term *bhita* extends beyond its literal meaning or physical structure. The *bhita* of Atiśa, a Buddhist scholar of ancient India born in present-day Bangladesh, who travelled across South-East Asia, who taught at different Buddhist institutions across current northern India and spent his final days in Tibet, is as malleable as the map he traversed. The fact that one can enter his *bhita* only through an underground tunnel in the basement of a Muslim household in Bangladesh suggests an alternative reading of the complex history of the subcontinent. Particularly for Bengal, it is a reminder of its legacy of a syncretic culture, a joint inheritance of Hindus and Muslims, with significant Buddhist influence, shared across the border between the Indian state of West Bengal and the People's Republic of Bangladesh which used to be East Bengal before the Partition of India.

The search for this one home leads to many worlds of different times, giving rise to a fragmented, trans-temporal historical sensibility. Due to these continuous dis-locations, Atiśa's world becomes a chronotope of multiple time and space that helps to replace his material journeys with purely metaphysical ones, conjuring a rather benign picture of ancient India's interactions with the rest of the Global South, obfuscating hegemonic as well as sectarian violence involved in those interactions.

The History of Indo-Tibetan Contact and The Hegemonic Role of Buddhism

Dharmakirti's interpretation of the first contact between India and Sumatra serves as a model to interpret the contact between India and Tibet as well. Buddhism first came to Tibet in the 7th century CE. It resulted in the overhauling of Tibetan scripts after the Indian model, preparation of two treatises on Tibetan grammar and translation of several Buddhist texts in Tibetan. A statue of eleven-faced *Avalokiteśvara* was brought from southern India and 12

Buddhist temples were erected on the pattern of Indian temples and monasteries (Pathak 1958: 167).

Later, in the 8th century, the famous Buddhist scholar and tantric practitioner Padmasambhava was invited to Tibet along with several other scholars such as Dharmakriti of Nalanda,[2] Jinamitra from Kashmir, etc. to rid Tibet of 'demons' using tantric practices (Behrendt 2014: 8). But 'demons' kept coming back, requiring renewed attempts at cultural exorcism. Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Srijñana travelled to Tibet in 1042 CE at the invitation of the western Tibetan king Yeshe 'Od for 'purifying' the Buddhism practised there and establishing 'correct' and 'authentic' Buddhist religious practices (Behrendt 2014: 7). As part of this effort a trans-migration of scholarship started taking place—a number of Buddhist scholars from north India travelled to Tibet and Tibetan scholars travelled to India.

When Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Srijñana travelled to Tibet Buddhism was primarily a religion of the Tibetan royal court and the elite (Behrendt 2014: 7). It had to compete with other indigenous religions such as Bon, repeatedly demonised in the novel as a violent cult. Thus, the purification drive was also a political strategy to turn the religion of the court into the religion of the masses in order to achieve a cultural homogeneity that would ultimately stabilise the political control of the ruling elite.

This picture was complicated by the ideas, imagery, and rituals of Vajrayana Buddhism with its complex pantheon of deities. Though Vajrayana Buddhism flourished in the 8th century in eastern India due to the political patronage of the Pala kings, it had earlier roots in the tantric tradition. Kurt Behrendt points out that though for Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna the Mahayana tradition provided an overarching ideological framework, by the time he was in charge of the Vikramaúilâ Vihara, patronised by the Pala dynasty, he would have to perform tantric rituals for the king and the state, 'a key development that led to the dynastic support for Buddhism in northern India' (Behrendt 2014: 7). The novel shows Atiśa's transition from the tantric to the sramanic path as a purely spiritual one; the ideological underpinnings remain unobserved.

Sectarian Conflicts within Buddhism and the Strategic Role of Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Srijñana

At the transit point of the tantric and the sramanic paths of Buddhism, Atiśa's home meets his world. In Atiśa's day, Vajrayana Buddhism was more established in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent, including Bengal, while Mahayana had more influence in the central part of north India at the sites associated with the Buddha's life. According to Kunal Chakraborty, eastern India's close political and trade links with the Himalayan foothills, particularly strengthened during the Pala period, resulted in cultural interactions that might have contributed to the spread of Tantrism in these areas. Gradually Mahayana Buddhism too came under its influence giving rise to Vajrayana and then

Sahajyana. Sahajyanas were critical of Brahmins and ritualist Buddhists alike. They claimed that '*bodhi* or ultimate knowledge was not realised even by the Buddha. Everybody has the right to attain Buddhahood and the state of *buddhatva* resides within the human body' (Chakraborty 2016: 13). In the novel, the tantric rituals serve as a rite of passage that needs to be undertaken but ultimately overcome. Yet the sublimation remains incomplete. The spectre of the desire unlived disrupts the purity of faith just as the home left behind haunts the uniformity of a world conjured by that faith.

Atiśa helped achieve a synthesis of the already existing tantric tradition of Padmasambhava and the Mahayana learning of the north Indian *viharas*, an important strategic step towards standardisation of Buddhism in Tibet. It was ultimately a hegemonic exercise difficult to perform in the 11th century India where Buddhism was already facing a Brahminical revival. 'That Atisha lived at the twilight of Buddhism in north India might explain in part why he chose to travel to Tibet' (Behrendt 2014: 8). This synthesis was made possible because of the cross-current of two local strands of Buddhism, appropriated and put to the use of the narrative of a universal faith.

Demonising the Muslim as the Disruptive Other: Historical Fact and Fiction

By the 13th century the tantric tradition came to dominate Tibetan Buddhism. As already mentioned, the early 13th century is an important knot in the entangled chronotope of the novel when 'foreign invaders' are shown ransacking monasteries and learning centres of northern India. One highlighted instance is the destruction of Nalanda Mahavihara allegedly by the army of the Mamluk commander Bakhtiyar Khalji. This claim is a centrepiece of the Hindu nationalist hagiography that thrives on equally sensationalist claims of 60,000 Hindu temples being destroyed during the Muslim rule in India, even though historian D. N. Jha points out that there is hardly any credible evidence for more than 80 instances of such destructions (Jha 2018:https://caravanmagazine.in/reviews-and-essays/dn-jha-destruction-buddhist-sites). Jha provides a detailed survey to prove that such acts of vandalism perpetrated against competing faiths were quite common among various Brahminical and non-Brahminical sects of pre-Islamic India. He also contests the historical veracity of Khalji's army destroying Nalanda. Nalanda was raided many a times and, according to Jha, its final destruction was caused by the 'Hindu fanatics who set fire to its library' (ibid.). Khalji in fact raided the nearby Odantapuri Mahavihara, another important centre of Buddhist learning. Khalji is also accused of destroying Vikramaśilā Vihara, though evidence suggests that Vikramaśilā was attacked and set on conflagration by the Brahminical Sena rulers of Bengal (ibid.). Still, the attack of Bakhtiyar Khalji remains a point of rupture in the historical vision that sees the history of pre-Islamic India as one of great continuity.

As this rupture is painted as a watershed moment of loss of the past, the internal transitions within the hegemonic order are subsumed in the grand sweep of this tectonic shift. In the words of Sri Bhadra, a senior monk at Nalanda, 'The *Yavanas* have attacked the university…. I do not know the reason behind their hatred. Maybe they think there is hidden treasure…. May be our idol worship, *shastras* and philosophical treatises are alien to them. That gives rise to such hatred' (Sanmatrananda 2017: 33, translation mine). However, such 'hatred' towards alien beliefs and rituals was really not that alien to ancient India.

Narrative Reinforcement of the Myth of Non-Violence in Ancient India

D.N. Jha says, '…there is considerable historical evidence to question the stereotype of India as a land of religious tolerance. Not only did the different brahmanical sects fight among themselves, of which we have plenty of evidence; they also bore huge animosity towards the two heterodox religions, Buddhism and Jainism, in early India' (Jha 2016: 5). According to Upinder Singh, in ancient India, violence was not an exception but rather intrinsic to piety:

> Violence jostles with piety in the political narratives of the early historic period. Brahminical, Buddhist and Jain texts give accounts of the personality of rulers, their matrimonial alliances and their wars. While they differ in detail, it is significant that all three traditions engaged with political history, sought to establish claims over the most powerful kings, and denounced those they thought inimical to their cause. (Singh 2017: 33)

It is true that there are instances of accommodation and appropriation of the Buddha in the Brahminical pantheon. But the Buddha was also reviled as a thief and a non-believer. In fact, in the novel, the term *nastik* should not be confused with its modern neutral meaning of an atheist, rather it was used pejoratively to denote Buddhists as non-believers. According to Jha, by the post-Mauryan period the Brahmanical intolerance of the sramanic religions became so deep that the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali states that '*sramanas* and *brahmanas* are 'eternal enemies' like the snake and the mongoose' (Jha 2016: 6). Jha cites other examples such as King Kshemagupta of Kashmir who destroyed the Buddhist monastery Jayendravihara of Srinagar and used its material to build the temple of Kshemagaurisvara (*ibid*.). Yet, the purported ransacking of Nalanda in the early 13th century is portrayed as the singular and irreversible break in the hitherto uninterrupted flow of Indian knowledge traditions.

Placing the Muslim Other in a Domain of Non-Knowledge: Strategic Reconfiguration of India's South-to-South Contacts

In spite of the fact that the novel continuously overrides set boundaries of what constitutes knowledge —Atiśa's cryptic Sanskrit code gets effortlessly translated into a Bengali folksong sung by a village girl of eastern Bengal—

certain things remain strictly in the domain of non-knowledge. On his way from Sarnath to Vikramaśilā Vihara, Chag Lochaba, the young Tibetan monk, meets an elderly Arab Al Muajjim. He is a magician who has come from Baghdad to learn Indian magic. Muajjim mesmerises Chag Lochaba with his magical skills, but they ultimately remain tricks; unlike the yogic or tantric rituals or the advanced scientific discourses of ancient India they do not lead to any higher form of knowledge. This binary is far from historical reality. David Arnold points out that the 'celebration of cultural eclecticism and trans-regional exchange aligns the history of Indian science more closely with the models of creativity, diffusion and interaction advanced for China, the Muslim Middle East and other non-European culture areas…' (Arnold 2004: 4). Later, from the 15th century onwards, trade, warfare, and migration helped India's cultural transaction with the wider Islamic world, linking India with Iran, Central and West Asia, as well as with Europe. Al Muajjim tells Lochaba how they have developed potions that can create hatred and enmity among people. Clearly his magic is indicative of a dark view of the world that thrives on enmity rather than compassion, the driving force of Atiœa's exploits – the distinction could not be clearer. Unfortunately, the distinction was not as clear to the Brahminical scholarship of the time or later. As late as in the 16th century, Madhusudan Saraswati held that the teachings of the materialists, the Buddhists and others are like those of the *mlecchas* or heathens (Jha 2016: 7).

Mahakaruṇā: Pushing Boundaries of Identity and Moving Beyond Stereotypes

The violence in the world of Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's Atiœa is upfront and celebrated in the name of protecting indigenous culture against foreign invasion; the violence in Sanmatrananda's narrative is erased from the surface, comes only as interruption brought about by the same foreign invaders. Ultimately both contribute to the self-image of an inherently syncretic, peaceful and accommodative indigenous culture disrupted only in the 13th century by that one other who is somehow too alien to be accommodated. What urges us to move beyond this supremacist self-image is the figure of *Mahakaruṇā*. When an old and fragile Atiśa loses his way in a sandstorm in the rough Tibetan terrain, he meets a child — a little girl who reminds him of the playmate of his adolescent days, the first and the only woman who has crossed his path in many different ways and many different forms. In a final surreal moment in the novel, Chag Lochaba meets Atiśa across centuries but not as a prince, or a scholar, or a religious teacher, but as a mother. He is one and inseparable with *Mahakaruṇā* who emerges as a woman, dissolves into a child, turns a monk into a mother. She pushes the limits of the debate of tolerance with the unlimited and all-encompassing force of compassion.

Notes

[1] D.N. Jha observes that the 11th century Vaishnavite Kalachuri king Karna did indeed ransack many Buddhist temples and monasteries in Magadha (Jha 2016: 6). But in the renditions of both Bandyopadhyay and Sanmatrananda this is not seen as an instance of sectarian violence, rather as collateral damage in the imperial strife of two Aryan kings. Whitewashing the long history of violence between different Hindu and Buddhist sects and presenting the history of ancient India as a common Hindu-Buddhist legacy helps to formulate and demonise a common enemy, something both the texts have done in their different ways.

[2] This Dharmakirti is to be differentiated from Suvarnadwipi Dharmakirti of the 11th century, the one mentioned in the novel.

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The Indian Female[1] Comic: Constructing Identities and Performing Resistance

Sarbajaya Bhattacharya

Abstract: This article seeks to investigate the relationship between bravery and funniness with reference to the contemporary female comedians in India and to understand how their stand-up comedy is an act of resistance and a process (conscious or otherwise) of performing and formulating multiple identities in terms of nationality, gender, sexuality, and class, among others. Amidst the gradual changes in the comedy scene in India, this article would like to trace the rise of the Indian female comic and how she constructs her identity and performs resistance through her comedy sets. In doing so, this article will focus primarily on Aditi Mittal's Netflix special —*Things They Wouldn't Let Me Say* (2018), and the short comedy sets by a number of female comics such as Kaneez Surka and Neeti Palta among others which were inspired by and used as promotional videos (2018) for the Amazon Prime show *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*. It will also analyse the two spaces that the comic often occupies at the same time—the web and the stage — the global and the local — and its relation to the gaze of the audience and the female body on stage/screen.

Keywords: Female Comedians, Stand-Up Comedy, Gender, the Web and the Stage, the Global and the Local

Introduction

"I'm not funny, what I am is brave."[2]

– Lucille Ball

Why does Lucille Ball, the American comedienne and actor, make a distinction between being funny and being brave? Presumably because for a woman, being funny *is* an act of bravery. One of the pioneering figures among comediennes, Lucille would have, in the America in which she lived and worked, faced the challenge of countering the myth of women having no sense of humour, a myth that defies temporal and spatial boundaries and can be found in greater or lesser degrees in most, if not all patriarchal societies.

This article seeks to investigate the relationship between bravery and funniness with reference to the contemporary female comedians in India and to understand how their stand-up comedy is an act of resistance[3] and a process (conscious or otherwise) of performing[4] and formulating multiple identities in terms of nationality, gender, sexuality, and class, among others.

The Indian middle class, with access to a television set and/or a mobile phone with an internet connection, had been introduced to comedy shows through reality shows (primarily in Hindi) churned out by television networks in the new millennium.[5] The participants of these shows were the modern-day versions of the court jester — now standing in a glossy studio set under harsh lights, a microphone in hand, and a hundred and twenty seconds to prove their wit in front of a panel of mostly male judges. Such comedy shows targeted a family audience and aired in the primetime slot. These comedy television shows —*Great Indian Laughter Challenge, Great Indian Comedy Circus*— to name a few, thrived on crass jokes that bordered on, and more often than not, crossed the borders that separate a joke from racism, sexism, and communalism, among other things. The promotional video of The *Great Indian Laughter Challenge* in 2017, for instance, depicted a pregnant Akshay Kumar being taken care of by his wife during his pregnancy, and by the end of the short promo, he gives birth to six children who come into the world laughing instead of crying.[6]

The hero, who stands in for the show itself, is the *baap* of comedy — literally the father, and colloquially an expert in a particular field. The man is the source and expert of comedy.

The *Great Indian Laughter Challenge* began to be aired in 2005 and ran for five seasons. It was not until season three that the show had its first female contestant — Aarti Kandpal. No female participant has ever won the 'laughter challenge'. Of the meagre number of female participants over the five seasons, only one seems to have gone on to carve out a career in television — Bharati Singh — while there are greater number of male contestants who have achieved success in the field.

The new stand-up comedy, on the other hand, has suddenly witnessed a growth of female comedians, many with their own shows. Aditi Mittal, for instance, has a special on Netflix. The reality show *Queens of Comedy* is exclusively for female comedians.The change of tone and content is immediately noticeable. Just to cite one example, one of the contestants, Surbhi, has a set in which she talks about sexual harassment, equal rights, tradition, and oppressive social norms.[7] It is worth noting that the first season of *Queens of Comedy* and the last season of the *Great Indian Laughter Challenge* both aired in 2017.

It is within the context of these slow, subtle, but sure changes in the comedy scene in India that this article would like to trace the rise of the Indian female comic and how she constructs her identity and performs

resistance through her comedy sets. In doing so, this article will focus primarily on Aditi Mittal's Netflix special —*Things They Wouldn't Let Me Say* (2018), and the short comedy sets by a number of female comics such as Kaneez Surka and Neeti Palta among others which were inspired by and used as promotional videos (2018) for the Amazon Prime show *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*. It will also analyse the two spaces that the comic often occupies at the same time — the web and the stage — the global and the local—and its relation to the gaze of the audience and the female body on stage/screen.

Can Women be Funny?

The Amazon Prime show *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* (2017), starring Rachel Brosnahan as the eponymous Mrs. Maisel, is a show about a homemaker in 1950s New York, who, in an inebriated twist of fate, stumbles upon her talent as a stand-up comedian. What is significant about Miriam Maisel is not her accidental career in comedy, but that she is established, from the very first scene of the series, as being funny. While her husband steals jokes from another comedian and she bakes him briskets to barter a better time at the club while measuring her daughter's forehead, Miriam always displays a sharp wit. She is inherently funny. *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* presents its audience with a rare female protagonist — not because she has a sense of humour, but that she is the protagonist *because* of it.

Historically, traditionally, in many cultures across the world, women have only been subjects in the realm of comedy, never acknowledged as creators. The female comedian is always asked what it means to be a female comic in an arena dominated by men. Neeti Palta, in her short set, mentions that she is often at the receiving end of this question by journalists. 'What does it mean to be a female comedian' they ask her, to which she responds, 'I don't know, I haven't been any other kind.'[8] Another question she says she often faces is, 'What are the challenges you face as a female comedian?' 'Traffic' and 'pollution', she laughs in response. But while Palta does joke about being asked such questions, they do remain pertinent in a culture that not only frowns upon women being funny, but also the very act of laughter when it is coming from a woman.

Loud, raucous laughter is not a part of the image of the traditional Indian woman. Niveditha Prakasam[9] in her set responds to the widespread belief that women cannot be funny (a trope that is used and subverted by the promo of the TLC show *Queens of Comedy*[10]). The short answer — women are often not funny because they have been conditioned to believe by the structures of the societythey inhabit that they are not supposed to*be* funny. Being funny would upset the balance, whereas their task is to maintain it. In India, this association between the traditional and the sacred and women have a long history and continue in various ways in the present. Nabaneeta Dev Sen writes,

> Women have always acted as the repository of traditional values, holding society together. To laugh would mean to show irreverence to the system that is crushing us but the system we must preserve as per our traditionally ascribed roles. The sacred is the domain of the woman, the men hold sway over the profane. (2012: 73)

Niveditha Prakasam also alludes to the traditional construction of women as being serious when she says, 'Give us a hundred years and we'll condition you into thinking we're funny.' She ends her set by saying, 'They say a lot of comedy is derived from tragedy. There's nothing more tragic than women's lives around the world.'[11]

There are eight female comedians in the promotional videos for *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* — Niveditha Prakasam, Sonali Thakker, Prashasti Singh, Aishwarya Mohanraj, Neeti Palta, Sejal Bhatt, Sumaira Shaikh, and Kaneez Surka. The comedians speak mostly in English.They come across as young, urban, middle-class Indian women, who, after quitting their day jobs (another common theme that runs through many of their sets) have achieved fame in the relatively novel terrain of stand-up comedy, making them immediately both relatable and aspirational to the target audience (young, urban, and middle class). At the same time, it also makes them alien and dangerous — rebels who have deviated the traditional route. Their sets, based on their own experiences, often grapple with this dichotomy. The other theme that runs through these different sets addresses the issue of being a woman in the world of comedy.

Neeti Palta expresses her exhaustion with journalists who constantly ask her such questions.[12] Niveditha Prakasam is forthcoming in her attack on the widespread idea that women are not and cannot be funny.[13] Kaneez Surka says that it is tough being a woman in a male-dominated comedy industry, but that she knows that, 'I'll always fight and I'll always ask for what I deserve.'[14] Sumaira Shaikh mentions that she spent years holding back her jokes, fearing that it would make her boyfriend insecure to see people laugh at her jokes while his only received lukewarm responses.[15] Aishwarya Mohanraj says that when she got a spot as a comedian, she initially felt insecure about it, thinking that it was given to her because she was a woman and not for her actual sense of humour. But she also tells the story of how she has found a surer footing, 'If I'm here because I'm a woman, I'm not going to be apologetic about it. I might have gotten here because comedy needs more women, but I stayed here because I'm fucking funny *yaar*.'[16]

Aditi Mittal's Netflix special *Things They Would Not Let Me Say* does not directly address the question of the identity of the female comic, but the very title of her show is an allusion to the traditional structures that bind women. Who constitute the 'they' in the title? In an interview to *Scroll*, Mittal answers, 'It's everyone and everything. It is silly to act that there is a specific 'they' in the world we live in which has a problem with what we say or wear' (Ghosh 2018).

Mittal's show also features a character that she has created and performs often — Mrs. Lutchuke (a failed pun in Hindi) — an elderly Marathi woman who is a 'sexpert'and a hunchback. Mrs. Lutchuke's visible physical characteristic and her content bring into focus both the body and the bawdy in comedy, which, in this genre, are very often interrelated. While Mrs. Lutchuke is talking about the human body, her own body draws the attention of the audience. And the humour she represents is bawdy — it seems as though the audience laughs because she is an old hunchback discussing sex had she been a young woman, it would have been a sacrilege. In multiple interviews, Aditi Mittal has mentioned that she created this character because she felt she would not be able to talk about these issues in her own avatar.[17] Although she does use expletives regularly and seems to exude supreme confidence on stage, she says that she was afraid of the consequences. This fear of judgement, peculiar to the content of the female comedians, also reveals the gendered access to language. Nabaneeta Dev Sen (2012: 73) points out that there are certain words that women seem not to be able to use publicly, and perhaps even privately. Beyond 'foul' language, it is possible to argue that there are certain subjects which remain out of bounds as topics for public discussion. Aditi Mittal says, 'I have realised that saying the words "sanitary napkins" in public is like standing in a Hogwarts common room and saying "Voldemort"'.[18] The description of her show on the Jagriti Theatre website (Bangalore) reads, 'Aditi Mittal is an *abla* Indian *nari* who is fed up of being an *abla* Indian *nari*. After years of being told to "be quiet, sit down, be seen not heard," the new a-blah Indian *nari* would like to say a few things'.[19]

The 'Indian' identity is used as a trope in most of the stand-up sets this article has so far discussed. Sumaira Shaikh and Kaneez Surka both mention that the environment in which they grew up taught them that their one aim in life should be to find the perfect man and get married. Aditi Mittal also jokes about being a single Indian woman at thirty. She also says at one point, 'I am terrified of sex, like every good Indian girl should be.'[20] The 'Indian' identity is constructed as being synonymous with 'tradition' — a tradition in which mothers expect their daughters to get married as soon as they reach legal age, a tradition in which parents worry about how to explain to their friends and family that their daughter is a stand-up comedian, a tradition in which motherhood is the natural destiny of women— subjects that come up in these comedy sets. Being 'Indian' seems almost to be a burden, although none of the comedians explicitly spell that out.

Beyond this 'Indian' identity, the sets performed by these women are able to recognise long existing structures of oppression and discrimination across time and space. Within this larger context, their physical presence on stage, their role as performers, and their use of the tool of comedy become acts of resistance and pose a challenge to universal norms and ideas.

Stand-up, Comedy, and Resistance

The term stand-up comedy has an in-built allusion to resistance in its similarity with the act of 'standing up' to something. In case of stand-up comedy, this standing up is important both in a physical and a political sense, or, it may be argued that the physical and the political are intertwined in the act of performing stand-up comedy.

Frances Gray (1994: 149) writes that the female comedian 'stands-up to be counted. Her task is to devise, develop, and project a self in a process of dialogue with an audience. In doing so she transforms the autobiographical process itself into a public event'.

Comedy, with its association of the grotesque, the bawdy, and the obscene is not often considered to be a high form of art, and most certainly not the domain of women. For a woman to be present on stage, that too for a solo act, would have been considered feat enough even in the previous century. For a woman to be a comedian is perhaps even more of a feat and a more noticeable act of resistance even today.

Stand-up comedy brings into the limelight, not just the content created by the women, but also, quite literally, their bodies. The new stand-up comedy in India presents a multi-layered act of viewing because of the format of consumption. On the one hand, these shows are performed on stage in front of a live audience. But the gaze of that audience is never recorded, even when the show is. Most of us have come to know these comedians through the recordings that have been uploaded to YouTube where live performances may be watched and re-watched by a global audience. Therefore, the content and the performed identity is also meant for both a local and a potentially global audience. The peculiarity of a live performance is lost. Instead of being a moment that passes, it is frozen in time — recorded, edited, and packaged into a capsule to be consumed, preferably over and over again.

As a form of live performance, stand-up comedy is connected to the presence of the audience. It may also involve and even depend upon one or more direct interactions with the audience, the charm of which is lost in its online recorded version.[21] Social media, nevertheless, creates different kinds of connections between performers and the audience — primarily in the comments section.

Neeti Palta says that after she had uploaded one of her videos at the same time a male comedian friend had uploaded his, she compared the comments he had received to those that she had. The comparison revealed that in an instance when both of them had been criticised, the male comic got called out for his content, whereas she got called out about the way she looked. Another comment read, 'You're not funny. Why don't you sit at home and make babies?'[22]

This comment, although stray, reveals the deep-rooted anxiety about seeing women occupying spaces they have traditionally not been ascribed to. To

occupy the stage, to be in the limelight, to have sole command over the microphone — it is an act of standing-up for women to gain access to the bare essentials of a stand-up set. Nabaneeta Dev Sen writes,

> Humour is a dangerous element. The humourist belongs to no fixed school of moral philosophy, promotes no particular ethical point-of-view, but flouts the existing mores, laughs at the existing conventions, finds flaws with the so-called logical structure of our lives. (2012: 76)

Prashasti Singh, in her short set, jokes about two kinds of people in the world — those who conform, and those who rebel. Breaking away from the regular binary of the good and the bad, the former, she says, are 'good' while the latter are 'cool'.[23] Even if one were to overlook the terminology, non-conformity seems to be built into the identity of the female comedian.

Beyond the verbal, the use of body language constitutes an important part of comedy even in its various traditional forms. Of the women comedians discussed in this article, it is Aditi Mittal who uses her body as a tool of comedy and resistance most visibly. Like certain words and phrases, certain actions would also traditionally be out of bounds for women. Mittal uses and controls these gestures in her set. She mimics the action of male masturbation, pelvic thrusts, and the physical gestures that accompany cat-calling on the streets. Through a comic imitation of these actions, Mittal is able to critique and challenge the very actions that threaten women in their everyday lives.

The form of stand-up comedy also provides the female comedian the opportunity to control the performing space in a unique way. Gadsby explains in *Nanette* that a joke survives on tension. She creates the tension, and then comes the punch-line which releases that tension, leading to laughter. Also, while the comedian is being looked at by the live audience, she is also looking back at them. And since she is controlling the tension and its subsequent release, she enjoys a unique power within that space. It is this nature of stand-up comedy that allows it so easily to transform into a tool of resistance, an act of standing-up.

The Last Laugh

In 2018, Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette* took the world by storm. In it, the Tasmanian comedian declared that she was going to quit comedy, joking that perhaps the declaration was not quite appropriately timed. But why did she want to quit comedy? She said that it was the essential element of stand-up comedy — the joke — more specifically, the form of the joke, that prevented her from telling the truth about herself. Because, for the joke to land, for the punch-line to work, the story had to be suspended in time — as a half-truth, an unfinished tale. She couldn't do it anymore, Gadsby said, because she needed her story told. Because it is not laughter but stories that hold the cure to the ailments that plague our minds, she argued. In an article in the *New York Times*, Melena Ryzik (2018) quite rightly points out that in the success

of the show, '...Ms. Gadsby has perhaps pointed the art of stand-up in an altogether new direction, even as she has repeatedly vowed, onstage, to quit the business.'[24] In this same article, Ryzik quotes Mike Birbiglia, the American stand-up comedian, who says of *Nanette*, 'I think that the magic trick of the show is that it is funny, and then it turns funny inside out.'

One of the biggest challenges facing women or any other voice from any margin is the challenge of being taken seriously, even if and when they get heard. In order to be heard such voices have to assume a serious voice, a sombre tone. Neither comedy as a form nor humour as a trait seem to fit into that scheme.

However, this new comedy has shown that the form of comedy and the nature of humour has elements of resistance built into them, and can structurally and ideally be a tool in the fight against structure of oppression and create a space where women can tell their tale. The stories of the Indian female comics are told to us in such a way that in the endit is we, the audience, who should realise that we are laughing at ourselves, that the joke is on us.

Notes

1 Here, I am following Toril Moi's explanation of the categories of female, feminist, and feminine.

2 The Internet is in agreement regarding attributing this quote to Lucile Ball, the American comedienne and actor, but unfortunately, I have not been able to locate the exact source of her comment.

3 There is a dearth of critical material on women and stand-up comedy performances in the Indian context. However, the woman comic in the West has received some critical attention. This includes Lindsay Elizabeth Rodgers' doctoral thesis on women's work and feminist laughter in stand-up comedy based in Ontario. Her interdisciplinary approach to the subject of women comics and comedy producers explores the issues of multiplicity of identities, deals with the nature of the audience, and provides a detailed analysis of case studies. It focuses closely on the question of power and the potential for resistance in stand-up comedy.

4 This article has been informed by theories of gender and performance, most notably of course, Judith Butler's seminal work.

5 It is not within the scope of this article to discuss similar comedy shows in other regional languages, but it suffices to say that they are mostly replicas of one another in terms of the format as well as the content of the jokes.

6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKMkV0FfWzo (accessed on 9 May 2020).

7 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RKvg7yqL7I (accessed on 9 May 2020).

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lngQxGRMq4 (accessed on 9 May 2020).

9 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7FNE3EI-fY (accessed on 9 May 2020).

10 https://www.facebook.com/TLCIndiaOfficial/videos/1370556386391428/ (accessed on 9 May 2020).

11 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7FNE3EI-fY (accessed on 9 May 2020).

12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lngQxGRMq4 (accessed on 9 May 2020).

13 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7FNE3EI-fY (accessed on 9 May 2020).

14 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6I1_GBV-D0 (accessed on 9 May 2020).

15 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fEnLGK8B5Y (accessed on 9 May 2020).
16 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCd61oVMCXs (accessed on 9 May 2020).
17 Ghoshe, Debarshi. 'Aditi Mittal talks about the things they wouldn't let her say and then some'. https://scroll.in/magazine/844417/aditi-mittal-talks-about-the-things-they-wouldnt-let-her-say-and-then-some (accessed on 9 May 2020).
18 https://www.netflix.com/watch/80183329?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C1%2C0db7735 c6d145cb5679b1a4b77451dd3525bf8e1%3A7a3add226a0a2d0af6acb68aa3121bf88d9b86ec%2C%2C (9 May 2020).
19 http://www.jagrititheatre.com/aditi-mittals-things-they-wouldnt-let-me-say (9 May 2020).
20 https://www.netflix.com/watch/80183329?trackId=13752289& tctx=0% 2C1% 2C0db7735c6d145cb5679b1a4b77451dd3525bf8e1%3A97 2c52c712bc97eed6e71542f2e29ba036e06864%2C%2C (9 May 2020).
21 Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* in its web series version is able to achieve this balance by breaking the fourth wall in innovative ways.
22 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lngQxGRMq4 (accessed on 9 May 2020).
23 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYpIZ4n-cFI (accessed on 9 May 2020).
24 Ryzik, Melena. 'The Comedy-Destroying, Soul-Affirming Art of Hannah Gadsby.' *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/24/arts/hannah-gadsby-comedy-nanette.html (accessed on 9 May 2020).

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Forging Identities through Friendships: Female Desire and Solidarity in Select Indian English Novels

Hiya Chatterjee

Abstract: One of the biggest challenges faced by the 'Global South' in this phase of globalisation has probably been the shift away from the family and the community (the strongest socio-cultural and economic base of these societies) to that of the individual identity. Thus, when women ceased to remain confined within the parameters of identity determined by the heteronormative society, they were accused of aping Western culture and denigrating their own cultural values. While mainstream mass culture until recently portrayed women only in association with the men (for e.g., the heroine as merely the 'love interest' in Bollywood movies), refusing to acknowledge their individuality, literature in English by women writers have depicted the changing status of women in the postcolonial, postmodern era by redefining their identity by presenting them as individuals outside of their family relations, with the power of choice and with an agency, contesting the idea of the oppressed and victimised 'Third World woman' in a patriarchal society. I intend to focus on the friendships and bonds between the women characters of select Indian novels in English such as Nayantara Sehgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985); Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* (1992); Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* (1999); and Thrity Umrigar's *The Space Between Us*, (2006). Although the concept of motherhood plays a crucial role in most of the novels, I have chosen to examine the bonds between women who have no familial ties, in order to analyse what makes women choose their companions in heteronormative societies where these same-sex friendships emphasise the individuality of the women. The relationships portrayed in these novels are often problematic, challenging the idea of female solidarity across the globe by highlighting the socio-cultural and economic obstacles that impede the development of true friendship in an inequitable society. Through a close study of these relationships, I will try to examine how the relationships between the women in these novels renegotiate their identities in an age of traditional revivalism.

Keywords: Indian English Fiction, Female Friendships, Intersectionality, Gender Studies, South Asian Studies

In *Friendship in Indian History: An Introduction*, Daud Ali and Emma J. Flatt write:

> Friendship, in particular, has over the last several decades gained a rich historiography in the fields of US, European and Middle Eastern history. Yet, Indian historians and anthropologists have, until recently, been reticent to engage with the theme of friendship despite, as these articles argue, copious evidence suggesting its importance. (Daud and Flatt 2017: 1)

According to them, the primary reason for the lack of adequate scholarship in this area is the (colonial) belief that the hierarchical feudal structure of Indian society, especially the existence of the caste system which is unique to South Asia, has acted as a deterrent to the development of an equitable, individuated and 'modern' notion of friendship. In Western philosophy, the idea of friendship has secured a place in the discourses of Aristotle, Cicero, Kant and Montaigne, and later in the eighteenth-century philosophical treatises of Adam Smith and David Hume. However, in recent times, many South Asian scholars have begun discovering the role of friendship in South Asian writings which predate colonialism, and this has emerged mainly out of their exploration of same-sex relationships in these works. In Indian philosophy, the notion of friendship has been treated significantly in ancient philosophical treatises such as the *Rig Veda*, and in later works related to statecraft such as Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Tales of legendary friendship such as that of Krishna and Sudhama, Karna and Duryodhana, and that of Krishna and Arjuna, also abound in the Hindu epics of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, as well as in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The Islamic scriptures of the *Quran* and the *Hadith* also mention the importance of choosing the right kind of friends to lead a life of faith and righteousness.

The common strand among most of these doctrines is either the exclusion of the idea of female friendship, or a tokenistic treatment of the same. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle believes that women, though capable of unconditional love within the familial ambit, are unsuitable for friendship. Bradshaw contends that for Aristotle women have a culturally conditioned rather than natural lack of prudence, leading women to suffer from incontinence or moral weakness that makes them incapable of the virtue necessary for perfect friendship (Bradshaw 1991: 563–64, 566–68, 569–73). Aristotle also claims that women's reason lacks authority over their emotions, thus implying that they are intellectually inferior to men. Derrida, in his essay 'Politics of Friendship', raises this crucial question, 'The double exclusion of the feminine in the philosophical paradigm of friendship would thus confer on it the essential and essentially sublime figure of virile homosexuality…this exclusion privileges the figure of the brother, the name of the brother than that of the father…' (1994: 384).

Friendship as an essentially homosocial bond was situated between the public and the private spheres of the masculine society, a domain inaccessible

to the contemporary woman. Besides, since friendship, personal, political, or both, was considered to be a product of modernity, the figure of the woman, the custodian of tradition, was relegated to the background in the discourse concerning friendship and its socio-cultural significance. Since women were always already defined in terms of their relationships with other men, what Janice Raymond calls 'hetero-relational',[1] same-sex friendships among women hardly ever received any attention despite the overwhelming evidence of its presence in women's writings of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Twentieth-century feminist scholarship in the West looked beyond the masculinisation of the notion of friendship and produced numerous works on women's writings which explored the camaraderie between women beyond their kinship relations. However, in the context of South Asia, it is only recently that South Asian scholars have begun discovering the role of friendship in South Asian writings which predate colonialism, and this has emerged mainly out of their exploration of same-sex relationships in these works. In their seminal publication, *Same Sex Love in India*, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai emphasise the value of friendship as depicted in many of the ancient, medieval and modern Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic writings. Contemporary South Asian literature in English has also dealt with the issues of friendship within the context of the other major themes such as those of class, caste, religion, ethnicity and nationality.

However, South Asian feminists have not shied away from questioning the problematic notion of universal sisterhood among women, an appeal sent out by feminist scholars such as Robin Morgan in her anthology on international women's movement. Chandra Talpade Mohanty makes an excellent analysis of the problematic nature of the Eurocentric concept of the 'woman' as a monolithic category and of 'transcendental' feminism proposed by the likes of Morgan by emphasising the need for transnational and cross-cultural perspectives in the political struggles undertaken by women across the world (Mohanty 2003: 117). Though Mohanty does not use the term 'intersectionality' in her work, she does imply that the identity categories such as race, class and caste cannot be glossed over while attempting to construct a feminist paradigm:

> The experience of being woman can create an illusory unity, for it is not the experience of being woman, but the meanings attached to gender, race, class, and age at various historical moments that is of strategic significance. In other words, it is the kind of interpretive frame we use to analyze experiences anchored in gender, race, class, and sexual oppression that matters. (Mohanty 2003: 118)

As in any other struggle against economic, social and political inequality, the call for solidarity among women of different classes, castes, communities and nations has been crucial in this case, but this is where the question of unity becomes problematic. Arguably, gender cannot be categorised in the

same way as other categories such as religion, caste, class etc. for the simple reason that apart from belonging to the same sex, women do not possess a shared history of oppression, political or cultural traditions. Women, especially those with privileges, often identify more with their class, caste and religion rather than with their gender. In her ground-breaking work *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, K.W. Crenshaw points out that it is essential to consider the intersections of racism and patriarchy, (1994: 93) and in the same vein it has been argued by South Asian feminists to take into account the intersections of class, caste and gender while establishing how power structures operate vis-à-vis women. Mohanty's theoretical propositions are investigated more specifically and intensively by studies which link gender to class, caste and sexuality in South Asia. In one such study, Banerjee and Ghosh underscore the fallacy of placing the woman as a passive victim of the patriarchal hegemonic structures. Intersectionality is not merely about locating the oppressor and oppressed in existing power structures, but also about accentuating the ways in which the narratives pertaining to the preconceived roles of the perpetrator and victim often shift and are subverted to expose the diffusive ways in which power works in society. Banerjee and Ghosh believe that, 'Intersectionality, unlike identity politics, by rejecting the notion of primary contradiction, provides a scope to initiate dialogue among marginal groups. This enables intersectional research to move towards building coalitions among multiple marginalities rather than fragmenting opposition to the processes of oppression' (Banerjee and Ghosh 2018: 7).

In the context of gender, one of the major processes of oppression is marriage and the production of family. This is interesting because for many hegemonic structures, at least in South Asia, inter-sect(ional) marriages might operate as the point of departure for abolishing systemic oppression. The caste system, for instance, can be arguably dissolved only through inter-caste marriage, as endogamy is at the root of this kind of social hierarchy.[2] The same can be said to work to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of class, religion or nationality. However, this does not hold true in case of discrimination on grounds of gender. Marriage, whether it be between two consenting adults, between two partners who have chosen each other, or arranged by their elders, cannot in anyway be said to empower them and place them on an equal footing as men. A considerable percentage of marriages in our country tend to do the opposite. This is because marriages in our country do not merely consist of the relationship between the husband and the wife, but as soon as the woman is married and leaves her native home, she is co-opted into the family of the husband, where her act of rebellion to marry someone she loves pales in front of her wifely duties (albeit with a few exceptions). Marriage as an institution (and the family as a unit preserving its sanctity) is inherently patriarchal and once a woman enters into it, her identity

as a woman is further subsumed under the social roles assigned to her one after the other. Uma Chakravarti (2018: 72) contends: 'the structure of marriage reproduces both class and caste and inequality and thus the entire production system through its tightly controlled system of reproduction'. Nivedita Menon (2012: 6) further emphasises the capitalistic agenda of the family: 'The family as an institution is based on inequality and its function is to perpetuate particular forms of private property ownership and lineage — that is patrilineal forms of property and descent.'

Though intersectional feminism might seem to provide an alternative to treating feminist issues, this theory too is not without its limitations. Nivedita Menon problematises the tendency of intersectional feminism to locate the 'woman' as the subject of feminism. She argues that long before 'intersectionality' became the buzzword of feminist movements in Europe and America, the multiple identity markers of the woman in the Global South had already occupied the centre of all feminist issues. Menon asserts:

> The presumed subject of feminist politics has been destabilised in India most notably by the politics of caste, religious communist identity and sexuality. The politics of caste and religious community identity insistently pose a question mark over the assumed commonality of female experience, thus challenging the identity of "woman", the supposed subject of feminist politics; while the politics of sexuality throws into disarray the certainty of recognisably gender coded bodies, the male-female bipolarity, the naturalising of heterosexual desire and its institutionalisation in marriage. (Menon 2015: 38)

By situating Judith Butler's abstract theoretical propositions of the instability of gender amidst concrete socio-political premises, Menon questions the legitimacy of intersectional feminism in addressing women's issues in the Global South. Menon and other South Asian feminists point out that heteronormative power structures function through the institution of marriage and the unit of the family, and that friendship and solidarity between women are devalourised as opposed to those between men. If male camaraderie is considered essential for social, political and cultural advancement of the patriarchal capitalist agenda because it privileges the masculine over other gender identities, female solidarity intends to thwart this objective. The question that emerges from this is: Can an extra-institutional relationship such as friendship, in which the woman can exercise her choice, and which does not entail her giving up her identity, be believed to endow a woman with the power to resist and subvert the heteronormative forces which delimit her potential as a member of the society?

One of the ways to analyse friendship and relationships by choice among women is to study feminism through the lens of queer theory. The link between queer activism and feminism in the West has been believed by many to be tenuous, as, according to Diane Richardson (2006: 19–20), '[t]he politics of queer are said to centre on local activities of performative transgression,

within which cultural realms tend to dominate, while for feminists the point of political engagement continues to aim for resonance with global struggle and the intent to participate in the state, political and economic arenas'.

However, it can be argued that in India, owing to the haunting presence of article 377 till September 2018,[3] queer activism has always already been located within the socio-political domain. Although queer theory problematised much of feminist ideology, it also empowered women because it foregrounded the knowledge of a woman's desire and body, issues which were and still are considered taboos in most parts of the nation. Post-independence, one of the major issues which brought these regional women's organisations together was the response to the Shiv Sena's attack on Deepa Mehta's 1998 film *Fire*, a pathbreaking film in its depiction of women's sexuality and lesbianism. C. Shah (2005: 144) remarks, '…[t]he women's movements were the first to articulate concern over the control over sexuality and the societal constructions of gender and are hence the closest link and support for the nascent 'queer' movements in the country.'

The intersections between feminist and queer theory may be said to advance the project of decolonising the feminist discourse and of locating it within the structure and culture of Indian society.

I intend to focus on the friendships and bonds between the women characters of the following novels: *Rich Like Us* (1985) by Nayantara Sehgal, *The Binding Vine* (1992) by Shashi Deshpande, *Sister of My Heart* (1999) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and *The Space Between Us* (2006) by Thrity Umrigar. Although the concept of motherhood plays a crucial role in most of these novels, I have chosen to examine the bonds between women who have no familial ties, in order to analyse what makes women choose their companions in patriarchal, heteronormative societies where woman's identity is defined in association with the men of her life.

This also calls for the declaration that the same-sex relationships in these novels are not always erotic in nature, and that they operate within the framework of the heteronormative society. As Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (2006: 26) write in the Preface to *Same-Sex Love in India*, 'Love need not take an explicitly sexual form, but it is nearly always expressed in language of poetic excess and metaphoric power.' Neither are the relationships of these novels simplistically egalitarian or always positive in nature; they are either forged unexpectedly in situations of crises or severed due to overpowering psychological conflicts. The friendships between Sudha and Anju in *The Sister of My Heart* and that between Urmi and Vanaa in *The Binding Vine* are childhood relationships between people belonging to similar backgrounds; that between Rose and Sonali in *Rich Like Us* is a bond between two like-minded women belonging to different nations and age groups; and the relationships between Sera and Bhima in *The Space Between Us*, between Mona and Rose in *Rich Like Us*, and between Urmi and Shakutai in *The*

Binding Vine are not as easily classifiable due to the various social, cultural and economic barriers which remain between the women despite a shared sense of loss and alienation.

In *Sister of My Heart*, the love between Anju and Sudha clearly has mythical overtones. The end of the novel shows Anju and Sudha locked in an embrace after their reunion at the airport, with Sudha's baby Dayita in between them. This scene carries stark resemblance with numerous hymns of the *Rig Veda* which celebrate the process of creation by two women, 'The sisters ten, unwedded and united, together grasp the Babe, the new-born infant' (Vanita and Kidwai 2006: 37). The entire novel is suffused with mythical imagery and language, something which binds the two women together. Heterosexual love is considered impulsive and all-consuming, whereas love between women is more enabling, subtle, and more powerful. Ashok waits for Sudha, but refuses to accept her daughter as his own, whereas Anju feels betrayed by Sunil when she discovers he is secretly in love with Sudha. It is interesting to note that the two women choose each other, or rather, are drawn towards each other at times of emotional crises: when Sunil fails to help Anju during her depression after her miscarriage, it is Sudha who comes to her aid, not by counselling her or repeating inane words of consolation, but by telling a story which highlights Anju's importance in Sudha's life. Anju tells Sunil, 'I don't think you've ever loved anyone the way we love each other. Sudha's like my other half — how could I just sit back and let her mother-in-law and that jellyfish of a husband force her into an abortion she didn't want?' (Divakaruni 1999: 194).

Sudha too rejects Ashok's proposal in order to fulfill her promise to Anju to go and stay with her in America. Sudha and Anju, therefore, choose each other over the men in their lives, and try to break out of the 'compulsory heterosexuality' which acts through 'the cluster of forces within which women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable, even if unsatisfying or oppressive components of their lives' (Rich 1980: 651).

In *The Binding Vine*, although Urmi is happily married to Kishore, the language of desire strongly pervades the narrative when she describes her childhood friend and sister-in-law Vanaa, similar to the close comfort between Sudha and Anju, '…there is a greater ease between us than there is between sisters, [who have] a straining at the bonds, a shame at being too close, too much alike. There is none of that between us' (Deshpande 2007: 153).

What these women feel for each other is desire, different from the sexual or romantic desire which they feel for their husbands, and the absolute opposite of that forbidden attraction which men feel for apparently unattainable women. Desire has come be redefined by postmodern theorists to denote an active force which has the power to resist and subvert. According to Jacques Lacan

(1991: 43), desire 'is only once it is formulated, named in the presence of the other, that desire appears in the full sense of the term'.

In case of feminist and queer theory, desire has come to represent a productive force, somewhat like power, and it is not confined to the sexual and the erotic. As Madhavi Menon points out in her work *Infinite Variety: A History of Desire in India* (2018: 19–20), 'desire can attach to fantasy, object, story, person, institution, idea, or all of the above.... Desire is not (only) love, and neither is it (only) sex'.

The rift that grows between these two pairs of friends owes its origin to their hetero-relationality. Urmi confesses to herself that as soon as their friendship transformed into kinship, the distance grew, never to be fully bridged, because of 'Kishore coming between' them. When Sudha finds out her father's reality, how he had taken advantage of his gullibility, and then how he had abandoned him in the time of danger, she feels alienated from Anju because of her deep sense of guilt, passed on as a legacy.

The unlikely bond that develops between Rose and Mona also happens under similar circumstances: both women suffer from a shared sense of neglect and alienation because of the callous and chauvinistic attitude of Ram, the privileged upper-class businessman for whom Rose, a British woman, a cockney memsahib, leaves behind her entire life to come to his house in India as a second wife. The open hostility between the two women culminates ironically in friendship as Rose saves Mona from self-immolation. Both Mona and Rose epitomise the faithful, long-suffering Hindu wife, aware of her husband's failings but blindly devoted to him. Sahgal writes in another part of the novel:

> [A]ll wives are good because they have little choice…The Hindu wife is a Hindu wife and nothing else. And it is not until we can take the goodness of women less for granted that we shall learn to value it. (Sahgal 1991: 202)

It is clear therefore, that, if Mona is bound to her house by her unwavering faith in the hoary tradition of marriage and due to her child Dev, Rose, who is completely deracinated due to her marriage with Ram, has no other option but to stay.

> Rose could have no more abandoned her marriage than an exploration of the Antarctic mid-ocean, or a story mid-story…. Whatever the reason she was good and stuck. (Sahgal 1991: 218)

Her status as Ram's wife becomes her only identity after marriage, and she is made to feel like an outsider not only by Ram's family but also by the other women Ram has affairs with. All that an inter-racial marriage does in this case is polish the ego of the anglophile Ram, who delights in correcting Rose's pronunciation and grammar, and does as little in emancipating a woman like Rose who does not enjoy any of the privileges of belonging to the race

and the nation of the former coloniser. What is not enunciated in the novel, but is implicit, is Rose's economic dependence on Ram. Sonali, an Oxford-returned civil servant, chooses not to marry at all after her disenchantment with her childhood friend, later lover and fellow civil servant Ravi Kachru, and constantly encounters the patriarchal mindset of the society in the form of her own mother and sister. The choice that Sonali can exercise is due to her financial independence. However, although Sonali escapes an unhappy and unequal marriage, the novel does not present her as an emblem of female emancipation but rather as a victim of the constant patronisation and eventual injustice of a system which punishes ethical integrity and rewards sycophancy. The looming presence of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, herself an empowered female, does nothing to alleviate the everyday discriminations faced by women like Sonali in the professional sphere.

Sonali and Rose find solace in each other's company because of their shared principles, humanitarian notions, earnestness of opinion, and because they are equally disillusioned with power and the people with whom it rests. If Sonali is directly affected by the political crisis of the nation, Rose becomes a victim of the chauvinism of Ram and the capitalistic exploitation of her stepson Dev. Similarly, Sera and Bhima in Thrity Umrigar's *The Space Between Us*, and Urmi and Shakutai in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*, develop a bond due to shared experiences of emotional trauma. Sera Dubash, an upper class Parsi woman is hugely dependent on her domestic help Bhima, but the relationship between them is highly unequal. Both women are victims of oppression; Sera silently tolerates her husband Feroz's physical abuse and Bhima is deserted by her husband who takes their son along with him. In Deshpande's novel, both Urmi and Shakutai suffer the loss of their daughters; Urmi through the tragic death of her youngest child Anusha, and Shakutai, through the violent rape of her eldest daughter, Kalpana. In Sera's abusive marriage, Bhima plays the role of the savior: 'Out of the blue fog of time, Sera remembers the blow and the balm; the tormentor and the healer: Feroz and Bhima' (Umrigar 2009: 126). Umrigar highlights the selflessness of the intimacy between Sera and Bhima by distinguishing between the self-oriented act of sex between Sera and Feroz, and Bhima's unconditional affection towards her. In *The Binding Vine*, despite being surrounded by an affectionate family and her childhood friend Vanaa, Urmi too feels more at home in Shakutai's little hovel than in her own home. Their shared emotional trauma brings them together, and an unspoken love develops, a love more powerful than even the organic, childhood friendships or familial connections.

Do 'subjective experiences' then necessarily lead to the creation of a sense of camaraderie? While critiquing 1970s feminism, Sharmila Rege (2003: 101) asserts that when 'the subjective experiences of knowledge' become 'the basis of the theorizing of universal womanhood,' it merely leads to the exclusion of the nuances of such relationships. Despite the profound emotional

connection with Bhima, Sera does not really transcend the boundaries of class or caste. As Umrigar notes in the beginning of *The Space Between Us*, Sera lauds Bhima's efficiency and cleanliness, but only to prevent Dinaz, her daughter, from buying them a dishwasher to reduce Bhima's load. Like most servants in most households in South Asia, Bhima has her separate utensils. Sera confesses to herself secretly, 'The thought of Bhima sitting on her furniture repulses her. The thought makes her stiffen, the same way she had tensed the day she caught her daughter, then fifteen, giving Bhima an affectionate hug' (Umrigar 2009: 174).

This might seem astonishing due to Sera's previously mentioned intimacy with Bhima, both physical and emotional, but it is actually naturalised through the precedence of prevalent ideology of hierarchy over that of personal experience and opinion. Thus, acts of generosity and feelings of repulsion can co-exist in these societies; attitudes which are reflected in our everyday treatment of beggars. Both class and caste pose major obstacles in the formation of an egalitarian relationship between Sera and Bhima, as Sera's identification with her class and acceptance in her community are crucial for maintaining her upper-class respectability. Although Umrigar does not refer to Bhima's caste in the novel, it is clear that the disparity between her and Sera Dubash has more than merely an economic basis. Evidently, the work done by Bhima 'is assigned a low rank because it is associated with women, does not call for any particular or identifiable skills, is considered drudgery, involves cleaning which is influenced by the ideas of purity and pollution' (Cock 1980: 127). As argued by most social scientists, the hierarchy of caste is predicated upon the ideas of purity and pollution, on the notion that certain communities are impure because of their food habits, their lifestyle, their limited access to sanitation facilities etc., all of which reinforce their marginalisation and deprivation. Although Sera finances Bhima's granddaughter Maya's education and even helps her to get an abortion, she does it out of a sense of gratitude for Bhima, and also to return the favour of the services that Bhima had unconditionally offered to her and her family, services which lay outside the ambit of her daily tasks. The discrimination which Sera practices against Bhima is supposedly compensated by the kindness she shows for her, and also legitimised by social sanction and the normalisation of such behaviour to one's servants. The relationship between Bhima and Sera does not cease to be hierarchical, and the inequality is rudely exposed when Sera finds out that Viraf, her son-in-law had seduced Maya and was the illegitimate father of her child. Unable to face the betrayal of her son-in-law and desperate to conceal it from Dinaz, her daughter, Sera becomes complicit in Viraf's brazenness when he accuses her of theft and dismisses her from service. It is clear that Sera, despite her affection for Bhima, chooses her own family's honour over that of Bhima, and her affection for her old servant, is immediately overpowered by her necessity to protect her family, which Michelle Barrett

calls 'an ideological construct', a social and not a natural formation in a society.

What we see here is the conflict between the personal and the social, a consequence of capitalistic and patriarchal modes of production. Eli Zaretsky contends that capitalism, in socialising the production formerly undertaken in household units, created the idea of the family as 'a separate realm from the economy'. It also created the realm of the 'personal' — a subjective preoccupation with relationships, individuality and the meaning of fulfillment, much of which takes place within the family. This eventually led to the identification of femininity with the realm of the personal (Zaretsky 1976: 180). When Sera shows kindness towards her servant Bhima by paying her granddaughter's tuition, she is acting on the realm of the personal, but when this clashes with the realm of the social, she has to prioritise the needs of her family, especially when a male member is concerned, for although she can distinguish between just and unjust, she has to silence her conscience and wield her power over Bhima. The power politics between Sera and Bhima has a firm basis on the ideological apparatuses of class, caste, family and society. Thus, if her contribution towards Maya's education does have the potential to bring about social change, Viraf's exploitation of Maya's sexuality ruins her life in multiple ways.

In *The Binding Vine*, Shakutai's daughter Kalpana shares a similar fate when she is raped by her uncle, i.e., her mother's brother-in-law Prabhakar. When Kalpana's case captures public attention and a police investigation threatens to reveals the truth, Sulu, who is Prabhakar's wife and Shakutai's sister, kills herself by self-immolation. In both the novels, the women suffer for the actions of the men of the family who are consumed by their selfish and perverse sexual desire for younger women, legitimised by the society's silent complicity. For Viraf and Prabhakar, Maya and Kalpana are desirable virgin bodies whose sexuality should remain under their control. Incidentally, the names of both girls have similar meanings that suggest, on the one hand, their parents' love for them, and on the other, their status as invisible, voiceless women existing in the rapacious fancies of men. The low class and caste status of both girls make them more vulnerable to sexual predators like Viraf and Prabhakar, for, 'Men have institutionalized mechanisms to escape the incurrence of pollution through sexual intercourse with a low caste woman' (Dube 2003: 250), whereas women are considered to be the custodians of *izzat* or the honour of the family. In both cases, the family becomes a tool of oppression; a tool used by society to enforce patriarchy by prohibiting a woman to defend the truth and thus, defend the victim instead of the perpetrator. It is in these ways that socio-cultural constructs such as the unit of the family and the age-old traditions conspire to make women collusive figures in reinstating capitalist patriarchy.

These novels demonstrate the insurmountable hurdles in the path of achieving female solidarity, and the reductionist notion of universal sisterhood. They question the assumption that women's shared oppression can simplistically lead to mutual understanding and solidarity by throwing light upon the numerous mechanisms that work to divide women and to define them only in terms of their socially and culturally imposed identities. In all the novels, the friendships between the women characters provide them with a refuge from the societal forces of oppression which are often embodied by their own families. The friendships that these women forge in these novels enable them to strengthen their individuated identities instead of roping them within another communal framework with an insidious agenda. Instead of harping on the impossibility of overcoming the obstacles, these works uphold different forms of resistance as possibilities of confronting the divergent hierarchical mechanisms that delimit women's identities beyond their kinship roles. They also emphasise the need to acknowledge the struggle that goes behind creating solidarity and forging friendships despite these obstacles, on individual as well as on collective levels. As Virginia Woolf (1927: 79) puts it, 'Through the intimacy which is knowledge, friendship becomes a vehicle of self-definition for women, clarifying identity through relation to an other who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self'.

Critics like Lillian Faderman have also noted how women in the early twentieth century were encouraged to harbour romantic friendships with members of the same-sex, and the opposition came only when these friendships started threatening male authority and demanded social change.[4] Such friendships between women are political in nature as they carry the potential of acting as tools of social change, because they contribute towards the creation of a positive sense of selfhood, an identity forged independent of their relationships with men. Moreover, in the novels, the term 'woman' as a stable identity is also problematised through the privileging of different identities at different points of time in the characters' lives. During the present era of socio-economic unrest, such bonds fashioned through resistance are all the more necessary to collectively combat the oppressive forces of the family and the nation which seek to dismantle the little that feminist activism has achieved in India till now.

Notes

1. Janice Raymond, in her work *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*, uses the term 'hetero-relational' to argue that women and femininity have mostly been defined in correspondence with men., cf. *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*. 2002. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.
2. In his article, 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', B.R. Ambedkar famously contends that, 'Endogamy is the only characteristic that is peculiar

to caste,' cf. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 1*. Edited by Frances W. Pritchett. 1979. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, pp. 3-22.

3. After multiple and protracted protests by the LGBTQ rights activists, on 6 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India declared Section 377 of the IPC (the law that criminalised 'unnatural' sexual acts) unconstitutional.
4. See Faderman, Lilian. *Chloe Plus Olivia: An Anthology of Lesbian Literature from the 17th Century to the Present*. 1995. London: Penguin Books.for an extensive discussion of the term 'Romantic friendship' and its connotations in 19th Century Europe.

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‘More Vegetal than Sexual’: An Ontological Reading of Gender and Madness in Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*

Srinjoyee Dutta

Abstract: Jacques Derrida, in the seminal essay ‘*Geschlecht*: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference’, rethinks and deconstructs the ontological notion of *Dasein* as conceptualised by Martin Heidegger, within the framework of sexual difference. He attempts to interrogate the existential analytic of Being so as to displace the ‘sheltered’ anatomy of *Dasein* into the slippery grounds of sexual identity and challenge the apparent neutrality of the former. By positing the palpable discomfort of the famous ‘end of metaphysics’ with the notion of sexual identity, Derrida lays the ground for a potential subversion of the same. This poses a problem, almost threatens what Derrida understands as the polysemic, connotative and fluid nature of the term ‘*geschlecht*’. In the claim of neutrality, which assumes a binary in itself, Derrida critiques the space of *Dasein*, of being-there, as conceptualised by a major part of continental twentieth-century philosophy, as a necessarily masculine space. Through the act of neutralising anthropology and its reach, silencing psychoanalytic categories such that *Dasein* entails an irreducibility to the former, there is effective assurance that sexual difference cannot measure up to the majestic and transcendental question of Being. Using this as the theoretical springboard, the article will attempt to contextualise and locate the problem of phenomenological and ontological identity in the novel *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang.

Keywords: Ontology, Vegeterianism, Dasein

Jacques Derrida, in the seminal essay ‘*Geschlecht*: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference’, rethinks and deconstructs the ontological notion of *Dasein* as conceptualised by Martin Heidegger, within the framework of sexual difference.[1] He attempts to interrogate the existential analytic of Being so as

to displace the 'sheltered' anatomy of *Dasein* into the slippery grounds of sexual identity and challenge the apparent neutrality of the former. By positing the palpable discomfort of the famous 'end of metaphysics' with the notion of sexual identity, Derrida lays the ground for a potential subversion of the same. He writes,

> It is as if… sexual difference did not rise to the height of ontological difference … insofar as it is opened up to the question of being, insofar as it has a relation to being, in that very reference, *Dasein* would not be sexed. Discourse on sexuality could then be abandoned to the sciences or philosophies of life, to anthropology, sociology, biology, or perhaps even to religion or morality. (Derrida 1989a: 66)

This poses a problem, almost threatens what Derrida understands as the polysemic, connotative and fluid nature of the term '*geschlecht*'.[2] In the claim of neutrality, which assumes a binary in itself, Derrida critiques the space of *Dasein*, of being-there, as conceptualised by a major part of continental twentieth-century philosophy, as a necessarily masculine space. Through the act of neutralising anthropology and its reach, silencing psychoanalytic categories such that *Dasein* entails an irreducibility to the former, there is effective assurance that sexual difference cannot measure up to the majestic and transcendental question of Being.

Using this as the theoretical springboard, the article will attempt to contextualise and locate the problem of phenomenological and ontological identity in the novel *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang. Located in South Korea, the novel traces the question of 'Being' vis-à-vis the protagonist, Yeong-hye, who in her unnerving quest to 'become a tree' challenges the centrality of the 'human' to the notion of Being. Situated at the centre of the nexus of sexual violence, mental disorder, gendered existence, and South Korean identity, she raises a more fundamental philosophical paradigm with regards to the limit of violence and its role in the formation of the Human Subject. While at a glance, the text seems to be a defence of the elementary notion of 'vegetarianism' as a choice, a closer reading reveals the thematic of the conflict between identity, ontology, and everyday praxis located within one's race, one's gendered body, and the spectral presence of the Cartesian cogito that fails to anchor the same. The text then becomes an investigation of the being-other-than-human, while taking into cognisance the fragile ontological promise of being-human. The article will explore the aforementioned questions vis-à-vis the overarching but often confining discourse of the 'Global South'[3] and investigate whether the philosophical and often radical ontological underpinnings of sexual identity can be a possible lens to formulate and understand the former.

Yeong-hye, the protagonist of the novel, is often described in two contrary ways: she is both 'unremarkable' in the sense of being an average South Korean middle-class, familial woman, 'plain' when viewed from her husband's

lens, and remarkable in a pervasive sense of 'strangeness'. Within the matrix of an identity bound by the Confucian[4] patriarchal sensibility of South Korea, she appears to be 'marked' by small but noticeable moments of rebellion: her voracious reading coupled with her laconic speech, the mundane nature of her attire coupled with her insistence on not wearing a bra, her rejection of the socio-cultural and violent stamping of South Korean paradigms of beauty, and finally, the spectrality of her body, at once challenging the corporeal while reinforcing it, all manifest in her choice to turn vegetarian and then give up food altogether. Consider the description of her physicality when her husband first finds out about her choice in the middle of the night:

> It was cold enough as it was, but the sight of my wife was even more chilling.… She was standing, motionless, in front of the fridge. Her face was submerged in the darkness so I couldn't make out her expression, but the potential options all filled me with fear. Her thick, naturally black hair was fluffed up, dishevelled, and she was wearing her usual white ankle-length nightdress. (Kang 2015: 7)

As the novel progresses, her husband's deep-seated misogyny coupled with her family's purported cluelessness and denial becomes apparent. Interestingly, all of them, with the exception of her sister and her sister's husband, come to think of the choice as some kind of mental disorder resulting from a 'global fad' called 'vegetarianism', insofar as they try to reinforce South Korean bourgeois familial values and identity through degrees of force-feeding or assume it to be a lifestyle choice born out of the compulsion to lose weight. Not only are their assumptions confined to South Korean socio-cultural identity, especially embedded within the nation's recent transition to democratic statehood and being an economic superpower, they are also quick to abandon the daughter to a mental institution without attempting to understand her psycho-sexual identity.

One eventually traces Yeong-hye's trauma to patriarchal violence embedded deep within the traditional familial order. Her father is a generous and benevolent man given to violent temper tantrums, a trait that her brother inherits. The nature of this violence is underlined in two important episodes: the first more pivotal episode occurs during a family lunch in which she refuses to touch meat. After a series of arguments, ranging from Western capitalist trends, Buddhist practices, to women's innate tendency towards the 'hysterical' fail to garner a positive response, all semblance of rationality is discarded and the father forces her to eat meat whilst slapping her twice in the face. In response, Yeong-hye spits the food out, picks up a knife and slits her wrists. The second episode is her husband's reaction to her choice. Not only does he feel 'victimised' by his wife's lack of sense of duty towards him but he also rapes her at least twice before finally filing for divorce. Thus, what appears as an idiosyncratic, albeit unsettling reaction to violence actually reveals a more dangerous pattern that pervades in the psycho-sexual identity, both mental

and bodily, of *being woman*. It is in this revelation that the gap between the ontic and the ontological suffers a foreclosure and one is compelled to regard Being as a possibly gendered idea. This is further evidenced by the fact that while Yeong-Hye exhibits the symptoms of insanity in her acceptance of death, her sister In-hye also begins to relate to her crisis and finds herself confronting her own madness vis-à-vis her state of 'being there'. Thus, the much-celebrated gap between *Dasein*'s 'neutrality' and the inherent bias of the ontic sciences is thrown into chaos. Being is subjected to a violent gendered opening and the spatio-temporal purity of *Dasein* qua *Dasein* now confronts cultural and corporeal identity. In thinking about *ipseity* and *Dasein*, Derrida raises the following questions:

> What… if it were an ontological structure of *ipseity*? If the *Da* of *Dasein* were already "sexual"? And what if, though not self-evident, neutralization were already a violent operation?... every proper body of one's own [*corps propre*] is sexed, and there is no *Dasein* without its own body…. (Derrida 1989a: 74–75)

Hence, in this unorthodox understanding of the bodily nature of being, one can find Yeong-hye's identity or *ipseity* formation manifest itself vis-à-vis the layers of South Korean identity and often suffocating idea that it is indeed incumbent upon the 'Global South', if one were to use a generic notion, to harmonise between a national identity and a cosmopolitan pull that the terms generate by definition. It is within these hierarchical taxonomies of identity formation that Being, as necessarily beyond these categories but deeply affected by the same, reveals itself in the novel. It becomes apparent that Yeong-hye is not merely a passive recipient of violence: her will to transcend the human, become non-human, posthuman even, is a will to move away from the violence she finds within herself, fanned by the aforementioned taxonomic classifications. Her vegetarianism and subsequent rejection of the human or the Humanist impulse is not merely the symptom of a patient with a mental disorder, but a deeper understanding of her own violent self that seeks to destroy everything around her. It is important to note that her decision to turn vegetarian and the chain of events that follow begin with a dream in which she finds herself dripping with blood, having violently killed and eaten a living being. She also keeps seeing her face in a pool of blood and the sensation of estrangement increases: she is unable to recognise herself. Perhaps, in the schema of events, this is the moment in which she realises the obscuring of her own being within the phallogocentric matrix. The rejection of the violence within herself then becomes the rejection of the violence of that very matrix.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva describes the abject as that which causes the dichotomy of the self and the other to break down in a way that results in the loss of meaning in the Symbolic Order. In short, it is that which causes the supposedly rigid boundary between the Semiotic and the Symbolic to blur in a way that the subject is both fascinated and repulsed by it at the

same point of time.[5] Interestingly, amongst the examples that Kristeva gives, she designates the corpse as the epitome of the abject such that its absolute corporeality and humanness make a person cringe, vomit, etc. Thus, even as the edible nature of her own social self becomes softer and more malleable, Yeong-hye's own definitions of that which is palatable, both literally and metaphorically, become stringent. By extension, she projects her own anxiety of being consumed by patriarchy onto her food: the more she moulds herself or attempts to mould herself into certain codes of socially acceptable conduct, her speaking body begins to resist and reject subsistence of all sorts, familiar or not. Kristeva describes food loathing as the most archaic form of abjection; in the context of non- assimilation, she claims that since '… the food is not an "other" for "me" [her]… I [she] expel[s] *myself [herself]*, I [she] spit[s] *myself [herself] out*, I [she] abject[s] *myself [herself]* within the same motion through which "I" ["she"] claim[s] to establish *myself [herself]*' (Kristeva 1982: 3).

This abjection then compels Yeong-hye to embark on a quest towards consuming her own body insofar as she attempts symbolic autosarcophagy. In the interlinking of the structures that govern consumption, of food, of commodities, of women, the limits of the symbolic orders intertwine. Toril Moi posits that Kristeva, in her positioning of the feminine, of the marginal, locates women at the limit of the symbolic order, constantly threatening the very fabric of that order.[6] Similarly, anthropophagy, in its discursive ideations, has been located at the limit of a 'civilised' world order, a monster prowling on the blurring edges of the Symbolic like the woman caught in her abjection, leaking from the orifices, and eating and vomiting her own psycho-social self out.[7] The event of Yeong-hye's consumption of her own self and her peace with the body physically eating itself on the inside is what can be categorised as an epistemic and tangible hermeneutic circle conceptually straddles both the notions of *endocannibalism* and *exocannibalism*. She eats her own self in her attempt to be nonhuman, posthuman but simultaneously consumes the foe, the enemy, the Other, in a jubilant moment of triumph over her own abjection. It is the final reaction to the violence she has inherited from a traumatic history, which reveals itself in her dreams that she calls a 'palimpsest of horror' (Kang 2015: 28), in which she strangles throats and sticks her fingers into eyeballs. Another pivotal moment for the reader to surmise this association with violence occurs when Yeong-hye, after being admitted to the hospital for slitting her wrists, leaves the hospital bed one morning and is found calmly sunbathing on a bench with her upper torso naked. Yet there is blood on her lips and the crushed body of a bird that she has bitten and killed in her hand, thereby creating contrary signifiers or images. Similarly, during a conversation with her brother-in-law, her unflinchingly calm expression rattles him. Kang writes,

> Such uncanny serenity actually frightened him, making him think that perhaps this was a surface impression left behind after any amount of unspeakable viciousness had been digested, or else settled down inside her as a kind of sediment. (Kang 2015: 76)

Moreover, the recurring dream that she confesses to having, reveals itself to be a haunting face on a rotting corpse, that is presumably her own.

Further, as the story progresses and as her condition deteriorates, the Semiotic or the Real threatens to take over. Not only does language fall apart, failing to articulate the nature of an ontological subversion, the affective facet of Yeong-hye's daily interactions also begin to fail. More and more, the reader finds her curled up in a foetal position, in an attempt to recede to mere pre-linguistic consciousness. Towards the end of the novel, when she is at a mental institution, she begins to behave like an infant and displays physical signs of a psychological transition. For instance, her sister contemplates on how her body hair has begun to resemble that of an infant. Her lack of speech and devolution to a mere perception-based existence clearly points at a move towards a pre-linguistic order of existence, culminating in the desire to become a tree while endowing the same with a phenomenological existence of its own.[8] This further complicates the many vantage points to understand Yeong-hye's insistence on the recognition of her gendered being as the ultimate subversion of the phallogocentric order. In the impulse to be posthuman/nonhuman lies a challenge to all categorical and entitative understandings of the matrix of identity, be it the fundamental, existential analytic of *Dasein* or the more conspicuous South Korean identity formation in the wake of palpable political shifts and cultural movements. Perhaps the text's ultimate radical politics does not merely lie in its obvious deterritorialisation[9] of the Humanist impulse and the breakdown of the 'self', but in necessarily challenging a teleological, progressive underpinning to the notion of the 'posthuman' in itself. This 'going back' to 'treehood' and finally to matter in itself is ambivalent in its potential to straddle both the past and the future of consciousness at the same time while deliberately creating an osmotic transaction between the two.

In their seminal work on Posthumanism, Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini provide a basic but significant definition to understand the nature of the posthuman:

> The digital prosthesis is only one among the many forms of the nonhuman supplement. In contrast to images of the cybernetic posthuman as trans- or super-human, posthumanist discourses promote neither the transcendence of the human nor the negation of humanism. Rather, critical posthumanisms engage with the humanist legacy to critique anthropocentric values and worldviews. (Clarke & Rossini 2017: xiv)

Quoting psychologist Susan Oyama, Rossini, in the essay 'Bodies', explains the existential aspect of such an ontological drive through a process of 'affect and select' (Clarke & Rossini 2017: 156) that brings into the fold of one's

immediate existence, phenomenological stimuli that cannot be reduced to pure self-determination. She further explicates this by elaborating on Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of 'co-ontology' or 'plural ontology' as an assemblage on existence shared between the self and other (*ibid*.: 157). With time, Yeong-hye comes to embody this concept in her 'becoming one with the glistening trees' (Kang 2015: 125), or even her attempts to stand upside down in order to be perceived as a tree living purely on sunlight and water. She is described as an 'inchoate mass formed of darkness and water' (*ibid*.: 127) and actually says the following to her sister:

> Look, sister, I'm doing a handstand; leaves are growing out of my body, roots are sprouting out of my hands… they delve down into the earth. Endlessly, endlessly… yes, I spread my legs because I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch…. (Kang 2015: 127)

Thus, she comes to embody a curious existence of an order in which the sexual gradually moves towards the vegetal, challenging even the prenatal. This is evidenced in one of the climactic scenes of the text in which the protagonist and her brother-in-law paint themselves with flowers and leaves, and engage in sexual intercourse in order to make video art. The latter locates, in the 'sensuality' of the process, a subversion of the late capitalist society of South Korea. The interlinking of the sexual with the vegetal (for instance, the fantasy of the green sap oozing from the vagina) is played out on the fabric of the existential. The brother-in-law, who himself suffers as an ill-understood artist in the stifling familial matrix of South Korea, actually imagines her to be 'some kind of mutant animal that had evolved to be able to photosynthesize' (Kang 2015: 91). Ridvan Askin, in the essay 'Objects', uses Kant's distinction between 'phenomena' and 'noumena' along with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of affective assemblages between the human and the nonhuman through precepts and sensations that assume ontological weight, to explicate this complex idea. Further, Bruce Clarke in the essay 'The Nonhuman' writes,

> Humanism deconstructs itself whenever "the human" is observed not asa unity but as an assemblage. In the parlance of earlier literary, philosophical, and theological texts, the human frays into gradations of subhuman, inhuman, and superhuman — the bestial, the daemonic, or the divine. Evolutionary modernity supplements the human with the prehuman and the posthuman. (Clarke & Rossini 2017: 141)

It is precisely through these frameworks, that Yeong-hye's 'madness' can be formulated. Moreover, in the nexus of spatio-temporal identity locations, it is clear that this pattern of 'madness' is not a purely individual response to internal factors: it sets the stage for a sociological pattern catalysed by South Korea's own strategic political and familial philosophies, which while liberating for some, become stifling for others. In-hye's growing empathy and understanding of her sister's choices points towards the same: the impact of 'sense of place' as opposed to location and locale, as sociological concepts

also play an instrumental role in what is seen as a necessarily psychological response vis-à-vis gendered resistance set in the everyday.[10] Not only does In-hye process the gravity of her own suicidal thoughts, but she too begins to exhibit a tendency to 'understand' the nonhuman, affective assemblages around her and find recourse in them to escape the spiral of violence and innocence. Taking from a dream that her sister has, In-hye thinks the following to herself:

> … what those trees she'd seen at the end of the narrow mountain path, clustered together like green flames… had been saying… they hadn't been words of comfort, words that would help her pick herself up. Instead, they were merciless, and the tress that had spoken them were a frighteningly chill form of life. (Kang 2015: 169)

Thus, *The Vegetarian*, as a text, poses both the ontological and the ontic question together. In the creation of the myth of the 'Global South', built on fragile definitions of identity, vis-à-vis the already politically ambivalent position of South Korea, is it possible to engage in Derridean 'hyperbolic ethics' and 'pure' concepts as a radical transgression that posits both philosophical and nationalist gendering, if one were to indeed assume a compartmentalisation of the two? If yes, then perhaps one needs to rethink in nuance the rhizomatic[11] assemblages of affective identity, always already dispersed into gendered multiplicity within the often-convenient binary of the 'Global North' and the 'Global South' while attempting, as Kang calls it, to radically 'shuck off the human' (Kang 2015: 179).

Notes

1 Martin Heidegger's ground-breaking conceptualisation of *Dasein* as 'being-there', that is, fundamental ontology vis-à-vis the question of metaphysics and philosophy in *Being and Time*.

2 The term 'Geschlecht' connotes sex, race, family, generation, lineage, species, genre, etc. Derrida uses its polysemic quality to extend the meaning of the ontological onto the realm of identity.

3 South Korea's position in terms of the basic understanding of the term 'Global South' is ambivalent in terms of its economic power and political position that compares with the countries in the 'Global North'. Yet, given its political and cultural history, and its very recent transition to democratic statehood, it is often still categorised as part of the 'Global South'.

4 Confucianism is a philosophical system that originated in China around 550 BC and has pervasive influence in East Asia till date. While its impulse is humanist and moral, it has also been criticised for certain misogynistic ideas, which relegate women to spheres of domesticity, bound by orthodox 'feminine' roles.

5 Julia Kristeva posits that the pre-Oedipal stage of amorphous *jouissance* is the Semiotic, while the order of the world in which the child has been socio-linguistically conditioned is the realm of the Symbolic.

6 From 'Marginality and Subversion: Julia Kristeva' in *Sexual/Textual Politics*.

7 Roger Davis, in '*You* Are What You Eat: Cannibalism, Autophagy and the Case of Armin Meiwes', claims that the cannibal or the re-presentation of the cannibal is what bridges the gap between the self and the other.

8 This move towards 'pre-linguistic' consciousness can be understood in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis as well. Here, it refers to a move back to the Real stage after having been socialised in the Symbolic order.

9 Fluid and dissipated nature of human subjectivity and culture as theorised by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

10 'Agnew and Duncan… provide — rather more simply — a threefold segmentation of place into location, locale and sense of place drawing on approaches to place that are characteristic of different disciplinary persuasions. Location is the classical geography of an area describing its physical components and the historical, economic and social processes that have made it…. Locale is the rather more malleable and shifting context within which everyday living occurs and picks out those elements of location, which are relevant and important to living…. Sense of place refers to the ways in which the human imagination bestows on locations particular qualities, meanings and significance.' (Rigg 2007: 15)

11 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari employ the symbol of the rhizome to denote the possibility of multiple and non-hierarchical interpretations, modes, and flow of affective meaning and desire in *A Thousand Plateaus* and partly in *Anti-Oedipus*.

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Weaving Stories, Reviewing Histories, Remaking Homes: The Traversals of Queer Diasporic Memory in Kunal Mukherjee's *My Magical Palace*

Anil Pradhan

Abstract: The socio-political concerns of diasporic movements and queer activism across transnational spaces have given rise to academic enquiries into the identity politics of/by the queer diaspora. However, there is a gap in the study of contemporary queer literature of the Indian North American diaspora. This paper investigates how the intersectionality of sexual and transnational identities is problematised vis-à-vis temporal and spatial negotiations of/by the queer diasporic subject in Kunal Mukherjee's novel *My Magical Palace* (2012). Specifically, how the nostalgia of a gay Indian man in the US traverses the margins of time and space by weaving his queer transnational identity using re-collective strands of the past life in India. Speaking of loss and longing, the narrative problematises its diasporic queer subject's story through a re-fashioning of identity in multiple home-spaces. This papersheds light on the crucial role played by queer diasporic memory that traverses borders — geo-political and socio-personal — and provides for a re-making of 'home' through the twining of spaces, memories and subjectivities.

Keywords: Queer, Diaspora, India, America, Memory, Home

In recent years, academic enquiry into the literature dealing with queer diaspora has provided literary studies with insights into the interconnections of gender, sexuality and migration, within the larger rubric of diasporic narratives and representations. With the increasing socio-political concerns of diasporic movements across transnational spaces, academic enquiries into the cultural politics of and by the queer diaspora have become increasingly important. Emphasis has been put on the texts emerging out of transnational dislocations and displacements and additionally, to the accompanying tropes and liabilities

of belonging to multiple spatial and temporal locations. The literature of the South Asian diaspora has contributed towards an understanding of being diasporic in the Global North. However, very little has been achieved towards investigating the dual problematic inherent in being 'queer' and being 'diasporic' in the Indian North American context despite an increasing focus on the contributions of the Indian diaspora in that geo-political region. This paper seeks to discuss how intersecting issues influence and construct the socio-cultural hybridity of a queer diaspora that is always already in a state of traversal, across borders and histories, as portrayed in Kunal Mukherjee's novel *My Magical Palace* (2012).

Gayatri Gopinath uses the term 'queer diaspora' to refer to the discursive networks of affiliation and negotiations that are constantly being produced and reproduced along the lines of race, ethnicity, sexuality, (trans)nation-al space, and memory.[1] I follow Gopinath's formulation regarding the 'queer' in the 'diaspora' to locate how they mutually influence and inform each other towards a critical understanding of what being queer and being diasporic mean in the context of multiple exiles through nostalgia, re-collection and re-representation. I have focussed on how diasporic movements and travels across geo-political and socio-cultural spatiality and temporality complicate the constructs of subjectivity, 'home' and belonging (or non-belonging) for the queer diasporan. This study highlights the role of queer diasporic memory in the idea of 'home'.

Kunal Mukherjee's debut novel *My Magical Palace* recounts the coming-of-age story of the gay Indian protagonist Rahul Chatterjee in Hyderabad in the India of the 1970s, as narrated by the protagonist to his American partner Andrew, a decade later in San Francisco where both of them live. In order to explain to Andrew his inability to come out to his parents and stop living the double life despite being away from the Indian 'home', Rahul — a first generation immigrant Indian American gay man — retells the experiences and events of one key year in his adolescent life that includes aspects of sexual exploration, homophobic hatred and personal loss. His story also portrays, through intimate narration, the complicated relations that he has had with his parents, romantic interests and home while in India and how the past still haunts him in the US. It also depicts key events that have assisted Rahul in discovering, acknowledging and re-visioning his identity as a queer diasporic man — a perpetual outsider — stuck in-between the past and the present, across bordersand cultures.

Speaking of loss, longing and 'impossible mourning', the narrative problematises its diasporic queer subject's 'story' through a re-fashioning of identity in multiple 'home'-spaces (Mishra 2003). Vijay Mishra, in the context of the 'art of impossible mourning' in the diaspora, emphasises that diaspora theories 'need to be tempered by individual diaspora histories' (*ibid*.: 28). It is necessary to look at Rahul's individual queer diasporic history, narrated as/

through fiction, to arrive at an understanding of loss, memory and narration. Considering the role of narrativity in the 'representative politics of/in history' (White 1986), I look at the temporal and spatial traversals that result in a dynamic palimpsest of diasporic queer subjectivities. Furthermore, I look at the crucial role played by queer diasporic memory that traverses borders — geo-political and socio-personal — and acts as both an 'exilic wound' (Mehta 2008), enabling an often-tragic reflection upon the lost past and as an 'absent certainty' (Miller 2008), providing for a re-making of 'home'.

How does fiction become narrative? In other words, why should a literary work of fiction be considered an entry point into socio-cultural history? Therefore, more crucially, does a story represent and eventually become history? If Hayden White's discussion on the role of narrativity in the representative politics of/in history and his argument regarding the strategic and problematic role played by narratives in constructing history in a transcultural context is considered,[2] stories become the potential arbiter in writing and rewriting history. However, from a literary point of view, one must also question the politics of narrativising history through stories. With fictionality and narrativity being coextensive, generic borders too, in some way, become restructured and refashioned by diasporic stories. While narrating the growing up of the queer protagonist in the Indian 'homeland', Mukherjee's novel entails a 'going back' of the Indian queer protagonist in America to the Indian past of simultaneous belonging and non-belonging. Avtar Brah has emphasised upon the agency of narratives that the diaspora weaves across temporal and spatial contexts and geo-political borders, focusing on the crucial importance of memory, remembering and retelling in the construction and sustenance of the transnational histories and homes.[3] Given that sexual queerness renders the Indian diasporic individual as perpetually 'othered', a reading of how the diasporic identities rewrite themselves like a dynamic palimpsest of sexual and (trans)national other-ness aids at connecting with the larger questions of queer diasporic home, loss and memory.

To begin with, the issues of home and of its loss feature as key elements in the narrative of the queer diasporic traversal in the novel. Loss that is bred by movement and displacement plays a crucial role in the narrative's focus on the idea of home. Rahul's dreams, where he relives his past life and experiences at Mint House in Hyderabad, act as nightmares that haunt him in his loss of the Indian home-space and also render him unable to reconcile with his new life in the US.[4] Rahul's romantic relationship with Andrew suffers especially because of his inability to come to terms with this loss, and a part of Rahul's suffering emerges from his doubt whether Andrew will be able to comprehend this loss that defines his life in multiple ways.It is also this loss that informs the very contexts of Rahul's remaining back in the US instead of returning to India to his parents. It is also a loss that transforms, over the course of the retelling of personal history, into mourning. In the context of

non-heteronormative sexuality, we know from Judith Butler, via Sigmund Freud, that 'the identification with lost loves characteristic of melancholia becomes the precondition for the work of mourning' (2002: 79). Furthermore, in the context of the diasporic, we know from Mishra that, 'in the imaginary of diasporas both mourning and melancholia find a place sometimes mutually exclusively but often they intertwine and co-exist' (*ibid*.: 35). For Rahul, the queer diasporan, the intertwining of mourning and melancholia threatens his subjectivity as an immigrant seeking a better life in the diaspora space — it not only manifests as his nightmares but also threatens to harm his relationship with Andrew due to the inability to reconcile the past with the present.

Rahul's story reveals a history that has always been shaped by his being an outsider — one who does not actually fit in, sexually or otherwise. The loss of Mint House in Hyderabad not only symbolises the loss of his 'home' but also of the ignorance of innocence and safety of the familiar and the familial. Rahul's fear of loss that haunts him in the US centres upon his relationship with Andrew who is not initially privy to his history in India. The novel is structured in the form of a recollection, an intensive retelling of the past — a story that Rahul hopes will help Andrew understand his cumulative reality and eventually save their relationship from falling apart. As a fulfilment of Andrew's longstanding demand to know more about Rahul's past and as Rahul's attempt at winning back Andrew after their tiff over the looming danger of Rahul's potential arranged marriage, the retelling of the past in the form of the narrative charts the most defining time period of Rahul's life in India that he has left behind — a past where, unlike the liberal uncertainty of queerness in the US, the family and the house provided for a conventional space of feeling safe. Andrew is not able to visit Rahul's old house — his magical palace — as it was demolished to make way for the expansion of the Mint, representing the literal effacement of the idea of 'home' and its symbolic affects that the queer diasporan does not have physical access to in time and space, reminding of Arjie's last glance at his own house before leaving Sri Lanka for Canada in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* where the loss of both the protagonist and the narrator narrativised through multiple exiles has become an element that has become a poignant feature of recent queer diasporic literature from South Asia.[5]

In the context of Indian diasporic literature, Mishra describes this idea of the traumatised-idealised 'home' as a central referent that enables 'the fantasy of the homeland [...] linked, in the case of the diaspora, to that recollected moment when diasporic subjects feel they were wrenched from their mother (father) land' (2007: 16). However, in *My Magical Palace*, countering the continual traumatic effects of the lost home, Rahul's retelling of the history of loss weaves a narrative that provides not only for Andrew insights into his past experiences but also for Rahul an opportunity to reconcile with the present, recalling to mind Brah's commentary on how the concept of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' 'potentially [as] the sites of hope and new beginnings,

[of] contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure' (1996: 190). Inadvertently, the aspect of the lost home in *My Magical Palace* is problematic because it borders on romanticising the lost past, when Rahul was not yet out as a gay man, but the aspect of loss also happens to be embedded into his eventual coming to terms with his reality and potential as a queer immigrant in the US, where he must gain a new sense of belonging, of being loved and of making a new home.

In Rahul's re-telling of history and reviewing his story, apart from the important role played by the lost home, people also feature as markers of loss and of the coming of age for the queer diasporic subject. Going back to his life in Hyderabad during 1973-74, Rahul recalls his history with the three men who he felt affection for during his adolescence. He recalls his reverence of and infatuation for the Bollywood actor Rajesh Khanna with whom he fantasised the performance of a romantic Bollywood-style hero-heroine love scene in the gardens of his house and, at times, pictured physical intimacy. He also recalls his admiration for his classmate Amit whom he followed around at school but who was later expelled after the discovery to his love letter to another boy at the school. He also recalls his desires and love for his senior Shubho with whom he shared his first kiss in secrecy and had his first sexual experience and who, later on, broke off all ties when Rahul demanded a sustained relationship of love from him, making him experience his first heartbreak. In addition to his intimacy with these men, Rahul also recollects the insecurity and anguish that he felt at his inability to confide in his parents who he feared would either disown him or send him off for shock therapy treatment due to the disgrace and disgust.The fact that all the important experiences and events that Rahul narrates to Andrew, with respect to home, are associated with men, does not come as a surprise but attests to the indelible link that Rahul has had with respect to his sexuality and the idea of 'history' and 'home'.

Another important male character is Colonel Uncle who lived on the top floor of the compound of Mint House and who represents the ideal father-figure in terms of the sort of understanding that Rahul longed for in the past. He plays an important role in Rahul's coming to terms with his life. As an old and apparently gay man, Colonel Uncle's identity as a constantly travelling bachelor with a mysterious life evokes interest in Rahul, making him rethink the similarities between his own present and Colonel Uncle's past. Eventually, the friendship and solidarity between them helps him realise that life can still turn out good if one has hope, love and will power. In this context, the narrative represents the indispensable role played by Colonel Uncle through a photograph of Colonel Uncle and his close friend Claudio — with their warm, wrapped arms and genial, laughing faces — that speaks of an untold relationship between the two men who served in the army during the war and who had formed an unnamed intimacy. Anna Pechurina notes that 'the meaning

of diasporic objects is ambivalent and simultaneously refers to experiences, feelings and attachments that are both familiar and strange and continuously reinvented through the course of everyday life' (2020: 3), playing a crucial role in 'the dynamic and changeable nature of home and homemaking' (2020: 10). Similarly, elsewhere, in relation to Farzana Doctor's novel *Stealing Nasreen* (2007), I have discussed how queer diasporic artefacts, such as photos that reveal past same-sex lives in the lost home-land, travel across space and time to remind the queer diasporan about the past and to help negotiate the present in the adopted home-space.[6] In *My Magical Palace*, the photograph, similarly, functions as queer diasporic memorabilia that reminds and teaches Rahul to reconcile with his past and present. As Colonel Uncle's parting gift to Rahul, it travels all the way to the US and sits on Rahul's table top in San Francisco, reminding him of the possibilities of same-sex love despite the odds and of Colonel Uncle's inspiring words about being true to oneself. The queer diasporic photograph keeps alive stories that serve as memory in the US that 'assumes the form of landscape' where 'metaphor becomes reality and absence becomes presence' (Miller 2008: 285), and through its agency of queer diasporic remembrance, provides hope and solace to Rahul in his remaking of home in the North American diaspora space.

Space and time become fluid in this form of weaving the story of/by Rahul who not only revisits his past but also remakes possibilities for a new home, and in this process, memory plays a crucial role. Anh Hua contends that 'memory is an important term of analysis for diaspora' (2005: 197) because 'the quest for memory is the search for one's history' (2005: 198). Moving to and fro San Francisco in the present where Rahul and Andrew live and Hyderabad in the past where Rahul grew up during his adolescence, the narrative unearths the various events that mark the losses that have been etched into Rahul's memory and that have crucially shaped his life ever since. Set in the closely knit Bengali community residing in Hyderabad in the 1970s, Rahul's experiences with restrictive and unflinching traditions and dictates inform the experiences that he recalls in terms of his exploration of his sexuality, desire and identity. Cynthia Miller comments that, for diasporans, 'place combines experience and memory' while constructing and contesting identities (2008: 286). She states, 'As immigrants bear identities that are in many ways liminal, betwixt and between, no longer of old places yet not fully of new, the immigrant is left to embrace symbols, to build utopias' (286). However, in Rahul's narrative, his utopia of lost spaces of home and the diasporic non-placedness does not necessarily have a negative effect. In fact, space plays an important role in diasporic memory's agency in remaking 'home'; for Rahul, Mint House — the house where he grew up in Hyderabad and had various experiences with people and relations — is his designated locus of his past realisations and present negotiations. As an aging royal palace that has been converted into a residence, Rahul considers the house as his 'magical

palace' that links up everything in his life. Most importantly, the natural setting and diverse and rich beauty of the locale provided for him the solace and contentment that was otherwise increasingly missing from his life as he grew up.

By the end of the narrative, Mint House itself becomes a memorialised character in the story that has not only witnessed the various crucial moment, secrets, and losses in Rahul's life but also provided with him with the safety of reflection and perusal. Evidently, by the time Rahul departs from his home never to return, the magical palace turns into the force that informs the narrative's reclaiming agency— both affective and effective. Similarly, Hyderabad remains in Rahul's memory as the absent presence, forever reminding him of the past and the loss but also making him reconcile with his present in San Francisco. The retelling of the past acts as a necessitated reflection that, as Mishra comments in the context of 'impossible mourning', 'demands that [he] constantly revisit our trauma as part of our ethical relationship to the ghosts of diaspora' (2003: 28). If Rahul's retelling of his story of loss can be considered as what Brinda Mehta terms the 'exilic wound', it can be seen to 'chart memory's enabling and disabling trajectories as the source of physical and psychic destruction on the one hand and, the path to reflection on the other' (2008: 435) — a path of both impossible mourning and possible reconciliation for the queer diasporan. In effect, the queer diasporic narrative of Rahul, informed by the agency of queer diasporic memory, 'is both a process of engagement with the loss and a way of understanding that loss' (Mishra 2007: 119). Through the images and the recalling of the lost home space, Rahul constructs, what Miller terms as,'relations of "absent certainty"' that 'partake of memories and identities detached from present experience' and that 'provide a certainty of connection to (and knowledge of) a homeland far removed from any South Asian geographic reality' (2008: 287) that, in Rahul's case, eventually helps him heal his relationship with his American partner in the San Franciscan locale.

Rahul, though living in the US, has not been able to come out to his parents at the beginning of the novel, but by the end of his narrative makes up his mind to stop living a lie and finally be true to his sexuality, history and desires. Hinging on the issue of societal and generational differences in terms of homosexuality in the two countries — India and the US — Rahul comments on how it has been difficult for him to confront his parents about his sexuality. In this context, issues of belonging and community take centre-stage in the argument between the two lovers where Andrew is critical of Rahul's inability to not look at himself as the immigrant outsider, emphasising on his understanding that America is his home now and the queer community in San Francisco his new family. Despite Andrew's love and the opportunities in the new land, Rahul feels 'that peculiar loneliness that comes with living in America as an immigrant' and ponders over his decision to make it his new home

(Mukherjee 2012: 206). Having being made to feel as an outsider for most of his life in India, Rahul's immigrant status in the US adds other layers of complexity in his struggle for coming to terms with both departures and arrivals and poignant losses and newfound possibilities. The double life that he has continued to live in the US, despite being far away from the familial and the familiar in India, makes him question the cost of movement across nations for a queer migrant. However, India does not seem to let go of him that easily; when he boards a cab to go to Castro Street (the visibly queer neighbourhood of San Francisco), the Indian cab driver's homophobic comments make him shake with anger and humiliation. For the queer diasporic subject, struggling with letting go of the lost home seems to be perpetually problematised by the very catalyst of its emancipation — migration across borders. However, once inside his favourite gay club, he finds his friends trying to uplift his mood, consoling him about his rough patch in the relationship with Andrew and helping him find solace in the positivity of an alternative form of family in the diaspora: queer kinship and camaraderie.

Movement across spaces and borders and losses of homes and people have been embedded into Rahul's life since adolescence, and the coming-of-age story in the form of his own retelling of history acts as the emancipatory act of reviewing and reclaiming the temporal past and the spatial home in a transnational queer diasporic context. Rahul's telling of his story enables him to not only confront the realities that he has to face as a first-generation immigrant gay Indian man with a white boyfriend in the US but also to overcome the fear and denial that has threatened to undo his personal life. By the end of his story, Rahul is able to make Andrew understand the deep-embedded causes of his fears and apprehensions. Subsequently, Andrew manages to comprehend the weight of history that Rahul has carried with him across national borders and wishes for him to let go and build a new home together. The past is a point of contention for Rahul, but the retelling of history in the hope of finding a new home space in the diasporic subjectivity. In Kunal Mukherjee's *My Magical Palace*, the weaving of stories, the reviewing of histories and the remaking of homes occur simultaneously, negotiated through the agency of queer diasporic memory — similar to the losses, the traversals and the arrivals that are in a constant state of flux in the life of queer Indian diasporans and their negotiations with similarly moving subjectivities.

Notes

1 See Gopinath 2005: 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 13.
2 See White 1986: 5–7.
3 See Brah 1996: 175–80.

4 An important example is the portrayal of diasporic trauma through dreams and nightmares in V. S. Naipaul's writings, as analysed by Vijay Mishra. See Mishra 2003: 106–32.
5 See Pradhan 2019: 201–02.
6 See Pradhan 2020: 211 and 216.

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Negotiating Identities in the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora: Queer Bildungsroman and Gendered Spaces in Select Novels of Shani Mootoo

Shehnaz Kabir

Abstract: There was a mass labour emigration between the years 1837 and 1917 from the Indian subcontinent to the Caribbean islands ensuing from the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 which became a potent mechanism in the formation of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. Over the course of time, this 'new system of slavery', overlooked by historians and litterateurs alike, had created a global melting pot with multiple identities thriving in the hybrid cultural community in the Caribbean islands. ShaniMootoo, one of the most notable postcolonial multimedia artists, deals with issues of xenophobia, homophobia, and displacement anxiety in her works. I will analyse her novels, *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Valmiki's Daughter*,which explicate the way thecharacters and their relationships are affected by the atrocities meted out by the indenture system, racial prejudices,and heteronormative structures. This article will examine the 'queer bildungsroman' in association with spatial dynamics. The magic realism present in the fictional town of 'Paradise' in *Cereus Blooms at Night* is countered by the uncompromising reality of Trinidad in *Valmiki's Daughter*, but in both these novels Mootoo navigates beyond the confines of queerness prompted by her Caribbeanness. The characters in the novels are found in a space constricted by societal regulations, while some succumb to the oppression, others continue to resist and subvert the discursive practices left behind by the colonial past. My article will demonstrate the eccentricity and intersections in identities within the Indo-Caribbean community as depicted in the two novels of Shani Mootoo.

Keywords: Indenture, Queer, Identity, Indo-Caribbean, Space

Shani Mootoo, one of the most notable postcolonial multimedia artists, deals with issues including xenophobia, homophobia, and displacement anxiety in

her works. She is of Indian origin, born in Dublin, raised in Trinidad, and presently resides in Canada. She is open about her homosexuality and is rooted in the Caribbean culture and ethos. The Caribbean population is a seething concoction of African slaves, Indian, and Chinese labourers, colonial settlers, European missionaries, and American businessmen.[123] Though the Caribbean islands have been utilised for various imperial programmes, it became a symbolic interstitial site for cultural discourse. An array of race, culture, and nationality of every denomination, in a struggle to thrive and overpower one another, amalgamates and favourably co-exists in the island nation. This multiplicity creates a phenomenon of 'othering' where the citizens have to constantly negotiate their individual identity, producing a space of 'in-betweenness' which is comprehensively captured and reproduced by Mootoo through her characters.This intermediate space often leads to the distortion of normative paradigms of society, and it is in this space that the transgressions and deviations become evident and acceptable. The demarcations of prescriptive patterns laid out by society become indistinct amidst the constant tussle to remain rooted to their native culture as well as find their individuality against the intersecting cultures and nationality. This threshold offers a space of expression for the non-normative, the unrepresented, and the queer.

Being a queer personality, Mootoo admits on finding freedom of expression as a citizen of Canada (Pirbhai 2015), while recognising her queer attributes that has developed in the multifarious nation-state of the Caribbean. The vibrant matrix of the Caribbean is evident not only in the characterisation of Mootoo's works but also in her descriptions of the place and setting. Both *Cereus Blooms at Night* (henceforth *Cereus*) and *Valmiki's Daughter* share a number of connections in terms of not only the thematic aspects and subject matter, but also through the emphasis placed in the representation of spatial relations. In *Cereus*, Mootoo not just creates a place of fantasy but posits the fictional town of 'Paradise' as a significant motif to explicate the bewildering nature of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora populace while representing the larger reality of the Third World nations; the nations excluded from the aggressive development policy demonstrated by the First World.[4] Mootoo's works delineate the development of the non-normative subject through the 'novel of development', precipitating the postcolonial trajectory of 'queer bildungsroman'.

Chandin Ramchandin is born to parents engaged in indenture labour but later adopted by Reverend Thoroughly, the Irish missionary in their village named Lantanacamara. However, his attraction towards his half-sister, Lavinia Thoroughly, leads to the estrangement between him and the Thoroughlys. His journey shows the trials and travails of an Indian immigrant subjected to corporeal exile due to the transoceanic journey undertaken by his parents to work on the Caribbean plantations as *girmitiyas* as well as a psychological

exile experienced by him after being adopted by the Thoroughlys that severs the umbilical cord between him and his ancestry.[5] After an initial phase of care and attention from the family when Chandin's romantic proposal is rejected by his half-sister, Lavinia, he is left behind at Lantanacamara while the Thoroughlys go to their native home, 'Shivering Northern Wetlands' (Mootoo 1996: 27). He immediately realises the role he played in the family; he is merely a token brown proselytised propaganda. Consequently, he sheds his adopted ways of life and, not only, returns to *Coolitude* (Torabully), he also marries the daughter of another Indian indentured immigrant, Sarah, and completely renounces the privileges bestowed upon a Thoroughly.[6] From there on, he remains aggressively averse to all aspects of European culture and operates his house with a patriarchal approach, resulting in the burning of his house and death at the hands of his elder daughter, Mala Ramchandin, who faces the brunt of all his venom and vengeance.

After a prolonged period of suffering unimaginable torture and despair in silence, Mala completely denounces words as a means of expression after she realised it could never encapsulate the inhumane acts or the pain experienced by her over the years. The only forms of expression she resorts to were imitating the sounds made by the creatures in the garden of Paradise Alms House, where she had been allocated by the town court as she poses to be a threat to the neighbours and treads the fine line between sanity and insanity. The emotional and physical violence perpetrated against Mala leads to her rejection of all visible construct of human civilisation — the house of her abusive father, her pet-name which acts as a reminder of her coolie legacy, the seafood that she prepared for her absconding lover, and language to express herself. *Cereus* not only delves in the issues of queerness, but also explores the possibilities of therapy and recovery after sexual trauma.

In a sharp contrast to the surreal setting of 'Paradise', Mootoo directly speaks to the readers in an imperative tone and takes us on a tour of the pulsating town of San Fernando in *Valmiki's Daughter*. The readers are inundated in an aural, visual, and tactile cacophony that saturates us with extensive details of the rich landscape, appetising food, a combination of strong olfactory and an oppressive climate. Despite the town being so 'miraculously varied geographically, environmentally, socially, linguistically. It sounds like a hodge-podge of a place, but it's more like a well-seasoned, long-simmering stew' (Mootoo 2009: 25). Such a practice of community-building leads to an 'ethnogenesis' through a process of *komplimentanorst* (Gumilev), a condition of bonding for survival often found in labour camps.[7] This strange mixture establishes culture as a phenomenon divorced from the concepts of time and space, and develops in an erratic manner unlike 'Europeanism'.

Queer bildungsroman intricately links the individual's journey with the nation's journey and represents the individual metonymic of the nation. The personal journeys of the characters of Mootoo are represented through non-

linear modes and highlights the exploitation, destruction, and re-formation of the Caribbean. For this very reason, Mootoo makes painstaking portrayals of her spatial settings that serves as an allegorical character. There exists an anthropomorphic tendency as the natural wilderness emulates the proliferating anomalies and transcends the boundaries of binary cultural practices. The multiple points of narrative also give a sense that the Caribbean greatly differs from the West in terms of hybridity and communality.

Digressing from a Eurocentric space to the Caribbean islands which is a point of convergence for ethnically disparate global minorities creates a space of 'counterculture of modernity' (Gilroy) that is not fundamentally non-Eurocentric but a ground of 'in-between'. Mootoo posits her queer characters in pivotal positions in her works yet society pushes them in peripheral positions and they are forced to express themselves behind the blinds. We witness the love between Mala's mother, Sarah and Aunt Lavinia blossoming in the inner spaces of the house as '[i]t seemed to the children that their Mama and Aunt Lavinia were wanting to conduct all their visits indoors, or only as far outdoors as the backyard' (Mootoo 1996: 55). Even after their relationship had crossed boundaries of heterosexual norms, there is a sense of constraint and a feeling of being trapped within boundaries, which is clearly manifested in the unconventional relationships in *Valmiki's Daughter* as well. Viveka's illicit relationship with her neighbour's wife, Anick, develops at the latter's new residence, thirty miles away from their hometown in Rio Claro, near a cacao plantation. Though Anick frequently travelled a huge distance just to cheer for Viveka during her volleyball practices, which was seen peculiarly by one and all, they were cautious of displaying their affection for each other. They also planned to elope to Canada where they would be able to live without any social stigma. It is ironic for a place to have produced a plethora of variant identities but remain intolerant towards non-binary relationships to flourish. Such a society finds a way to hurl the disgrace upon close members of their family as experienced by Mala and her younger sister, Asha, after their mother elopes with her lesbian lover, Lavinia. The two little girls are labelled as belonging from objectionable parentage and chased out of the children's park by their classmates, who are heard saying that, '[t]his park is only for good, decent people' (Mootoo 1996: 87).

The acts of 'aberration', as labelled by Devika, between her husband, Valmiki and his lover, Saul, usually take place outside the bounds of the town, in a remote village which lie on the fringes of the forest where Saul resides. This suburban space can be considered as an 'epistrata' (Deleuze 1987) that allows a degree of tolerant deviance away from the public eye. Such exclusionary policies are deeply rooted in a catholic and corporatist regime. In fact, Valmiki's first homosexual experience took place in another continent while he was at medical school. In the town of San Fernando, Dr. Vamiki Krishnu is a respectable citizen and an ideal family man with a reputation of

being a philanderer, all at the cost of remaining a closeted homosexual. While recalling his blissful moments with Tony at medical school, he realises that '[n]o matter how much he and Tony suited and cared for each other, Valmiki had been determined to return home and fall into whatever role was expected of him, or at least to adopt some form of numbing complacency' (Mootoo 2009: 67).

On the other hand, his wife, Devika's understanding of her husband's homosexuality comes across as grossly submissive and reactionary, since, she agrees to marry him with full knowledge of his sexual preference, firstly, because they were expecting a child and more importantly, marrying a 'doctor-in-the-making' (Mootoo 2009: 68) would provide her a life of status and abundance. Devika's approach towards her husband's homosexuality is quite contrary to Saul's wife who embraces his queer nature and coexist peacefully. When confronted by Saul's wife in a supermarket, Devika takes great offense at receiving empathy and solidarity which breaks through her charade of a happy upper class/caste married Indian woman. The way Saul's wife embraces his homosexuality is beyond Devika, since, her own bigotry has never allowed her to speak aloud regarding her husband's homosexuality even while blaming him for their daughter's queerness, '"[y]ou should not have returned here after you finished medical school. You knew even then, didn't you, you knew that you were…" But she couldn't finish' (Mootoo 2009: 341). Devika's reaction to her husband's and daughter's queerness emerges from a sense of remaining rooted to one's ancestral traditions, which is absent in Viveka, a third-generation Indian immigrant, who has evolved through the specificity of interactions with the outside world.

Chandin Ramchandin also moves towards sexual aberration soon after his wife, Sarah, elopes with Lavinia and he starts punishing Mala by repeatedly raping her almost every night owing to the absence of Sarah. Thus, his substitution of Sarah with Mala can be characterised as 'corrective rape' and an acute Caribbean male response to lesbianism. It is a traditional practice of curing lesbianism with heterosexual experience. When Chandin engages in violent sex with Mala it can be categorised as 'queer sex'. He 'yanked out his penis, hardened weapon-like by anger … with his large fingers he parted her buttocks as she sobbed and whispered, "have mercy"' (Mootoo 1996: 222). Such actions demonstrates that he used his phallus as a symbol of power and an instrument of torture. The perverse substitution of his daughter and wife severely stunts Mala's physical and psychological development. Eventually Mala entombs her father in his bedroom since he was devoid of any regret of manacling his daughter.

Mala Ramchandin comes across as a connecting thread between all the queer characters in *Cereus* as their non-binary relationships flourishes owing to her embracing nature. The unusual relationship between Tyler and Otoh, the transgender son of Mala's absconding lover, Ambrose, is forged through

their visitations to the Paradise Alms House. Yet Mootoo consciously restrains from explicit portrayal of sexual acts between her queer characters, while giving graphic details of heterosexual intercourse, indicating the impermissible as seen in Tyler and Otoh's conversation where they agree to 'meet away from the curious eyes on the periphery of the grounds' (Mootoo 1996: 152). Such aberrant relationships pose a serious threat to the heteronormative structure, and these rebellious acts are held punishable by stereotyping them as anomalies; such anomalous acts are performed behind the veils with complete awareness on part of the outside world.

Sarah is immediately labelled as an irresponsible mother for abandoning her children and eloping with Lavinia, whereas both of them had planned their future with the two daughters. Lavinia Thoroughly, the daughter of an Irish missionary, broke off her marriage with an Irishman within six months and returned to the Caribbean leading to the rekindling and ultimately, eloping with her childhood friend, Sarah, who is from an Indian indentured ancestry. Hence, this imaginary village of Lantanacamara resonates with the concept of a *Thirdspace* (Soja) which incorporates the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the spirit and the body, the conscious and the unconscious, and the finite and the infinite.[8] Such a space brings forth a plethora of anomalies, making allowances for the unrestrained and dissentient. Geography has massively faltered in keeping with the social movements and settlements in the post-war era creating a 'terra infirma' (Rogoff) which interrogates the positioning of spectatorship while describing spaces and the epistemology of migration.[9] The formation of a terra infirma begins when large communities are displaced from their national, cultural and racial domain to an unknown space which creates a sense of un-belonging and challenges the expected allegiances of the individual. In such hybrid societies, the topography plays a key motif.

A clear cartography based on social strata is visible as Mootoo takes us on a tour through San Fernando which lacks a homogeneity, moving from the poverty-stricken ghettos to 'a sea of green — the fronds of palm and coconut tress mixed with sampan, flamboyant, Pride of Barbados, mango trees — dotted with a confetti of colourful roofs — reds, greens, silvers, blues. These mark the residential neighbourhood of Luminada Heights. It is here you find the residences of the city's more prosperous citizens' (Mootoo 2009: 13). This segregation is the very crux of postmodern geography which is fashioned according to class division. The visual politics inherit in the upper class while maintaining a façade as done by Devika who throws a lavish party during a moment of crisis in her family. The façade is important for her to project a picture of an ideal family sans the aberrations. During one such party, the façade was shattered revealing the adulterous relationship between Valmiki and their Italian neighbour, Pia Moretti. In order to avoid another public

humiliation, Valmiki swiftly reaches out to Viveka after the announcement that Nayan and Anick are expecting their first child at their anniversary party.

The titular flower of the novel, cereus, reflects the fragmentary life of the novel's characters as we find the flower being transplanted several times during the course of Mala's life; it was first brought to Trinidad by the Thoroughlys, plucked by Lavinia from her mother's well-kept garden and presented as a token of love to Sarah, later planted in the Paradise Alms House by Otoh when they come to visit Mala. This exotic night-blooming flower blossoms once a year for a short time, 'trembling … against the wall, a choreography of petal and sepal opening together, sending dizzying scent high and wide into the air' (Mootoo 1996: 198). The fragrance from the cereus spreads throughout the village of Lantanacamara, permeating the neighbouring households that ostracised Mala's existence for no fault of her own. As an act of rebellion, Mala also rejects conventional ways of living and takes permanent shelter in the wild garden of the house which was made by Sarah which symbolises natural fecundity as opposed to the colonial patriarchal patterns of Ramchandin household. Hence, the space of the garden becomes a 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1986) reminiscent of the blissful days spent with her mother, sister and Aunt Lavinia while inside the premises of the house they lived in constant fear of Chandin's abuse.[10] A sharp contrast is drawn by Mootoo while projecting the unorthodox happy family of Sarah, Lavinia and the two daughters against the miserable heteronormative family of Chandin, deftly dismantling the notion of ideal heteronormative structures resulting in healthy relationships and emotionally secured individuals. After killing her father in self-defence, Mala abandons his house, taking shelter in the garden and gradually becomes a part of it, resembling the garden not just in appearance but also in its sound and smell. She emanated an earthly scent and her way of expression were sounds resembling the rare insects and birds which bred in the middle of Lantanacamara, subverting the concept of a domesticate garden. Belonging from an Indian indentured ancestry, Mala naturally forges a strange communion with the land which has been a prime factor throughout the Caribbean history of dispossession, torture, slavery, indentureship and capitalist agendas. But for Mala, the land is symbol of love that transpired between her sister, mother and Lavinia, of hopes of being reunited with them in the future, of freedom from the oppressions of her father, and of resistance against the norms of society. Mala's garden makes a sensory assault on Otoh when he encroaches the garden one sultry afternoon:

> Otoh marveled at the sight of the magnificent mudra, knowing that such a specimen might be seen only in the heart of an old-growth forest on the other side of the island. With its yard-long, bean-like purple pods, the mudra had taken over the side of the yard, completely blocking out the road beyond and glimpses of the town. It took generations for a mudra tree to grow so large. The peekoplats hopped to the edges of the branches and their whistling subsided as though in curious and worried anticipation…. Otoh was

> astonished that in his neighbourhood, unknown to catchers and gamblers, there existed a tress laden with hundreds of peekoplats. (Mootoo 1996: 154–55)

The transformation from Ambrosia to Otoh has been so seamless that even his parents have forgotten to have given birth to a daughter and find this development to be natural. As we hear his mother say, 'you are not the first or the only one of your kind in this place' (Mootoo 2009: 176) goes on to show the Caribbean to be a place with transgressing identities. It also brings to the forefront the fact that queerness is not a recent occurrence and has always existed without identification and categorisation. Through Otoh's transformation, Mootoo skillfully shows the fluidity of sexuality and deconstructs the binary status quo (Butler 1993). Once again, it is Mala who is able to see through the veil and recognise the trauma experienced by Otoh during gender dysphoria, as she does with Tyler. By making Tyler the narrator of the *Cereus*, Mootoo places the power in the hands of a homosexual nurse, who is born a male but feels like a female within. Mootoo subverts the position of power by making a person of deviant sexuality narrate a story of other peripheral entities, hence, disrupting the balance between the privileged and the marginalised. Tyler is constantly aware of the probing eyes of his fellow nurses and the snide comments on his clothing and feels free only in the presence of Mala, who has an uncanny understanding of the eccentricities present in people around her as we find her stealing clothes from another female nurse for Tyler to put them on. When Tyler wears those clothes, he feels a sense of freedom and realises that, '[s]he was not the one to manacle nature, and I sensed that she was permitting mine its freedom' (Mootoo 1996: 155). Mootoo further queers the bildungsroman through the representation of Otoh and Tyler as androgynous figures. She unsettles the traditional gendered identities by blurring the lines between feminine and masculine.

Tyler is shown to be one of the most progressive characters as he has questioned the binary construction of gender from a young age and does not go into denial regarding his sexuality even after being subjected to constant humiliation from people around him. He sees himself as a beautiful woman trapped in a man's body and feels thwarted that his 'mammary glands were flat' (Mootoo 1996: 155). Such assertiveness of one's sexuality is identified in the words of Anick during an argument with her husband saying, 'I cannot help it who I love. I do not love a man or a woman. I love this person or that one. And when I love that person nobody else exist' (Mootoo 2009: 231). Yet, Tyler's conviction is absent in the central characters of *Valmiki's Daughter* as we find Vtyleralmiki go to great lengths to display his masculinity as a proof of his heterosexuality. Viveka is perpetually confused regarding her sexual orientation, much of which is induced by her mother's patriarchal ways of upbringing and witnessing the fate of her childhood friend, Merle

Bedi. Merle was Viveka's former school friend who has been ostracised by her family and society for expressing her love for a female teacher publicly and now, has to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together. Merle Bedi is a literal representation of victimhood for being a rebel which ultimately forces Viveka to forsake her sexual inclination and lead a double life like her father. Mootoo represents her characters as a site of epistemology that challenges the institutions of society. Her novels emerge from a spectrum of socio-political issues like race, nationalism, religious practices and labour activism, and strive to foreground the gender subjectivities and sexual politics within the Indo-Caribbean diaspora community. Though the community has remained vastly under/mis-represented, we could use this discrepancy as an entry point into a cross-cultural dialogue in our literary endeavour.

The two novels approach conflicted father-daughter relationships, patriarchal spaces, same-sex desire, and the performativity of gender. Tyler, Mala, and Viveka's bildungsroman demonstrates the complications inherent in coming out and the necessity of sexual self-definition to achieve self-actualisation. While Lantanacamara underscores the absence of sexual limitations related to incest, it raises the crucial question regarding the competing morality of the Caribbean at large that disapproves loving homosexual relationships, yet gives implicit approval to Ramchandin's incestuous abuse. Additionally, the modern world of San Fernando also fails to support homosexual affairs of two generations of a family. Mootoo upholds this discursive modern reality of cosmopolitanism that is deeply associated with nationalism and religious idealism. Both *Cereus* and *Valmiki's Daughter* end on a hopeful note where a new generation of flexibly gendered characters imagine ways to move beyond normative order. Mootoo uses queer bildungsroman to demand sexual equality, acceptance, and belonging in the West Indian space that is fraught with tensions and complications. The gendered, ideological hegemonies leave us questioning who or what is 'queer' in the Caribbean archipelago.

Notes

1 During the Transatlantic Slave Trade beginning from the 15th century, the Spanish, British and French, respectively, enslaved millions of Africans on their sugarcane plantations.

2 The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 led to the British Empire to bring manumitted labourers from Asia, primarily, Indian, Vietnam and China.

3 By the mid-16th century, Christian missionaries flocked to the British plantations in the Caribbean to preach and pave way for conversions of African slaves.

4 There was a mass labour emigration between the years 1837 and 1917 from the Indian subcontinent to the Caribbean islands following the Slavery Abolition Act 1833. Towards end of the indenture period, while most of them chose to make a

passage back to the homeland, several remained, making up the second largest diaspora community in the West Indies.

5 Girmitiya is the local term coined by the indentured labourers for themselves and their ancestors who has agreed to sign the 'girmit' or the agreement of indentureship.

6 Khal Torabully coined the term 'coolitude' in allusion to Aime Cesaire's concept of 'negritude'. It redirects a particular debased community into building a composite identity that will help in easing the trauma and enrich the culture of the past in the land settled in.

7 I use Gumilev's term 'ethnogenesis', a conception in which he denies that ethnicity is determined through race and emphasises on its ecological quality. My usage is primarily based on the intimate relationship of the girmitiyas with the land they inhabit.

8 Developing Lefebvre and Foucault's discourse on the trialectics of space, Soja's *Third Space* is a combination of perceived and conceived space.

9 In allusion to Rogoff's concept of 'terra infirma' which harps on the contemporary changes that has taken place in the post-war time and space. She insists on the need to situate knowledge and meaning in the local and the subjective.

10 Michel Foucault elaborates the term 'heterotopia' to describe certain spaces which is the 'other' and acts as a microcosm, encapsulating worlds within worlds, bound to disturb the paradigm of society.

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Disconsolate Homelands: (Re)turning to Lands Marked with Notional Departures in Chandani Lokugé's Fictions[1]

Indrajit Mukherjee

Abstract: While locating the drifting significances and purposes of the South Asian diasporic literary existence, we cannot afford to turn our eyes away from the slow but inevitable changes in recent postcolonial criticism evolving itself from within and without into a transitional avatar. In other words, the cross-national mobility of human subjects and their cultural baggage leads us to an interpretation of human agencies enacted across the threshold of 'here' and 'there', 'now' and 'then', 'past' and 'present', 'us' and 'them'. The purpose of the present article is to unfold the crosscurrents of race, ethnicity, gender, cultural ramifications, political affiliations and economic factors that make Lokugé's novels a trope for disconsolate homelands. It will examine how her literary production grapples with the intensely fractured implications of the private and public spaces spanning horizontally and vertically across first and second-generation migrants' experimental journey in the host land. This article will bring to the fore how the diasporic experiences of her characters distilled from 'alternative modernities' as portrayed in the rhetoric of first and second-generation migrants complicate the home/host dialectics. The literary theorists and philosophers I will call on within the corpus of this essay include Amartya Sen, Bill Ashcroft, Gilles Deleuze, Graham Huggan, Homi K. Bhabha, Sigmund Freud et al.

Keywords: Diasporic, Postcolonial, Transitional, Disconsolate Homelands, Alternative Modernities

'The identity of South Asians (throughout the world) has proved to be problematic, both for the self-identification of the group and for the identifying institutions and popular perceptions of the host society.'

—Koshy (1998: 285)

Koshy's critical observation in constructing the ideology of neo-diaspora takes us to the significant difficulty of the 21st century—the problem of negotiating the relationship between the mobility of human subjects and cultural baggage across nations that leads to an interpretation of human agencies enacted across the threshold of 'here' and 'there', 'now' and 'then', 'past' and 'present', 'us' and 'them'. While locating the shifting significances and intentions of the South Asian diasporic literary life, we cannot afford to turn our gaze away from the sluggish yet unavoidable shifts in recent postcolonial critique emerging from inside and beyond into a transitional avatar. In other words, current trends in the discipline of postcolonial criticism throughout the world reveal that the term 'diaspora' has a direct association with the critical modality of 'transnational studies.' It illustrates an intrinsic relationship between different cultural and ethnic groups, questions 'homogeneous modes of belonging, and suggests a *de-territorialized* construction of new identity that is both immediately local and yet mediated by the wide world' (Zhang 2006: 151; my italics). Following the paradigm of Homi K. Bhabha[2] in his theorisation of border aesthetic, Bill Ashcroft studies 'not merely the adaptation of the migrants to the new societies, but also their ties, real or imagined, to their homelands and lands outside where the diaspora has settled' (Kadekar et al. 2009: 3). He observes that transnationalism indicates a 'utopian idea that national borders may not […] need to be the authoritarian constructors of identity that they have become' (Ashcroft 2009: 13). Glick Schiller describes transnationalism as a type of migration in which people recognise their origins and routes from which they emerge to set up 'transnational social fields' despite crossing borders and living together in diverse cultures in different countries (Schiller 1999: 96). The present article aims to map the crosscurrents of race, ethnicity, gender, religious faith, cultural implications, political affiliations, and economic forces that make Chandani Lokugé's novels a trope for disconsolate homelands in which diaspora identities are bound to be created through metamorphosis and difference (Hall 2013: 402).

Born and brought up under the benign tutelage of Colombo, Lokugé has cemented her position as a 'well-known Sri Lankan-Australian academic' (Sarwal 2017: 89) and a representative of 'global diasporas' (Cohen 1997: xii) who continually travels between her homeland and her host country.[3] When an interviewer asks Lokugé at the Melbourne Writers Festival, 'I mean, many of your books do deal with ideas around the difficult conditions of migration and identity. What is about the theme that so captures your mind?', Lokugé replies:

> Look, it is a felt experience. It is my own experience. It is also the experience of more than half the people I know. So, it is very fertile territory. It is also very poignant how we try not to forget our homeland or the adopted land and that murky space in-between [...] There are so many untold stories in that experience that every time I open my book and think of writing something else, I end up doing this theme.[4]

The imposition, denials, and experiences between different and heterogeneous societies, as well as the spatial and temporal detachment between the homeland and the hosting world, give rise to what Bhabha refers to as the 'liminality' or 'in-between' (Bhabha 1994: 2) space in the forming of a hybrid identity, or what Freud regards as '*Das Unheimlichen*' or 'the uncanny' (Freud 1990: 340). This 'heterotopic' (Foucault 1986: 22) site thereby creates 'a subversive strategy of subaltern agency' (Bhabha 1994: 185), linking to 'trans- and extra-national worlds' (Chambers 1996: 2). This 'marginal liminality' and 'plural monoculturalism' produce 'a mythic place of desire' (Bhabha 1994: 77) to view the problematic situation of identity construction in this era of globalisation, where so-called notions of identity, derived from the national sentiment, are being persistently problematised by the ever-present and ever-growing traits of diasporic populations across the globe (Kral 2009: 15). To put it another way, 'house' becomes an imaginary space (Rushdie 1991: 9) that is outside the limits of the private room and can only be entered from the viewless wings of imagination since the imaginary state is the site of recognition, with the image illustrating 'what we would like to be' (Žižek 1989: 105). Lokugé's involvement in these bi-directional confluences of arrivals and departures fictionalises her narratives of coming or leaving the motherland, and her writings explore the deeply fragmented ramifications between private and public spaces, stretching horizontally and vertically through multigenerational immigrants' experimental journey in the host country to depict the tug of war between old and young generations' perspectives. It illuminates and complicates the home/host dialectics correspondingly by the diasporic experiences distilled from 'alternative modernities' (Gaonkar 2001: 1), embracing transgressive identities in their dissenting identity conflicts in an alien land.

For example, Lokugé's debut novel *If the Moon Smiled* (2000) explores gendered public and private environments, displacement, rootlessness, and fragmented personalities in a vocabulary that spins out remnants of rhythms strung to myriad moods of attachments and detachments in rich, lush prose writhing in search of the home and not home. It is the tale of a young *Cingalese* Sri Lankan village girl, Manthri, who ties the knot with Mahendra, gives birth to two children, Nelum and Devake, and migrates to the capital city of the state of South Australia. Adelaide, a picturesque place that accommodates a multi-ethnic society and carries the legacy of history, reveals the ugly features of imperialism, racism and sexism, leading to a life of oblivion and the loss of her Sri Lankan identity during the 1960s. The unhappy and unsuccessful conjugal life of Mahendra and Manthri leads to a dysfunctional household, leading Mahendra to live an embittered and solitary living, Manthri to search for an identity in an alien land, Nelum to a successful but distant existence, and Devake to a drug-addicted and unsuccessful being. Like Hardy's Tess, Manthri becomes a representation of the hideous gothic darkness of a

glamorous maiden who looks for her identity in a house that does not belong to her, in a romantic attraction which is never satisfied, and in a religious faith that genuinely cures through the principle of 'moksha'. She is gradually dislocated and isolated due to her partner's constant, systemic assaults and her transplantation from her native land to a faraway unknown. However, her best thing, Nelum, warms one's heart with hope because she fights ceaselessly to be herself against all odds, including her mother's instructions. It is ironic that when her authoritarian spouse does not find any mark of blood on the white bedcover after the sexual encounter, this Angel Clare often doubts his consort's virginity, and his wife becomes a 'serpent' in his misogynistic imagination (Lokugé 2000: 35–36). This 'defocalized'[5] (Faris 2004: 3) narrative is a painful attempt at remembering that Manthri slowly recaptures her own disremembered identity in fragments in a carceral society by using magical realism elements in the form of Vana Mohini, a symbol of Manthri's repressed anxiety. She says, 'I enter the margins of darkness. In the centre, entrapped in a web of flame, the scorpion dances as if possessed, I reach fearfully towards the centre' (Lokugé 2000: 194). Because magic teaches us to believe in an alternate reality, with the help of the miraculous and unstoppable forces that can change the world in an instant, it gives people confidence that magic can free them from the bondage of causation.

The novel's core dilemma seems to be the heroine's strong urge to live her life on her own terms, despite her parents' hazy orders to be like a '*permanent* offering for the husband-shaped deity' (Mukhopadhyay 2013: 1; original italics) and to 'blossom' for her spouse and 'derive value from him' (Lokugé 2000: 7). Manthri's transnational paradigm of traumatic remembrance only helps to exacerbate the intricate design of tug of war between her intensely alive, rich, and engaging self and her husband's livid, prosaic, monotonous, and profit-driven bourgeoisie perspective. The 'Third World' that the Sinhalese family left behind represents a veritable hotbed of mass-scale abuse and extremism, which appears to negate the divine and holy life of a nation-state blossoming under the heavenly shadow of the 'nelum' flower, a Buddhist emblem of purity and divinity. Nonetheless, the heroine can only reclaim her identity by recalling her life in the chronotope[6] of the island, which she had missed after her tumultuous marriage with Mahendra and eventual forcible deportation. The novelist writes, 'May it go on (she wishes), life after life, birth after birth. This moment, this dream: this memory' (*ibid.*). On an intra-personal cultural-ethnic basis, this novel offers a space in which Manthri's primordial identity can be considered a mode of resistance against the patriarchal hegemonic constructs, where the female story defies the static narrative structures of patriarchy. Mohini alias Manthri describes her poor condition at the end of the novel, 'Disconnected from all. Wandering spirit seeking some other husk in some other existence. That's what I am' (*ibid.*: 201), meaning that she has become a stranger among men, companionless.

As a result, the penetration of this ironic amalgamation of being the 'other' and deeply individualised recreations of pre-immigration experiences into the scope of Australia's national culture reflectsthe poverty of Australia's historical consciousness. While questioning the sense of identity in the mother country, this novel creates a niche for the imaginative reproduction of the mother country's history to forge the dynamics of Sri Lankan–Australian aesthetics. It reveals the vulnerability of realising exceptions in a foreign setting, which the novel obscures with a transcultural viewpoint. The paradigm of Manthri's transnational identity in *If the Moon Smiled* can be studied with respect to Glissant's conceptualisation of rootedness, by applying the notions of Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome' to the creation of transnational identity in a chapter of his book, entitled 'Errantry, Exile', 'Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the *Poetics of Relation*, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other'(Glissant 1997: 11; my italics).

Lokugé's third novel, *Turtle Nest* (2003), is 'a traumatic story of cultural and personal conflict, rootlessness and impotence' (Herrero 2008: 49). It follows Aruni, a teenage diasporic girl who is adopted and nurtured by the love of Neela and Mohan amidst the hustle-bustle of Melbourne, through the complex and sometimes deceptive networks of family memory and intergenerational recalling, urgently seeking to restore her identity by discovering the truth about Nirmala alias Mala, her birth mother. This novel concretises a picture of this transnational crisis from the perspective of Aruni, because she has lost her name, her place, her loved friends and people, her freedom, even her sense of time and comprehension of reality, and, therefore, she is not at peace. She is anxious, with a sense of impending doom swirling inside her, and she eventually realises the issue. While visiting the scenic beaches of Sri Lanka, she thinks that this picturesque land with its rich histories and diversities is her homeland and later confides in Paul, 'I'm a local, see? This is my country. I belong here' (Lokugé 2003: 73). When she says to her mother's bosom friend Simon about her lost time, he asks several significant questions, 'But why? Why must you always belong to someone or someplace? Why can't you find a home right inside yourself?' (*ibid*.: 41). However, through a tortuous and harrowing route, she finally arrives at the bitter truth about her mother and her mother's brother (Priya). Her mother and uncle were brutally molested by the beach boys and wealthy white tourists, respectively, as an unfortunate outcome of impecuniosity and patriarchal hierarchies (Mudalali) in a poverty-stricken fishing community. But the local people's attitudes to Mala and Priya were completely different: they were more violent and threatening to Mala because the pre-marital sex of a girl was considered a sin. Women were considered the representatives of the nation's purity and moral identity in Sri Lankan Buddhist culture and heritage, thereby revealing their gender-bias nature. Therefore, this severe and tragic novel about child-sex-tourism illustrates Bell's argument of 'home' as a Janus-

faced[7] space 'where one discovers […] frontiers of difference' (Hooks 2015: 148). It also relates to Huggan's concept of 'exoticism' as a kind of realisation—'one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness' (Huggan 2001: 13). Thus, the present text becomes a *tour de force* because Lokugé recreates a new paradigm of cultural conflict and the exotic land's alternative history from the perspectives of the neglected and deprived.

Plotted in the backdrop of political unrest generated by the soul-sapping scheme of random bloodshed post the horrendous 9/11 attack, Lokugé's next heart-catching novel *Softly, As I Leave You* (2011), deals with 'the migrant's world of fractured consciousness and half-fulfilled relationships' (Siddique 2012: 154). It depicts Uma's trials and tragedies; she goes to Australia to complete her research in Sinhala Literature, meets and marries Chris Foscari, a hybrid of Australian and Venetian origins. However, when she realises the chasm in their worldviews, they begin to drift apart mentally between the homeland and the host country. For Chris, race and ethnicity do not play a pivotal role, but Uma always yearns for the Sri Lankan cultural and heritage. The inaction in identifying ethnic disparities becomes a silent effort to maintain white cultural supremacy and sovereignty. Cabined and cribbed and trapped in a cold, narrow cell in a foreign country, she manages to salvage her horrific past bit by bit as far back as she can recall. Her crisis represents 'the clustering of the categories—immigrant, non-Western "Other", refugee, and terrorist—by the Australian government and media' (Watkins 2016: 589).

This impressionistic narrative takes a U-turn when their only beloved son Arjuna, with whom Uma only finds delight, feels 'caught between two disparate cultures and alternative modernities' (Rundle 2017b: 332). He is butchered and battered on the threshold of his undone years in a violent encounter by some dacoits, considering him a terrorist from a news channel's headlines, where the reporter has projected him as an ardent worshipper of the LTTE group. Arjuna's premature death at the extremists' hands resembles the killing of Ranil by the LTTE group for not obeying their instructions in Lokugé's short story 'Alien'. After his death, his father recognises his secret diary where he describes his identity crisis, 'I'm language without words, words without meaning. Flying high in beautiful music heaven of freedom'[8] (Lokugé 2011: 186). His mother realises 'the egocentricity' that produced her son 'the unwilling object of her nostalgia and guilt-borne desire' to keep her attachment with her homeland (Kaur 2013: 2). It is only at the end that she sees the entire vista of her life and recognises her own identity in the form of Lokugé's other tragic heroines like Manthri and Aruni after Chris discovers her illicit relationship with Liam. It illustrates Spivak's notion of transnational women as 'the super-dominated, the super-exploited, but *not in the same* way'[9](Spivak 1996: 249; original italics). These three texts show that any violation in a transnational woman's life generates a displacement in the familial

position, social position, moral position, and even the woman's religious position, and that the parts of Manthri, Aruni and Uma can be best summed up by following Deleuze and Guattari's theorisation of the difference between the discourses of minority and majority:

> Women, regardless of their numbers, are a minority, definable as a state or subset; but they create only by making possible a becoming over which they do not have ownership, into which they themselves must enter; this is a becoming-woman affecting all of humankind, men and women both. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 106)

At an international conference, entitled 'Scenes of Reading: Is Australian Literature World Literature?', organised by the prestigious Sydney University on 25–26 May 2012, Ashcroft, like the keynote speaker, Prof. Wai Chee Dimock, illustrates the relationship between transnationalism and cosmopolitanism and discusses how the concept of 'transnation' differentiates between 'nation' and 'state', how cultural and ethnic mobility disrupt, deconstruct and dismantle notions of identity in the works of fiction, by describing this as a particular mode of 'horizonality', where the 'many different stories' of individuals construct a horizontal axis against the 'overarching grand narrative' alias vertical axis of the state or nation (Rundle 2017a: 8). In other words, the overcrowding in a given space, the displacement and dispersion of individuals away from their homeland, the increased and illegal crossing of borders, the blurring concept of 'home', and the contact between different communities across constructed national boundaries have all worked to create the idea of the transnational narrative as an essential illustrative tool of 'smooth space' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 474). It does not only 'restore geography and the arbitrary, but, rather, open up again their conditions of possibility, a release, especially through women's writing, from the "locked within boundaries" of patriarchal hegemony' (Bromley 2000: 73). Postcolonial discourse and transnational fiction studies have persistently tried to produce the idea that culture and nation can be problematic, highly nuanced, controversial, and conflicting in both a general sense and individuals' specific embodiment.[10] With all those components of rich Sri Lankan culture and heritage charged with a commendable aesthetical sense as a nostalgia for a particular location, Lokugé's diasporic novels appear as sagas of the Sri Lankan island in a specific time-space continuum while underscoring the declaration of new selfhood. It anticipates Edward Said's assertion, 'Since almost by definition exile and memory go together, it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determines how one sees the future' (Said 2000: xxxv).

Notes

1. The author presented a brief version of this article as a paper at the International Conference organised by IACLALS and Jadavpur University from 5 February to 7 February 2020. I owe my friend Deblina Hazra of Mahisadal Raj College for this conference, who first informed me about IACLALS over a telepathic communication

on a winter evening in 2018. For this paper, I am indebted to my mentor Dr Sibendu Chakrabarty of Charuchandra College, who introduced me to Chandani Lokugé' scomplex fictional world.

2. Bhabha also takes the view that there is an innate relationship between 'nation' and 'narration' and shows how nationalist discourses, like their narrative constructions, 'lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realise their horizons in the mind's eye' (Bhabha 1990: 1).
3. Amartya Sen comments, 'having two styles or traditions coexisting side by side, without the twain meeting, must really be seen as "plural monoculturalism"' (Sen 2006: 157).
4. This is part of the interview, entitled 'Chandani Lokugé on Writing, Short Stories and Inspiration—Sydney Writers' Centre Interview' on 7 September 2011. It was uploaded on YouTube by Australian Writers' Centre on 19 November 2019.
5. Faris describes 'defocalized' narrative as a kind of narrative which 'witnesses and reports events that humans ordinarily do not' (Faris 2004: 3).
6. Bakhtin describes the chronotope as an illustration of the 'intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature' (Bakhtin 1981: 84).
7. Tom Nairn problematises the nation's idea by comparing and contrasting it to Janus (Nairn 1997: 71).
8. Rushdie describes Saleem's existential crisis while similarly rewriting his homeland's history, 'I am alone in the vastness of the numbers, the numbers marching one two three' (Rushdie 1981: 532).
9. See Donaldson (1992), Emberley (1993), Butler (1993), Visweswaran (1994), and Alexander and Mohanty (1997), who discuss gender performativity, the relationship between feminism and imperialism, and individual forms of transnational feminism.
10. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin comment, 'The existence of these shared themes and recurrent structural and formal patterns […] speak for the shared psychic and historical conditions across the differences distinguishing one postcolonial society from another' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002: 17).

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Subcontinental Philosophy: The Passage from Diversity to Difference

Huzaifa Omair Siddiqi

Abstract: This article provides an introduction to a new philosophical movement in India which I categorise under the name 'subcontinental philosophy'. Philosophers such as Soumyabrata Choudhury, Aishwary Kumar, Shaj Mohan, and Divya Dwivedi are taking forward B.R. Ambedkar's anti-caste thought in a way that surpasses the impasse of postcolonial theory when it comes to the question of caste. While postcolonial theory has celebrated diversity, it has not seen the necessity of moving from diversity, which valorises the oppressive caste hierarchy, to a theory of difference which would allow for its annihilation. In this article, I read Choudhury's book *Ambedkar and Other Immortals* and show how his reformulation of Alain Badiou's theory of the event allows him to institute a revolutionary/pre-revolutionary distinction that is not the same as the modern/pre-modern distinction legitimately criticised by postcolonial theorists. I also show how it is with this theory of the event that Choudhury can think the passage from diversity to difference, and thus institute a new philosophy of singular universalism.

Keywords: Subcontinental Philosophy, Diversity, Postcolonial Theory

This article attempts to provide an introduction to a contemporary movement in Indian philosophy whose focus on the question of caste is challenging the theoretical dominance of postcolonial studies. Thinkers such as Soumyabrata Choudhury, Aishwary Kumar, Divya Dwivedi, and Shaj Mohan are all united, despite their diverse theoretical and analytical methods, by a commitment to the anti-caste thought developed by B.R. Ambedkar. Their work takes an antagonistic and often polemical attitude towards what has for so many years gone under the catch-all term of 'postcolonial theory'. More than their antagonism towards the 'marked comprador tendency' (Choudhury 2018: 57) common to postcolonial intellectual output, what unites these writers is their commitment to the term *philosophy*. It may be argued that their work is

not so much scholarship as an attempt by intellectuals of Indian origin to make an original contribution to political philosophy. At the very least, we can claim that their work seeks to demonstrate how the project of the annihilation of caste invoked first by Ambedkar cannot be located in a particular milieu but has *universal* and therefore a properly philosophical relevance. This article is an attempt to understand the basic thrust of this contemporary philosophical movement which I call *subcontinental philosophy* which seeks to revive a new political and philosophical conception of universalism localised in the margins of the subcontinent. Through a reading of Soumyabrata Choudhury's *Ambedkar and Other Immortals: An Untouchable Research Programme*, I will attempt to demonstrate in what respect subcontinental philosophy opposes itself to postcolonial theory's critique of universalism.

A Genealogy of Postcolonial Theory

Any discourse that attempts to criticise what goes under the name of postcolonial theory is bedevilled by the very diversity of what it seeks to critique. Just like the postcolony itself, postcolonial theory encompasses an immense number of disciplines ranging from literary studies, gender and queer theory, anthropology, history, legal theory, and economics. It is absolutely pointless to claim that there is one formulation for postcolonial theory. Like its object, the theory itself is also plural, hybrid, and composed of multiplicities; it has no essence that we can expose and then critique. Rather than attempt to essentialise a highly diverse mode of critical and theoretical practice, it would be more fruitful to essay a genealogy of its primary analytical category, which is *difference*.

Martin Heidegger's questioning of the meaning of being in his book *Being and Time* laid the foundation for the philosophies of difference that would proliferate in France in the 1960s. Heidegger took the fundamental presupposition of phenomenology, intentionality as the subjectively structured 'consciousness *of* something' and discovered that the latter requires and presumes the always already open field, the *lichtung* or the Clearing 'within' which the play of phenomena can become apparent. The Clearing, quite remarkably, does not display the subject-object structure. But the Clearing remains the inapparent condition of appearance.Rather than becoming an object of thought, it constitutively withdraws from it. This withdrawal, instead of being a lack within thinking, is the very condition of meaning. Thus thinking, reflected back on itself, leads to an irresolvable and undecidable aporia, a difference (between Being and beings) which cannot be sublated into a higher unity. Whereas Hegel's philosophy (continued by various strains of Marxism) had argued for a dialectical resolution of all contradictions which would reduce difference to identity in the super-subject *Geist* or Spirit, Heidegger's thought shows why such a resolution is impossible when it comes to the question of being. By deconstructing the subject, difference is thus freed from the shackles

of identity. The French philosophers of the 1960s like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida who followed up on Heidegger never abandoned this pathbreaking insight even as they pursued fundamentally different projects. Foucault's *episteme* and genealogy is prefigured in Heidegger's theory of the epochs of being, while Derrida's invocation of the non-word and non-concept *differance* only clarifies what remains all too metaphysical in Heidegger.[1]

The task for philosophy is therefore *critical* in a deconstructive (immanent rather than Kantian transcendentalist) mode; it is to show how every discourse makes metaphysical claims that it cannot sustain without ending up in aporias that ruin its desire for consistency. The single dialectical plane of colonial and Marxist history fractures itself, in a careful and cautious deconstructive reading, into two (or more) terrains that render the question of a sense of history moot. Whether in the form of Derridean deconstruction or Foucauldian genealogy, postcolonial theory holds fast to the utter impossibility of *articulating* a univocal and singular sense of history. Postcolonial historians have taken up the philosophical deconstructions of Heidegger and Derrida as an occasion to implement the Foucauldian genealogical method and in doing so have valorised difference over identity and devalued the colonialist's dialectical understanding of history.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*

When one reads Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, a much referred to minor classic of postcolonial theory, one finds it to be a paradigmatic example of both the abovementioned philosophical moves. Chakrabarty is correct in arguing against the historicist project fostered by both European colonial and Marxist intellectuals. John Stuart Mill, in his justification for the continuation of colonial rule in the 19th century, had consigned Indians and Africans to the waiting room of history, while even a Marxist historian like Eric Hobsbawm categorised the Indian peasant insurgencies of the 20th century as 'prepolitical' and 'archaic'. As Chakrabarty writes, in Hobsbawm, 'Peasants' actions, organized—more often than not—along the axes of kinship, religion, and caste, and involving gods, spirits, and supernatural agents as actors alongside humans, remained for him symptomatic of a consciousness that had not quite come to terms with the secular-institutional logic of the political' (2000: 12). For Hobsbawm, such contradictions needed to be resolved on a higher plane before the peasant insurgencies could be considered 'political'. This is however exactly what Chakrabarty makes a valid and important argument against.

Similarly, Chakrabarty argues for the persistence of differences despite the existence of the supposedly universalising tendency of capitalist and scientific modernity. At almost the very end of *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty in an effort to substantiate his point, provides us with two

exemplary anecdotes. The first is about the distinguished astronomer A.A. Krishnaswami Ayyangar (the father of poet A.K. Ramanujan), who was also an expert astrologer; his son recounted that he was 'troubled by his holding together in one brain both astronomy and astrology', to which his father replied, 'don't you know, the brain has two lobes?' (cited in Chakrabarty 2000: 253). The second anecdote Chakrabarty cites is about the physicist and Nobel Prize winner C.V. Raman who would take a ritual bath ahead of a solar eclipse. For Chakrabarty, these two anecdotes, even if not circumstantiated, tell us that these distinguished scientists 'did not need to totalize through the outlook of science all the different life-practices within which they found themselves and to which they felt called….To provincialise Europe in historical thought is to struggle to hold in a state of permanent tension a dialogue between two contradictory points of view' (254). This is perhaps the entire point of Chakrabarty's book distilled into a few sentences: what appear to be contradictory life practices such as, in this instance, being an astronomer and an astrologer does not necessitate the supersession of one by the other. Rather, as he writes, the two points of views can and must be maintained in a 'state of permanent tension' (254).

In the introductory essay to *Historical Teleologies in the Modern World*, co-written along with Henning Truper and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Chakrabarty augments his bifurcation of the singular plane of history into History 1 and History 2 in *Provincializing Europe* with the genealogical discovery of the plurality of teleologies in European thought from the 18th century onwards: 'This introductory chapter does not mean to argue that it is possible, or impossible, to eliminate teleology, or even just tragedy, from history. Neither does it insist that, normatively speaking, teleology, historicity or temporality *ought* to be plural. It does, however, suggest that historically they have been and that the present-day tendency to overlook this plurality is at least in part a product of this very plurality' (17). One might note here that Chakrabarty's genealogical recovery of the plural strands within the European history of the concept of teleology intends to discover the pulverised terrain of multiple historicities and temporalities even from the very midst of the discourse that propagated historical uniformity and homogeneity across the world. The fact of difference is the only universal truth.

Difference and Diversity

The two anecdotes cited above from *Provincializing Europe* are, however, not innocent portrayals of the persistence of historical difference. Rather, as anyone who is from the Indian subcontinent can attest to, astrology and 'ritual baths' are fundamentally practices that play a role in the preservation of caste purity. Postcolonial theorists, as Choudhury (2018: 57) writes, show a 'marked comprador tendency when they have promoted and celebrated so-called cultural and other "differences" in structurally unequal societies'. What

remains obscure in such a theory is the difference between the valorisation of difference in the French philosophers of the 1960s and the celebration of difference of the structurally unequal, caste-based societies like those of the Indian subcontinent. While the work of philosophers like Derrida and Foucault (among many others) was directed against the suffocation of revolutionary discourse in Europe by Hegelian Marxism and thus an intellectual response situated within revolutionary history (*ibid.*), the contemporary celebration of difference by postcolonial theorists like Chakrabarty only conceals the incredible structural inequality of caste society and in a way becomes an apology for its continued existence.

Indeed, one might even go so far as to say that postcolonial theory simply continues the project of consolidating a brutal 'Hindu' majority that has never actually existed in the subcontinent, as Shaj Mohan, J. Reghu, and Divya Dwivedi claim in their article for the January 2021 issue of the Indian magazine *Caravan*. In that article, they point out how most postcolonial intellectuals from Ashis Nandy and Gayatri Spivak to Rajeev Bhargava, Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty simply used the tools of 'self-criticism of the West' to assert 'native pride and values which were confused and hidden by colonial rule'. Mohan, Reghu, and Dwivedi go on to claim that in such a discourse, 'caste divisions and oppressions vanished into the category of the native with its moral superiority within the postcolonialist dyad. In the writings of postcolonial theorists, the upper castes' lamentations about colonial humiliation alone appear before the international audience, obliterating the discursive space for lower-caste people's historical interventions and political desires'. While it is debatable whether the confusion between the two kinds of difference by postcolonial theorists is deliberate or a product of unconscious caste biases, what is undeniable are its deleterious effects.

The primary task of subcontinental philosophy would be to sharpen this difference and keep it from being obscured. To separate the two terms which postcolonial theorists needlessly and even destructively conflate, it would be more helpful to call a theory that celebrates the plurality of a caste-based structurally hierarchical society a theory of *diversity* rather than *difference*.[2] Any theory that posits a plurality without posing the self-reflexive question of the position from which it is made visible as such, is a theory of diversity. A theory of difference is one that makes this reflexive gesture, by which it includes itself within the plurality it surveys. The difference between *difference* and *diversity* does not exist for postcolonial theory. This is of course what I argued for in more detail in an earlier article (Siddiqi 2020). But why is this difference obscure and invisible for most postcolonial theorists? Why do they act as if the undeniable plurality and diversity of practices in a caste-based and structurally unequal society can be thought under the name of *difference*?

From Diversity to Difference: A Theory of the Event

Choudhury's claim is that this difference between a theory of difference and a theory of diversity only becomes visible after the occurrence of a revolutionary event. It is only for those who pledge their fidelity to the event that there can be even something like a difference between difference and diversity. Thus, we can see that the reason why postcolonial theorists have so often shied away from a serious and rigorous reading of Ambedkar is not due to some contingent facts but baked into the very foundations of their discourse which denies the event of 'Ambedkar-thought' in the same way that contemporary Hinduism denies the event of Buddhism in its attempt to assimilate it. By not having a concept of the difference between diversity and difference, it is easy enough to view Ambedkar's history of untouchability as forming a 'familiar historicist narrative of modern nationalism' (Chatterjee 2004: 9) rather than as a history of the revolution and counter-revolution (the title of one of Ambedkar's great works). The revolutionary moment that is what Choudhury calls 'Ambedkar-thought' is reduced, in Chatterjee's reading, to one among many such negotiations within the modern state's governmental apparatus by political societies.

We are of course familiar with Chatterjee's classification of Ambedkar as an 'unalloyed modernist', an accusation that has much more of a polemical sting to it than it might at first appear. Rather than refuting or denying Chatterjee's polemical characterisation of Ambedkar, Choudhury quite categorically writes that Ambedkar was 'India's first Europeanist' (2018: 39). Such a characterisation could of course, lead to accusations of Eurocentrism, one of the cardinal sins from the perspective of postcolonial theory. This coupled with Choudhury's revival of a revolutionary/pre-revolutionary distinction that might seem to mirror or be analogous to the modern/pre-modern distinction of colonial or Marxist ideologues, makes subcontinental philosophy an obvious target for the postcolonial theorist. Indeed, how is one to defend a discourse that appears to be reiterating the much-debunked claim of 'first in Europe, then elsewhere'? How is one to distinguish between Europeanism and Eurocentrism? Moreover, how can the resurrection of the revolutionary and pre-revolutionary distinction (accompanied by the term 'comprador' as well as counter-revolutionary) not give rise to the modern/pre-modern distinction which was one of the primary ideological tools that allowed for the justification of colonial rule?

Choudhury's analytical concept of the *event* allows him to evade both these accusations. The derivation of the theory of the event from the axioms and theorems of set theory is, as we know, perhaps Alain Badiou's most remarkable philosophical achievement. In *Being and Event* Badiou followed up on the mathematician Paul Cohen's theorem that demonstrated how Georg Cantor's Continuum hypothesis could not be proved within the axioms of modern standard set theory.[3] In a non-mathematical language, we may say

that Cohen disproved the hypothesis which claimed that the difference between the number of elements of an infinite set and that set's power set was a measurable quantity. Inspired by this idea, Badiou has argued over the last thirty odd years that in any kind of social or political world there can be the immeasurable and unpredictable eruption of an *event* which would create the subjects that would declare their fidelity to it. Unlike the category of modernity which presumes a prior historical movement and progression towards it, the event is not the telos of a historical movement but rather a break or breach which announces the commencement of something new. The event is not the culmination of a progressive historical movement but rather something sudden and unforeseen. But once it has occurred it creates the subjects who will be faithful to it. It is a break in historical time that has nothing to do with the modern/pre-modern distinction. The revolutionary break that is the event can occur at any time, in any society. Badiou most often invokes the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Chinese Revolution of 1949, both of which occurred in societies considered by dogmatic Marxists to not yet be ready for revolution since they didn't have any of the supposedly favourable conditions for it (no highly developed industries, a majority of the population being small peasants or serfs rather than wage labourers who would revolt against capitalist oppression). Russia and China were not at the correct historical stage for a revolution to occur, yet it did. This occurrence is for Badiou an event, one that does not obey the dictates of a dialectical understanding of history.

For Choudhury, Ambedkar's Mahad Satyagraha of 1927, where he led Dalits to drink water from the Chavadar Lake from which they were barred (though animals could drink from it) is such an event. Here Ambedkar proclaimed the 'norm of equality'; for Ambedkar this event was such that he felt that 'no parallel to it can be found in the history of India' (cited in Choudhury 2018: 163). This event, according to Choudhury, broke apart historical time into two: 'one part useless, archaic history of the 'old regime' (which continues!) and the other, a zone of 'raw' time of a new event of politics and not merely a political programme' (*ibid*.: 164). But if, as Choudhury says, 'there is no *history of events*' in the sense that an event is a breach that occurs without the debt of the 'temporalisation of historical time' (*ibid*.: 181), in what way can we understand Ambedkar as India's first Europeanist? Would this not imply that he is someone who emulates a European event, such as the French Revolution of 1789? But then would that not bring us back to the much-criticised discourse where European history is the model for all other histories?

In fact, Choudhury writes that 'nowhere does Ambedkar say that the Mahad Satyagraha *emulates* the French Revolution' (2018: 172). For Choudhury. the French Revolution might chronologically precede the Mahad Satyagraha, but that should not be taken to mean that the latter simply emulates the ideals propagated by the former. In fact, Choudhury claims that they are

'equal and *incomparable*' (*ibid*.: 173). They are equal in their *truth-effect*, which is the institution of the 'norm of equality'. Choudhury explains that the 'significance of this analogous schema lies in its common function in both cases that it consolidates the history beyond and against the old regime in the name of a new regime of truth-effect(s)' (*ibid*.). It is not as if the Mahad Satyagraha and the French Revolution are part of a 'shared teleology of human progress' (*ibid*.), for that would be to discount the 'vast differences of the institution of historical discourses' (*ibid*.: 172). Rather it is the proclamation of the norm of equality which is equally enjoyed by whoever utters it, whether it is the French *citoyen* storming the Bastille or the Dalits drinking from Chavadar Lake for the first time. The equality shared between these two events is an equality of function; it is an isomorphic relation. Yet at the same time the two events are also *incomparable.* They are incomparable because the norm of equality has to be *actually declared.* Indeed, for Choudhury this is nothing but the 'declaration of a *breach*' (*ibid*.: 175). This breach cannot be an effect of anonymous discourse but is an actual and local event, what Choudhury calls, following Badiou, a wager. The event that breaks history into two, between an old regime which continues empirically and a new regime of equality, is not an effect of discourse, it has 'no discursive support' (*ibid*.). The actual declaration is nothing more than an egalitarian gesture which declares that there has been a breach, and nothing more. It is a 'conjunctural effectivity based on *nothing*' (*ibid*.: 181). This is what unites the French Revolution and the Mahad Satyagraha, as Choudhury writes, 'That there *is* a declaration of equality in the French Revolution and in Mahad, strictly speaking, an *absurd* declaration in each case with no discursive support, is what unites them across an abyss' (*ibid*.: 175). This institutes a peculiar symmetrical reversibility into history where the French Revolution serves as a metric to measure the Mahad Satyagraha in the same way that the latter serves as a metric to measure the former. This is why Choudhury's characterisation of Ambedkar as India's first Europeanist is not a Eurocentric proposition.

Conclusion

Thus, we see why the revolutionary/pre-revolutionary distinction cannot be neatly aligned with the modern/pre-modern distinction. In an earlier article I had pointed out that sharpening the difference between *difference* and *diversity* was one of the most important theoretical tasks confronting subcontinental philosophers (Siddiqi 2020). Choudhury's reformulation of Badiou's theory of the event seems to directly address this problem by allowing us to understand why this difference remained so obscure and hazy for so long in postcolonial theory. Yet this does not mean that we have to reject the incredible theoretical achievements of postcolonial theorists over the last century. Rather the task is to intensify and amplify their pathbreaking insights into the nature of history,

politics, culture and economics in the postcolony while simultaneously affirming the event that remains due to structural reasons, absolutely invisible. The Mahad Satyagraha is but the name for one such event; for Ambedkar himself the name of Gautama Buddha is an index to the traces of a revolution that the Brahminical counter-revolution has not yet been able to completely swallow. It is only with the name of these two singular individuals — Ambedkar and the Buddha, that we can further the project of subcontinental philosophy to rethink universalism, but this time a universalism of the singular.[4]

Notes

1 One can read Reiner Schurmann's *Heidegger: on Being and Acting* and his magisterial *Broken Hegemonies* to corroborate these points.

2 A theory of diversity does in many cases advocate tolerance, but without the self-reflexive gesture of the philosophies of difference, this remains benign and patronising rather than political and emancipatory.

3 Cantor's Continuum Hypothesis states that the set containing all the natural numbers, ù, has a power set whose cardinality (the number of elements it contains) is n_1 which is the next biggest cardinal number after n_0 which is the size or cardinality of ω.

4 Of course, this universalism of the singular must not be conflated with Chakrabarty's recovery of what he calls a 'negative universal history' borrowed from Theodor Adorno. Chakrabarty uses the term in his Anthropocene writings, defining a negative universal history as 'one that allows the particular to express its resistance to its imbrication in the totality without denying being so imbricated' (2021: 47). I do not see how Chakrabarty's turn to the universal, even if it is a negative universal, is at all different from the valorisation of difference he borrows from Heidegger. The confusion between diversity and difference seems to be even more dangerous when it is transplanted from the terrain of questions of human history into that of the histories of non-humans. Any reckoning with the question of the 'Anthropocene', it seems to me, is destined to remain futile without this distinction coming into play.

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Narrating Fragmentation: Violence and Pakistan in Bilal Tanweer's *The Scatter Here Is Too Great*

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Abstract: This article attempts to look at Bilal Tanweer's work *The Scatter Here is Too Great* from the Masudian perspective, that is, the inability to represent the complex human emotional experiences through straitjacketed narratives or theories that try to reduce the plurality of human experience into generalised and uniform ways of being. The human condition is not translatable into simple binaries. I analyse how Tanweer's characters defy being participants of the master narrative, instead they are presented as developing and not completely knowable. In consonance with this I also reflect on the collapse of the discourses of globality which necessarily forces us to think about the other alternative, an inward movement towards the individual, who becomes an Untranslatable in the discourse of the global.

Keywords: Fragmentation, Globality, Global South, Untranslatibility, Master Narrative

Naiyer Masud, the famous Urdu short-story writer, known for his esoteric stories with no final ending, and one of Bilal Tanweer's professed influences, suggested through his stories that the human subject is not capable of ever seeing the larger picture, of envisioning the totality of human experience, and that he is inherently myopic by nature.In his short-story collection *Seemiya* (The Occult), Masud says that 'knowledge is nothing … because of our own lack of knowledge we call it knowledge' (Masud 2015: 120). For Masud, any attempt to understand the whole is a redundant task because we can only feign understanding and therefore are only deluding ourselves. If one is perhaps to use Masud's understanding of the world, the idea that we end up grappling with is this: are all our methods of thinking on a worldly/global scale missing

one irrefutable point, of the impossibility of translating the individual human experience into a generalised knowable form? It is, in a sense, a question of the untranslatable nature of the human condition that resists easy formulations and simple binaries such as North–South, East–West, and the like.

This article attempts to look at the work of Bilal Tanweer from this Masudian perspective, that is, the inability to represent the complex human emotional experiences through straightforward, straitjacketed narratives or theories that try to reduce the plurality of human experience into generalised and uniform ways of being. In Bilal Tanweer's novel-in-stories *The Scatter Is Too Great* (2013), we see a similar attempt to de-link the individual experience with any sense of the totality or a commonality of experiences. Tanweer's novel is a work dedicated to the city of his birth, Karachi, and whose story revolves around a bomb blast at the city's Cantonment Station. The novel tries to link up the different perspectives of the same blast, of lovers, of families, and strangers and witnesses, all the while feebly trying to form a coherent picture of Karachi through their fractured, damaged lives that lead up to the blast. Tanweer's work becomes relevant in an era of global discourses obsessed with terms like the 'Third World' and so forth because the novel-in-stories attempts to suggest the need to skirt these overarching ways of perceiving the world, and in turn also hints at how the task of literature, in many ways, is a resistance to such ways of seeing and being, and the importance of the experiences of microhistories.

Before we delve into the work of Bilal Tanweer, it is necessary to unpack the different meanings and impulses that form a part of the theory of global discourses. Even before the word 'Global South' gained currency in the contemporary socio-political and economic discourses, what is pertinent to our discussion with regards to Tanweer's novel is to understand the hegemonising impulses of the all-encompassing terms such as the 'Third World', terms which originate in the so-called First World to define the nations and societies that are unable to achieve the goals, economic and otherwise, of capitalist or socialist world orders (Dirlik 2007). The term 'Third World', coined by Alfred Sauvy in 1952, was essentially used to distinguish the former colonies from the capitalist and socialist systems. Arif Dirlik goes on to elaborate that:

> [t]he term [Third World] in its origins had suggested that societies of the Third World, embarking on the long path to modernity, had one of two paths to follow: the capitalist or the socialist. Implicit in it was a lingering assumption, ultimately to be fulfilled, that the socialist path itself was something of a temporary deviation, as modernization discourse assigned to capitalism the ultimate teleological taskof bringing history to an end. (Dirlik 2007: 14)

Dirlik argues that the usage of the term 'Third World' did not really have the hopeful connotation that the word 'Third' encompasses—of an order that is neither capitalist or socialist, of a third possibility—but rather had an implied

allegiance to the capitalist world order. Moreover, any hope of a possibility of a third world order, of a 'third path to modernity' conceived in the Bandung Conference of 1955 was overturned by the 1977 Brandt Commission that in the decade from 1968 to 1977 almost reversed the idea of the 'South' as a 'possible saviour of the world to an object of compassion that must be saved in order for the world to save itself' (Dirlik 2007: 14). Dirlik's point with regards to thinking on a worldly/global scale is the need for intense scepticism when it comes to simple terminological shifts to define the postcolonial/Third World, especially after the 1990s Globalisation, where there is an attempt to think unilaterally with regards to ways of being and doing, and the project of the Global South should ideally challenge hegemonic discourses which overpower *microhistories* in favour of an overarching version of unified History.

It goes without saying that the Global South is not a reference to the literal south of the globe but is a 'metaphor that indicates the regions of the world at the receiving end of globalization and suffering its consequences … the places on the planet that endured the experience of coloniality—that suffered and still suffer the consequences of the colonial wound' (Mignolo 2011: 184–85) and of course the 'setbacks of the …global market' including the 9/11 attacks and the meltdown of financial markets in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

In the introduction to the journal *The Global South*, Alfred J. Lopez says:

> What defines the Global South is the recognition by peoples across the planet that globalization's promised bounties have not materialized, that it has failed as a *global master narrative*. The global South also marks, even celebrates, the mutual recognition among the world's subalterns of their shared condition at the margins of the brave new neoliberal world of globalization. The global South diverges from the postcolonial, and emerges as a *post* global discourse, in that it is best glimpsed at those moments where globalization as a hegemonic discourse stumbles, where the latter experiences a crisis or setback. (Lopez 2007: 3)

Lopez's succinct choice of words describes what it means to be Global South is surprisingly the very lack of being global, that is, as he says of a post-global existence. According to him, this post-globality is the necessary condition for the modern day, which forces us to ask the pertinent question that if the global does not hold together anymore, what does? This article tries to read Bilal Tanweer's work in relation to the ideas propounded by Dirlik, Lopez, and their ilk, which question the hegemonic discourses of Globalisation and global thought that are forced upon the nations of the Global South without much inclusion of the stakeholders themselves. The forceful imposition of terms like the Third World or the eventual change in the meaning of the term itself and the consequences of policies of the Global North forced downwards so as to speak onto the Global South is something philosophers like Jacques Ranciere have questioned in their works. For example, Ranciere, in his *Dis-agreement*: *Politics and Philosophy*, discusses the impact of a

seemingly simple change of nomenclature on the human subject. On the topic of the migrant worker, Ranciere says:

> We had nearly the same number of immigrants twenty years ago. But they had another name then: they were called migrant workers or just plain workers. Today's immigrant is first a worker who has lost his second name, who has lost the political form of his identity and of his otherness, the form of a political subjectification of the count of the uncounted. All he now has left is a sociological identity, which then topples over into the anthropological nakedness of a different race and skin. What he has lost is his identification with a mode of subjectification of the people, worker or proletarian, as object of a declared wrong and as subject giving form to his dispute. (Ranciere 1999: 118)

The example from Ranciere only attempts to show how the policies and politics of naming can affect almost an uncountable number of human subjects who do not have a say in their own renaming and de-subjectification. In almost an analogous way, Tanweer, Dirlik, and other thinkers in and of the Global South too attempt to bring to light the insidious workings of global discourses thatignore and occlude difference in order to fulfil skewed political, social, economic, and ideological goals.

In reading Bilal Tanweer'snovel, we see that the collapse of the discourses of globality necessarily forces us to think about the other alternative, an inward movement towards the individual, who becomes an Untranslatable in the discourse of the global. The Untranslatability of the individual is what, according to Emily Apter, troubles the discourses which work at a global/worldly level. For example, in her book *Against World Literature*, Apter says that at the core of disciplines like World Literature is a homogenising principle at work that flattens difference, questions uniqueness, and attempts to reduce 'cultural untranslatability' (Apter 2013: 190). Through the example of World Literature, which works at a global/worldly level, there is the tendency to overlook that which is different, or in Rancierian terms, the 'uncounted in the count of the population'. Through Apter and Ranciere, we are witness to the anxiety of global discourses which are unable to deal with the excess and with the remainder in the attempts to form an artificial wholeness, that the master narratives no longer can maintain their mastery and control over the human remainder that they attempt to leave behind. Tanweer's stories read from this perspective are an exercise in the untranslatability of the individual human experience into a globally comprehensible language. Therefore, the question that the Global South texts attempt to pose is just because we can think globally, as opposed to animals, does that necessarily mean that we should do so at the cost of excluding and occluding the smaller uniquely untranslatable voices?

Tanweer's novel attempts to deal with this conundrum and also to engage with what is left behind when the easy calm of the master narrative breaks down, in this case, symbolised by the bomb blast that rips through the city. The epigraph to his novel states clearly what he attempts to do:

> Ever seen a bullet smashed windscreen? The whole at the centre throws a sharp clean web around itself and becomes crowded with tiny crystals. That's the metaphor for my world, this city: broken, beautiful, and born of tremendous violence. One way to give you this account is to "name the streets and number the dead". Another is to give you this scatter that I have gathered. (2013: 1)

His novel tries to understand the human casualty of thought at a global scale, and instead of numbering the dead, he would rather prefer to give the reader the unique stories that form his collection.

In an attempt to understand the fractured lives of the protagonists of the novel, Tanweer, right at the outset, sets up his novel as a collection of short stories of different characters with some inhabiting different time schemes/ periods altogether. The breakdown of the structure of the novel, as Shams Siddiqi points out, into five distinct parts, is almost like a five-act play (Siddiqi 2014). Even before embarking on narrating the fragmented lives of his protagonists, Tanweer tries to make it abundantly clear that in the post-global world, the neat divisions of genres and disciplines do not hold together, and as Lopez argues, the world itself is fragmenting, where the Global South comes into being at the moments of crisis of the totalising impulse.

In the story, 'Sukhansaz', we are introduced to the eponymous protagonist, an old eccentric communist poet who was jailed during the time of Zia-ul-Haq, and is now travelling in a local bus with a cartoonist narrator who is attempting to draw him, while his fellow travellers, mostly young boys, make fun of the old manas he is egged on to recite his poetry. The story in itself is a very simple, straightforward narrative about the laughs the characters have at the expense of the eccentric poet, Tanweer drawing him out in a cartoonish manner, much like the cartoonist narrator. At the simplest level, Tanweer seems to be mocking the one-dimensional character of Sukhansaz and the failure of the ideological system of Communism which he represents, mimicking the totalising impulse of the master narratives.

However, at a deeper level in the other stories, Tanweer uses the role of memory to highlight the impossibility of complete knowledge about the individual through the memories of protagonists in other stories of the novel. For example, in the story 'Lying Low', we are introduced to Sukhansaz's son, in a different time scheme, who is recuperating immediately after the blast when he is at his home with his old mother and another elderly relative. Here, through the narrator's memory, we come across Sukhansaz again, who this time isnot an unrealistic caricature as in the earlier story but one whose actions have real-world consequences as his son ponders over him. Sukhansaz, we get to know, had abandoned his family in the hope of living the life of a revolutionary and for his son is merelya 'raving old lunatic' who cares more about his ideology than his family. Tanweer adds a layer of depth to the character, which is, however, from the perspective of the other.

Similarly, in the story 'Things and Reasons', the narrator, a sub-editor in a newspaper, visits a hospital after the bomb blast has taken place to receive the body of his brother and comes across the dead body of Sukhansaz. Here again, we come across Sukhansaz, who was the narrator's father's friend. However, in this case, Sukhansaz does not come across as either a caricature or what his son thought about him but again as something more than what we expect, as the protagonist narrates: 'After his son was born, he[Sukhansaz] said he had started feeling alienated from work, to which he had dedicated his life. He cared only about his son. Nothing else was important to him anymore. "That scared me", he said, "and I realized it had to be one thing: family or revolution"'. The representation of Sukhansaz by Tanweer is a tribute to his literary master, Naiyer Masud, who, in many ways, brought into Urdu literature the technique of looking at certain people and things from multipleperspectives. A peculiar characteristic of Masud's oeuvre is how the same object or person gains or loses significance in different stories, suggesting the reader's inability to look at the object of literature in its wholeness. Fragmentation is not only a part of Masud's narrative technique but also of his outlook towards literature and humankind's inability to grasp the totality of things.

Similarly, this style is inherited by Tanweer, too, and he uses it to highlight the inability of the West to understand the problems and predicaments of the Global South clearly. Tanweer, through the many representations of Sukhansaz, also makes a pertinent point of the inability of not just official narratives to understand the individual but also of fiction as the writer narrator realises about the art of writing itself when he says: 'Meaning never matched the words and words always evaded the thought. Before you started writing you could picture the clean arcs of your life, but what finally made it to the paper was circular and loopy … joined at the wrong ends … [and] messed up the whole picture' (Tanweer 2013: 53).

Each story in in the novel has characters which turn up and impinge on the life of the protagonists, not like a physical presence but almost in the form of a vague memory, a presentness which does not have any physical existence but yet nonetheless in a way occludes a movement into the future. The structure of the novel, in many ways, is a roadblock to itself and to the idea of progress, which continuously hinders the final aim of the work, almost forcing itself to look inwards in a self-referential manner, and to ponder over the remainder that master narratives usually gloss over. For Tanweer the only way to narrate the disparate experiences of individuals inhabiting a post-global world, where the focus is on the microcosm rather than the macrocosm, is to acknowledge the presence of untranslatable experiences of the individual protagonists of the stories and also the incomprehensibility of characters he creates.

In a story called 'The Truants', we get a glimpse of the message of Tanweer of the predicament of the post-global world. The truant in the story

remembers a discussion with his father during a bus ride when he was younger. The father, a lover of the city, says: 'you see my son, a city, is all about how you look at it…. We must learn to see it in many ways so that when one of the ways of looking hurts us, we can take refuge in another way of looking' (2013: 86). Tanweer is perhaps obsessed with the problem of representation in literature, bringing us back to the question of the problem of global discourses and master narratives. For Tanweer, the only way to understand a shattered, fragmenting world is through the task of memory, of reconstruction from multiple perspectives, and yet that too is perhaps doomed to failure. In the same story, he has a character utter this perpetual problem: 'places and people are like things: both made of memories and meaningful to us in the same way: we construct ourselves in conversations with them' (2013: 85).

What moreover stands out in the fiction of Tanweer is his desire to focus on the individual through multiple perspectives and time periods. Here we come across the fundamental method of Tanweer which for him is the only way to narrate the fragmenting lives of his residents of Karachi. In stories like 'The Truants', 'Things and Reasons', and 'Sadeq', the narrators inhabit different time periods, some years and even decades apart, and of characters remembering their older selves of the earlier stories in an attempt to reconstruct their realities. For Tanweer, the layering of the stories as with the example of the character of Sukhansaz, is complemented by the existence of multiple temporal schemes, all however seemingly contemporaneous to each other. The task of the Tanweer, therefore, is to destabilise any fixed notion of time and the fetishisation of periods. To narrate, therefore, in the post-global world requires a radical rethinking of the nature of time itself, of making contemporaneous the many experiences of the same person, along with that of other people, of experiences that exist side by side by de-hinging historical time, which in the Apterian sense would be a 'radical re-sequencing'and 'non-Eurochronic descriptions of duration' (2013: 39). As opposed to the global, understanding the personal requires its own framework of time that does not fit into the neat compartments of Greenwich Mean Time or the Gregorian Calendar. In the shift to the personal, Tanweer tries to revive the 'lost stories' in the master narrative dominated by the idea of the bomb blast: The narrator-editor of 'Things and Reasons' says while pondering on the smaller narratives of love and relationships affected by the bomb blast:

> These stories I realized were lost. Nobody was going to know that part of the city but as a place where a bomb blast went off. The bomb was going to become the story of this city. That's how we lose the city—that's how our knowledge of the what the world is is taken from us—when what we know is blasted into rubble and what is created in its place bears no resemblance to what there was, we are left strangers in a place we knew, in a place we ought to have known. (Tanweer 2013: 173)

Being in a way the *shagird* (disciple) of Naiyer Masud and in his ideas of the self-referentiality of the work of art, through Tanweer's novel, we see that

the neat compartmentalisations that are expected of any endeavour of global thought are bound to fail in the postglobal world and replaced by an inward turn into the unique experiences of the individual rather than an outward movement towards a totalising impulse and explanation of the world. The novel ends with the narrator-editor contemplating over the function of fiction. He remembers his father who himself was a writer just like him, who believed that 'stories were reasons that allowed us to connect to the world to compose ourselves in ways that others could read'. However, unlike his father, who 'told stories to find ways into the world…. I wrote to avoid the world' (2013: 190ff). The narrator-writer rejects the need to communicate with the totalising impulse, to make his story and characters comprehensible to the world, and prefers to, in particular Masudian fashion, not to participate in the master narrative that subsumes rather than cherishes difference, to leave the story of the individual incomplete and unknowable.

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Hindi Theatre: 'Tradition', 'Modernity', and Constructing a National Theatre

Deepanshu Mahajan

Abstract: This article seeks to investigate the construction of 'Modern Hindi Theatre' during the 20th century. This entails exploring the manner in which major theatre artists, at various moments, responded to the questions of culture and politics and how their responses defined which streams of theatre and performance were seen as legitimate constituents of the national identity. Further, in trying to understand which forms of theatre were included in the national canon — and the conditions laid on their inclusion at different points of socio-political struggles — the article reflects on the politics involved in the mechanisms of both exclusion and inclusion aimed at managing the challenges posed against hegemonic power structures. This investigation will necessarily involve a study of major trends and arguments in Hindi theatre from late-19th century to the post-Independence era and examining how the debates around 'tradition', 'folk', and 'modern' organised the cultural field in the said time-period.

Keywords: Modern Hindi Theatre, Tradition, Folk, Progressive Cultural Movement, Naya Theatre

The history of the 20th century Indian theatre is eclipsed by the question of a unified 'Indian' identity. Whether we consider this question as a mark left by the experience of colonisation or as something borne out of the anxieties of a newly born nation-state, it was necessary for theatre artists to engage with the idea of 'tradition' while opposing or asserting a certain form of 'modernity'. Such an engagement worked within and against the confines of the epistemological framework laid by colonial control, certain anti-colonial struggle and also postcolonial constructions.

This article will attempt to understand how at various points in the late 19th and 20th century, Hindi theatre calibrated its position vis-à-vis the ineluctable

questions of national identity, and thereby constructed its own. Such an investigation will be carried out through a discussion on the birth of modern Hindi theatre and a brief overview of the major trends ranging from the theatre of Bharatendu Harishchandra to Mohan Rakesh. After charting out the history of the aforementioned, the article will seek to highlight the discourse of 'returning to past' present in the Theatre of Roots, and in doing so, raise concerns regarding the exclusion of certain relations of theatre production which the postcolonial state found incommensurable with its own cultural logic. Finally, the article will also hint at projects and movements which have attempted to provide alternative imaginations of cultural history and politics. However, before initiating that discussion, it will be useful for us to keep in mind certain important categories which will structure our discussions.

'Folk', 'Tradition', and 'Modernity'

It can be argued that a crucial part of the process of 'modernisation' is to position 'modernity' in opposition to other categories descriptive of time. Such positioning makes certain categories act antithetical to modernity and thus constitute it in a dialectical manner. While these categories and their content might pre-exist the advent of 'modernisation', it is their reorganisation vis-à-vis 'modernity' which sets up particular relations in the discursive field. In such a situation, it becomes important to pay close attention to what gets constructed as modernity's 'other', and what gets foreclosed in the process. For instance, the two categories that are often posited in opposition to 'modern' are 'tradition' and 'folk'. While 'folk' literally means 'people', 'tradition' relates to the act of 'handing down'. As such, these words are not exactly opposite to 'modern' which relates to that which 'exists in the present'. The etymology sketched by Raymond Williams in his work *Keywords* (1985) shows us that both 'modern' and 'tradition' were in use since the 15th century and that 'folk' was in use since the 17th century. However, it was around the 19th century that these terms began to acquire newer connotations. On the one hand, where 'folk' began to be used for popular elements which were reminiscent of the 'old order', i.e., pre-industrial, pre-urban, and pre-literate (137), 'tradition' began to represent a large range of ideas related to the 'age-old' (319). On the other hand, the negative connotation associated with 'modern' — of being an undesired deviation or alteration—began to disappear, and the term gained a favourable meaning by the 20th century (208).

Although a detailed analysis of the manifold nuances involved in these changes is beyond the scope of this article, one important point can be noted for our purpose. In the overall process of categorisation and changes in connotations, the modes and forms of cultural production, clubbed under 'folk' and 'tradition', were alive and evolving. However, the manner in which they were segregated from 'modernity' created a sense that these modes had exhausted their potential for further development and had thus become static.

In this way, the content of these categories was rendered largely incommensurable with 'modernity' and 'civilisation'.

The popularisation of such modes of thinking is deeply embroiled within the history of colonisation and the hegemonic shaping of discourse. For instance, in India, the British officials were the first to document the existence of 'antique' cultures as part of a larger project of colonial anthropology in the 19th century (Dalmia 2008: 155). In the context of colonial encounters between the 'Occident' and the 'Orient', the deployment of the aforementioned categories provided a 'logic' and legitimacy to the colonial venture — where the 'orient' was reduced to antiquated forms of existence and social organisation. Such a discourse can, however, also be utilised by the colonised to further their own agendas and ends as the colonised groups articulated their resistance against the colonial apparatus. It is interesting to note that 'tradition' — when moulded by the colonised — can seek to strengthen existing precolonial hierarchies such as those between the 'classical' and the 'popular'. As we shall see further, such processes of marking certain modes and relations as static — sometimes corrupted, obsolete or at other times valorised as pure — will register their recurring presence in various contexts.

Hindi Theatre

What constitutes Hindi theatre today is itself a subject of historical and cultural analysis. Besides the development of the form of 'modern' theatre, the development of the language of modern theatre has itself been surrounded by controversies and serious debates. In this section, therefore, we will attempt to understand some of the key ideas around which the concept of a unified Hindi theatre came to be constructed in the 19th century and then note the ways in which these ideas were carried forward/challenged in the 20th century. The pre-history of the construction of the modern Hindi theatre shows that there were multiple, at times intersecting and overlapping, strands which all contributed to the development of Hindi drama. While Sanskrit theatre came to be regarded as the most important tradition for dramatic activity in Hindi, this use of Sanskrit aesthetics or in other terms, the aesthetics based around Bharata's manual *Natyashastra* (200 BCE–200 CE), was a conscious attempt made by writers to draw connections with an ancient knowledge system. Sanskrit dramas preceded the Hindi dramas by centuries.[1] During the interim period from the 14th to the 19th century, 'folk' or popular forms such as *Raslila*, *Ramlila*, *Swang*, and *Nautanki* had gained popularity in northern plains of the Indian subcontinent.

Along with popular forms, the commercial theatre of the Parsi companies had occupied the centre-stage of drama in the northern and western parts of the subcontinent in the 19th century. The theatre of the Parsi companies coincided with the beginnings of theatre in Hindustani i.e., with Agha Hasan Amanat's *Inder Sabha* (1853). Commissioned by Awadh's Nawab Wajid Ali

Shah, *Inder Sabha* was extremely popular with the Parsi theatre groups, and, subsequently, many Hindustani writers were hired by the companies. Due to this reason, the Parsi companies are also accredited to have contributed to the foundation of modern Hindi theatre, for it was with the Parsi theatre that Hindustani texts had been first played on the proscenium stage.

The development of the said modern Hindi theatre came as a reaction against both the Parsi theatre and the popular performance forms like the *Swang* and the *Nautanki*. Both the popular theatre and the Parsi theatre garnered audiences from different castes, classes and religions; they were also criticised often to be obscene and immoral. Perhaps, they were seen in this light for the very reason that the occasions of such performances created the conditions of co-participation of various castes and classes under the absence of any formal code of conduct. Kathryn Hansen (1982: 74–78) explains the birth of the Hindi drama to be an attempt to establish a theatre which could suit the social and moral conduct of the elite Hindus, a theatre which did so not just in the content it played, but also in the conditions of its performance and spectatorship.

The beginnings of modern Hindi theatre are stamped by the works of Bharatendu Harishchandra. The attempts to establish a theatre distinct from the '*bhrasht*' (corrupt)[2] and commercial forms are situated not just in the politics of social norms, but also in the linguistic divisions which had begun to gain prominence in the late 19th century. The official division of the common language Hindustani into Hindi (Hindustani written in the *Devanagari* script) and Urdu (Hindustani written in the Persian script) could be traced to the British epistemological projects of categorisation and characterisation of Indian languages and cultural practices. In the process of canon formation of various Indian languages under the departments of the Fort William College, the communal division of Hindustani had first gained institutional legitimacy. The processes of discovering an Indian 'antiquity' free of foreign influence resulted in concretising linguistic and political divisions.

Bharatendu himself was a part of the 'Hindi agitations' as they have come to be known. The ideas of a separate linguistic identity affirmed the arguments of a separate heritage of the Hindus and Muslims. For this reason, the patriotic concerns of Bharatendu and of the writers of his age were deeply fused with ideas of cultural and religious identity. This cultural purism resulted in attempts to establish links with the pre-colonial, pre-Islamic, Sanskrit theatre. There was, however, also an emphasis on a reinterpretation of tradition for contemporary needs. Vasudha Dalmia points out that Bharatendu's dramatic endeavour stressed on not only using the aesthetic values of the Sanskrit drama, but also on moving away from the older purpose of entertainment to the purpose of tackling contemporary social concerns. Therefore, in Bharatendu's work, there existed a blend of past aesthetic values and contemporary social concerns (Dalmia 2008: 36–37).

Two important points need to be marked from the theatre of Bharatendu and his age. One is that his plays were performed by amateur[3] theatre and literary groups set up by Bharatendu himself or his disciples. His own theatre group, the Hindu Natak Samaj, is considered to be one of the first amateur theatre groups in North India. These performances of Bharatendu's plays were patronised by the Maharaja of Banaras and took place in closed spaces where accessibility was limited, and, therefore, participation in such a theatre became an opportunity for the 'display of social status' (Hansen 1982: 85). These plays were usually set on the themes reflecting upon the former greatness of India and reasons for its subsequent decline. Some of the most famous plays of Bharatendu included *Bharat Durdasha* (1875), *Satya Harishchandra* (1876), *Andher Nagri* (1881), and *Neeldevi* (1881). The second point would be regarding the distance between the developing nationalist movement and its urban middle-class intellectuals with the broader struggles of the people. Besides the limited accessibility of Bharatendu's theatre, and his insistence on the use of Hindi in place of the vernacular Hindustani, the absence of the mention of popular mass revolts — such as the 1857 revolt — from a theatre which consciously claimed to be politically oriented has been noted by critics such as Namvar Singh as the most definitive instance of the distance and disconnect.[4]

The further development of Hindi theatre took place in association with similar models of amateur societies. For this reason, the expanding theatre of the Parsi companies continued to draw criticism beyond the age of Bharatendu (1868–1900) into the age of *Chhayawad* (1919–1938). Jayashankar Prasad (1890–1937) — considered to be the most Hindi significant playwright after Bharatendu, and the foremost representative of the age of *Chhayawad* in theatre — rejected not just the commercial stage, but also *Yatharthwad* or realism. Prasad argued for elevating drama to the ideals of life and profound philosophical truths. Prasad wrote many historical plays such as *Ajatshatru* (1922) and *Chandragupta* (1933), which were noted for their elevated language (Mathur 1956: 130). Prasad's plays were seldom staged but continued to influence university students and scholars through print versions.

The decades after the 1930s also saw radical transformations in the literary and dramatic world of Hindi. One of the reasons for these transformations was the change in the political atmosphere of the subcontinent. Questions related to class and ideas of socialism gained popularity within the national movement. In North India, specifically, the 1920s had seen the formation of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) and the Communist Party of India (CPI). Later, the 1931 hangings of Bhagat Singh and his comrades had also left an impact on the popular consciousness regarding their political ideas.

Echoes of these ideas were beginning to be heard in the Hindi literary and critical writings. From the 1930s onwards, Hindi literature and theatre saw

the emergence of styles which were driven towards bringing the dramatic and literary language closer to the everyday speech forms. Artists were gaining an increasing interest in representing the lives and concerns of common working people. One important result of this interest was that, in presenting the everyday struggles of people, they also gave due importance to the language of the common people, instead of writing in one or the other form of standardised languages. This meant that this time period — which came to be known as the Progressive Age in Hindi literature — saw many artists not following strict language distinctions between Hindi, Hindustani and Urdu. Hindi writers of this age commonly used the syncretic language i.e., Hindustani.[5] Munshi Premchand was seen as an exemplar of such an aesthetic and linguistic style. This strain of social realism gained a definite character with the formation of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) in 1936.

Even though the nationwide progressive cultural movement disintegrated in the 1950s, the emphasis of realism continued to be a major trend in theatre and literature. In the post-Independence decades, the psychological reflections of mostly urban characters came to be fused with a sense of alienation and disillusionment. The growing interest in psychological reflections of interpersonal relationships, and the disillusionment with the ideas of political emancipation[6] among many writers, resulted in a gaze which was increasingly turning inwards, towards relationships in the urban domestic life. Dalmia (2008: 119) suggests that an investment in developing rounded characters based on the conflicts of the individual had resulted in the birth of a 'new realist vogue'. Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* (1969) is considered to be the most significant play which embodied such sentiments in the field of theatre. Set in an urban middle-class family's living room, Rakesh's play explores the complexity of domestic relations in the nuclear family.

Postcolonial State and the Theatre of Roots

After the Indian Independence, the postcolonial state needed to take up the responsibility of providing a formal structure to the cultural arena. This necessity of formal organisation could be seen in the light of the vast influence that theatre had exerted during the national movement, but also in the context of formalising the national cultural identity. An important step in this direction came in the form of the setting up of national academies like the Sahitya Akademi and Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA). Through these institutions, discussions regarding the 'Indian Theatre's' role in articulating a national identity, ensued on a national level. While the modernist urban theatre inclined much more towards realism and contemporary domestic relationships, the state saw it necessary to revive traditional theatres. For instance, Anita Cherian's work shows that since the SNA considered theatre as a nation-building activity, revival of 'national heritage' became an important agenda for the Akademi (2007: 32). The notion of an 'authentic' theatre tradition was

legitimised (Cherian 2007: 17), and yet again we find the presence of the 'antiquity' or 'tradition' at the heart of the processes of modernisation, carried out this time by the postcolonial state. One of the key differences was the inclusion of 'folk' within the 'national, seen this time as complementary to the 'classical'. Speakers at SNA's First Seminar (1956) could not escape making judgements regarding the 'corruptness' of popular forms. The corruption of 'folk' arts and, in effect, the degeneration of 'Indian' culture was now relegated as an outcome of 'centuries of 'foreign' rule' (Cherian 2007: 39). The task of revival was concerned primarily with an 'uncorrupted' and 'ancient' heritage. Additionally, in their condemnation of the commercial theatre of the Parsi theatre companies, speakers at the first seminar consciously sided with the tradition of amateur theatre, which had for long opposed commercial theatre. It was the amateur theatre which was seen as the basis of a future professional theatre. We can observe that, by accepting certain conceptions of the 'folk' and by dismissing the commercial, the postcolonial state had come to assert the primacy of a theatre aligned with the middle-classes at the level of both organisation and values.

While amateur theatre saw the participation of people with varying interests and affiliations in the subsequent decades, the state-run academies shifted their focus towards the task of reviving traditional theatres for the task of constructing a national identity. Over the next decades, this sentiment of reviving 'classical' Sanskrit theatre, in conjunction with 'folk' forms, with the help of the state, culminated into a full-fledged movement. The 1971 'Round Table on the Contemporary Relevance of Folk Theatre', organised by SNA under the leadership of Suresh Awasthi, became a key event in initiating this movement. The roundtable drew both support and criticism from theatre practitioners. By the 1980s, the movement was established and had come to be known as the 'Theatre of Roots'. This theatre movement was given a pan-Indian character, with the purpose of putting Indian theatre 'back on the track of great Natyashastra tradition' (Awasthi 1985: 86).

Following this trajectory of Hindi theatre, we can note that its birth was itself based on the dissociation of a modern theatre from the popular and the commercial forms of theatre already existing in the 19th century. After Independence, when the SNA began the project of rehabilitating the 'folk' forms as part of the cultural heritage, there was little discussion regarding revitalising the popularity enjoyed by such forms, their conditions of mass accessibility and their structures of improvisation. Instead, the discussion was based on the ideas of reinstituting a technical 'authenticity' in these forms through planned programmes (Awasthi 1956: 27).

Theatre of Roots embodied elements of the conservative nationalist rhetoric wherein realism was opposed as a Western form. Writing in the defence of the movement, Suresh Awasthi emphasised the opposition to 'western realistic theatre' as one of the distinct features of the Theatre of Roots (1985: 87).

The merging of 'folk' and 'classical' had already begun with the SNA's First Seminar. Awasthi further clubbed a wide variety of experiments and projects such as Habib Tanvir's work with *Nacha* artists, B.V. Karanth's and Girish Karnad's attempts of re-interpreting Sanskrit texts, and Badal Sircar's attempts of moving away from the proscenium, under the generic umbrella of the 'search for roots' (1985: 86). The classification of wide-ranging experiments under a single label — which had Sanskrit aesthetics at its centre — mischaracterised the purpose of these experiments as a search for an authentic 'Indianness' away from forms such as realism.

While it is true that such artists worked with folk theatre forms, it was not necessarily for the aim of reviving an 'authentic' Indian' culture or opposing 'Western' culture. Rather, such works were directed at experimenting with forms of theatre which could communicate effectively with a varied audience of both urban and non-urban backgrounds. For instance, Tanvir's works with *Nacha* artists rejected notions of cultural formalism or even linguistic purity. Not only did Tanvir's Naya Theatre made alterations in the critical conventions of *Nacha* — such as accommodating female performers — but also attempted to break the barriers of dialects by infusing together both Khariboli and Chhattisgarhi in their plays (Tanvir 1996: 45–46). Most importantly, in the relationship which Tanvir formed with *Nacha*, he did not impose his own urban, educated sensibilities on the form; rather he let his own sensibilities be shaped by the *Nacha* performers. In doing so, he defied the act of characterising folk as a 'pre-modern' or a 'static' form and instead allowed *Nacha* to breathe and evolve in the context it found itself in. It was for this reason that the range of Naya Theatre's productions spanned from Chhattisgarhi and Rajasthani folk tales to adaptations of Shakespeare and Bertolt Brecht, and even Sanskrit dramas.

Tanvir was able to interpret folk with such openness partly due to his early experiences with Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). IPTA — the theatre wing of the progressive cultural movement discussed earlier — had considered folk forms as viable means for politicisation of the people. In arguing so, IPTA's aims were not limited to the project of revival or construction of any one cultural identity. Instead, it saw this identity as only one aspect in the larger struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed classes. The IPTA saw the traditional and folk as forms enjoying popularity amongst the masses and, therefore, efficient for the task of building connections with the larger audiences. Since the IPTA activists did not aim to valorise folk form, they accepted only those elements of traditional and folk theatre which were 'usable' (Damodaran 2017: 18). Many of IPTA's works strived to replace the content prevalent in these forms with the political concerns of the working classes and peasants. One of the most successful examples of this fusion was the play *Nabanna* based on the Bengal famine of 1943. The play highlighted the realities of the peasant life while employing musical genres such as the *kirtan*

not to present religious devotion, which is typical of the genre, but to express the sufferings of the farmers affected by the famine (Damodaran 2017: 117). While the nationwide progressive movement came to be dispersed in the 1950s, the artists associated with IPTA, such as Tanvir, continued to break new waves and carry the politico-cultural legacy of the movement. Tanvir experimented with the *Nacha* artists not just to reach to a rural audience, but also to intervene in the state of how theatre was presented to the urban audiences. At once, the works of Naya Theatre both contributed to broaden the horizons of Hindi theatre and highlighted the possibilities beyond the narrow confines of linguistic and formal dogmas.

Conclusion

Through our discussion so far, we have come to note that the modern Hindi theatre, having based itself on the rejection of existing models of popular and commercial performance, also gave birth to the amateur model of organising theatre activities in North India. This model of performing drama in a language distinct from the vernacular, focusing consciously on didactic political and moral issues, under the patronage of the educated elite, reflected the limited accessibility of both Hindi theatre and the amateur theatre at the time of their birth. The exclusion of the commercial and the popular theatre from the corpus of Hindi drama was a dismissal of a model of social relationships between the performer and the spectator, wherein the performers depended upon their spectators for their sustenance.

Further, our discussion has helped us note the paramount presence of the question of interpreting, opposing, appropriating, and constructing a 'tradition' at the heart of 'modern' Hindi theatre, both during the colonial rule and the post-Independence era. While the proponents of the Hindi nationalist movement maintained a distance from the popular forms, the postcolonial state and the Theatre of Roots gave stress on the revival of such forms. However, we can observe that this discourse of reviving an 'authentic' tradition worked on certain necessary erasures. In the whole discourse of reviving 'indigenous' art forms, we hardly find any substantial mention or reflection on the conditions of people among whom these art forms had taken birth or those who practised them, their caste histories and economic status.[7] Rather, what we find are symbolic representations of the excluded, which was sought to be displayed as parts of the 'national' culture.

In the light of the above argument, the state's inclination towards both the cultural heritage of the past and modernity does not seem paradoxical. It instead highlights the state's own necessities of organising, mediating, and appropriating diverse forms of expression with the aim of neutralising potential threats against its own hegemony. For these reasons, the state can be seen as having to operate with multiple and seemingly oppositional registers. The imagination of a politicised tradition, wherein different communities seek to express themselves through their own cultural forms and not necessarily in the

language of the state, is precisely the act of self-determination which threatens the state's hegemony. For this reason, it becomes crucial to investigate and explore the presence of such imaginations in our past and present.

Notes

1 Bachchan Singh (1958: 15–16) points out that the last notable plays in Sanskrit were those of Jayadev and Murari, written in the 13th century A.D.

2 In his most important critical essay on theatre, '*Natak*', Bharatendu categorised the popular forms and the theatre of the Parsi companies as the most depraved under the category '*bhrasht*' (Hansen 1982: 86).

3 The term 'amateur' can be understood largely in opposition to the 'professional', as referring to those participants who neither belonged to traditional performative communities nor earned their livelihood completely from theatre. The phenomena of amateur theatre rose largely in urban centres, in and around universities and other cultural hubs.

4 For an elaborate commentary on the contradictions of the nationalist Hindi literature of the late 19th century, see Namvar Singh's '*Hindi Navjagaran ki Samasyaein*' (The Problems of Hindi Reawakening).

5 The interest of the national movement in the 'language of common people' is also reflected in the importance given to Hindustani in the 1937 Wardha Scheme of Education, proposed by M.K. Gandhi.

6 Consider *Nayi Kahani*'s foremost writer Nirmal Verma's resignation from the CPI in 1956, after the Soviet army violently suppressed the Hungarian uprising.

7 The issue of the economic conditions of *Bhavai* artists of Gujarat was discussed by Dina Pathak in the *The First Drama Seminar (1956)*, but such issues hardly warranted further discussions in the programmes of reviving folk theatre.

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Liminal Lives: Imagining (Lost) Childhood in Kashmiri Fictions

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Abstract: This article offers a critique of Kashmiri fictions that narrativise childhood in post-Independent India. I bring into discussion Paro Anand's *No Guns at My Son's Funeral* (2005), Mirza Waheed's *Collaborator* (2011), and Malik Sajad's *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015) in foregrounding how narrativising childhood becomes a force in countering the rhetoric and praxis of the hegemonising nationalism (of opposing contenders). I establish this point by drawing upon the concept of liminality and posit that children are liminal lives whose liminality makes them susceptible and vulnerable to contending claimants of Kashmir.

Keywords: Liminality, Childhood, Conflict, Militarisation, Nationalism

Introduction

Imagining Kashmir, in the past, had often been sans the Kashmiri. Artistic renditions and accounts of Kashmir during the Mughal period, and later during the colonial administration, foregrounded the picturesque beauty of the Kashmir Valley: 'a landscape without people' (Rai 2004: 4) and an idyllic image of Kashmir that 'prefers to eliminate Kashmiri people, monuments in use, and homes' (Kabir 2009: 17). In a way, one can see this paradigm of effacing the Kashmiri from the artistic imagination of Kashmir continuing in Indian state's response to revolutionary and violent claims upon the idyllic Kashmir by contending forces in Kashmir. A 'systemic scapegoating' (Mathur 2016: 121) of the Kashmiri has been 'collectively' put into effect 'for having so inconveniently disrupted that pastoral serenity' (Kabir 2009: 20). The long, tortuous history of brutalisation and humiliation Kashmiris were made to endure speaks volumes of their invisibilisation, literally and figuratively.

Kashmiris have been invisibilised through flagrantly violent means, facilitated by the impenetrable military stronghold, web of surveillance,

indescribable apparatus of torture and interrogation, and institutionalised impunity of state forces. While the state forces continue to safeguard Kashmir, they have paradoxically relegated the humans of Kashmir to a subhuman condition. An enforced silence prevails among the people in myriad forms. However, despite 'crippling' circumstances, a poetics of resistance — 'a converse move by Kashmiris to reinsert themselves into their "magnificent frame"' (Rai 2004: 4), a counter-discourse 'that foregrounds Kashmiri insistence on the body in the landscape' — has emerged (Kabir 2009: 20). The body thus re-inscribed is 'a body in pain, a body that bears the scars of multiple registers of violence — physical, epistemic, psychosomatic, nostalgic' (Kabir 2009: 21).

Imagining Kashmir now, therefore, inevitably draws our mind to this 'body in pain' — particularly those of children imaged on media and depicted in literary narratives. Gun-toting boys, bodies in shrouds, orphaned children,[1] pellet-scarred face and blinded eyes, stone-pelting children, and so on, often capture the face of childhood in Kashmir. These images have become a metaphor for the subhuman condition of Kashmiris, bearing testimony to the present and a reminder of the violent past. If in the 1990s, the decade when Kashmir insurgency was in its peak, children in Kashmir were embroiled in the crossfire between insurgency and counterinsurgency operations, children continue to be entrapped even to this day. Their future remains contingent upon Kashmir-India balance, which often puts children in peril[2] and uncertainty.[3]

Amid the dense military enforcement and surveillance Kashmir is placed in, narrativising childhood in Kashmir not only ruptures the controlled narrative of Kashmir as 'safe' and 'normal'; it also exposes the legitimation with which the state agents deploy brute force to silence voices of dissent or potential threats. In this article, I foreground the centrality of childhood in Paro Anand's *No Guns at My Son's Funeral* (2005), Mirza Waheed's *Collaborator* (2011), and Malik Sajad's *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015) in countering the rhetoric and praxis of the hegemonising nationalism (of opposing contenders) that seeks to invisibilise dissent. I establish this observation by reflecting on the two sites in which childhood manifests varyingly in these novels: the site of appropriation and target (by non-state and state forces), and, the site for interrogating nationalism.

Narrativising childhood in Kashmir is neither an innocent act nor a reflection on innocence. Childhood as subject appears benign outwardly but conceals distressing realities. In the first part of this article, I explore the liminal condition of childhood in Kashmir, and how this liminality poses children as objects of appropriation and target. On the one hand, children's liminality seemingly presents them as potent force that makes them susceptible to appropriation; on the other hand, this liminality is ambiguously perceived as threats, thereby exposing them to numerous state-legitimated disciplining-mechanisms. In the

second part, I discuss childhood (in narratives) as a site of memorialising not just individual experiences of trauma, but also for confronting tumultuous pasts of the Kashmiris, thereby contesting democratic India's nationalist project.

Liminal Childhood and/in Kashmir

The child-subject occupies a liminal position — between the threshold of innocence and awareness, 'one not yet constrained and … not entirely defined by social categories and fixed socio-cultural identities' (Tierney-Tello 2017: xxi–xxii). This consciousness, *un*formed and *un*inflected yet, locates the child in a liminal position. Arnold van Gennep used the term 'liminal' in the context of individual's rites de passage.[4] The liminal stage is a 'neutral zone' wherein the person in transition is ambiguously positioned, wavering 'between two worlds' before s/he is incorporated into the next stage (van Gennep 1960: 18). The liminal being is therefore 'neither here nor there', in 'betwixt and between' position, disenfranchised without any 'property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system' (Turner 1969: 95). Turner, however, notes the paradox of liminality that manifests powerlessness and, at the same time, anticipates new powers and station in life (1969: 95).

As had been noted by Turner, the political implication of liminality entails 'a potentially unlimited freedom from any kind of structure' (Thomassen 2014: 1). Therefore, 'thinking with liminality' has become a crucial approach towards understanding 'the relationship between [socio-political] structures and agency' (Thomassen 2014: 1), particularly so in the context of 'existential liminality' that characterises 'the human condition in the modern culture' wherein 'personal meaning is often both non-existent and over-determined at the same time' (Downey, Kinane and Parker 2016: 12). I draw upon the ambiguity of the liminal and its political underpinnings in interpreting the dynamics between children, state and anti-state forces.

Kashmiri lives, particularly children, are liminal entities — located within the interstices of a socio-political order that simultaneously threatens to undermine their existence (by force) and is marked by 'over-determined' meanings (for instance, the misperception of all Kashmiris as terrorist). Children in Kashmir grow up 'caged and under the shadow of a gun', without the entitlements and possibilities accorded to children under 'normal' circumstances (Mathew, Vaigai, and Devika 2019). These children exhibit passivity and unquestioning obedience to authority, and acquiesce to receiving 'arbitrary punishment' (Turner 1969: 95). And yet, their condition of liminality portends an agency for disruption, as far as the militants and the law-enforcers are concerned. This makes them subject of appropriation and target at the same time.

The Site of Appropriation and Target

Children are liminal figures on account of their psychological and physiological development: their 'body and mind are in transition' (Austrian 2008: 86). In early childhood, they are considered to be 'incapable of complex thoughts and feelings about their world' (*ibid*.: 7). While this liminality is true in general, childhood in Kashmir is characterised by another dimension of liminality. The violence and brutalities children grow up with entrap them in a world of many contradictions, thus rendering their childhood environment far from what can be considered 'normal'.

Children in Kashmir straddle two worlds: of innocence and experience, of freedom and confinement, of agency and victimhood, thus locating them in a liminal situation. This liminality exposes them to forces of appropriation and indoctrination (by the anti-state forces), and target and retaliation (by the state forces) simultaneously. The bodies of young children embody the contradictions of their world — the liminality of their condition — for their young skins bear 'welts and burnt marks' that are 'incongruous and shocking' (Devadas 2018: xv). They become the object of incitement and manipulation to convince them to 'volunteer' for organised protests and movements. Children were deployed as the 'tools of propaganda', making them part of stone-pelting and arson during 'street protests and enforcing shutdowns' in the wake of Burhan Wani's[5] killing in 2016 (Shah 2019: 2). On the one hand, children are persuaded to participate in protests by holding the placard of 'innocence' without as much as reflecting on the nature of the protests; on the other hand, these children are more often than not held as suspects, for alleged links with anti-state agents.

Some children who participated in stone-pelting, arson and other forms of protests against Wani's death 'were eventually lured into the ranks of militancy, due to the government's failure to rehabilitate and steer them back into mainstream society' (Shah 2019: 2–3). Justice B.R. Gavai,[6] downplaying the alleged illegal detention of children in the wake of Article 370 abrogation in 2019, expressed the fears Kashmiri children can evoke within the Indian establishment: 'What if they (the minors) were detained and released on the same day?... Sometimes it is done in their own interest. You do not know what 13 and 14-year-olds can do.'[7] Justice Gavai invokes the fear of the unknown. This ambiguity — of passivity and agency, of innocence and experience, of benignity and threat — identifies Kashmiri children as ominous. Noting the threat this liminality foreshadows, Justice Gavai, with a paternalistic concern, legitimates detention as the immediate redress for possible disruption to the metanarrative of India as one grand family.

Characterised by a rather simplistic portrayal of the complex Kashmir-India conflict, Paro Anand shares the angst of the patriarchal state in *No Guns at My Son's Funeral.* Major Ramneeq, the army officer in command, is unsure of the child protagonist Aftab's position. Aftab is a sympathiser of Akram, the

leader of a fledgling militant group. Upon confronting Aftab, who hero-worships Akram, Major Ramneeq was alerted for 'guile and deceit' in the boy's eyes. The seasoned major was in doubt:

> He found tears instead. Tears that made the bile rise in the older man's throat…. Could he trust him, take him at his word? Whom did the tears in those eyes glisten for? (Anand 2005: 46–47)

Anand underpins the description of the moment of encounter between Major Ramneeq and Aftab by the rhetoric of a father's concern for his wayward son. However, the threats posed by the liminality of children, particularly when they had been psychologically conditioned, looms large in the novel. The Kashmir in Anand's novel is in the throes of a perilous time with 'rumours of atankvadis luring young boys away with the promise of money and martial arts training and weapons' (2005: 2). Heady idealism, among other reasons, often lures unthinking children into militancy. Akram preys upon Aftab's, and even his sister's, emotions and indoctrinates him to commit himself to the fight against the Indian armed forces.

No Guns at My Son's Funeral provides a critique of the militant groups in Kashmir that sell the dream of freedom in exchange for children's 'innocence'. The emotions of these children become an important capital in this transaction. Their unquestioning obedience moulds them into powerful weapons against the state forces. When questioned by a fellow militant, Akram remarks:

> One should never wait till these new recruits are old enough to start thinking for themselves. Then they lose courage, once they know what dangers ahead of them are. You have to use them while their dreams are bigger than their knowledge. While they're still hypnotized by its romance, by the likes of you and me [sic]. (Anand 2005: 8–9)

Akram capitalises on the unmindful phase of young boys like Aftab whose 'rage is a frightening thing' (2005: 22). At the same time, he is wary of their indeterminable emotions that may forsake the idea of heroism fed to them at the first sight of blood, or at the thought of capture and torture. Anand's novel illustrates the scheming devices with which children's emotions are appropriated as sites for warring against the state.

Emotions have the capacity to act upon the body and can '"make" and "shape" bodies as forms of actions' (Ahmed 2004: 4). Children's emotions, from this perspective, are malleable and can be exploited for personal or political gains. Emotions serve as a crucial capital in generating an affect that unsettles the status quo of unequal relations. Ahmed illustrates the economics of emotions by drawing upon the circulation of 'hate' — a feeling of 'intense againstness' (*ibid*.: 49) — as capital:

> The emotion of hate works … precisely by constituting the ordinary as in crisis, and the ordinary person as the real *victim* … the one that is 'hurt' or even damaged by the

> 'invasion' of others. The bodies of others are hence transformed into the 'hated' through a discourse of pain. (Ahmed 2004: 43)

The discourse of the 'body in pain' (Kabir 2009: 21) affects hate that 'circulates between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement' (Ahmed 2004: 44). The three novels in this article varyingly establish the evocation and circulation of hate in a dynamic way. On the one hand, hardened militants capitalise on the liminality of children's emotions, and generate and circulate 'hate' among them; on the other hand, the state forces draw on the protectionist sentiments for the nation to legitimate their production of disruptive elements as objects of hate.

> The unnamed narrator-protagonist in Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* expresses the hate with which 'the army people, the protectors of the land' deal with the boys who cross the border: 'catch and kill. *Catch and kill*' (7). Captain Kadian, the narrator informs, delivers with a clear conscience what he was instructed to do: To stop these motherfucking bastards from sneaking in, and the best way to do that is kill anything that tries to cross into our territory. (Waheed 2011: 91)

Mirza Waheed's Captain Kadian is nothing like Paro Anand's Major Ramneeq who is portrayed in a more favourable and humane light. Captain Kadian is lethal, brutal and indiscriminating in his use of torture and abuse.

The Collaborator tells the story of many boys who, in the twilight of 'freedom', lost their lives in that liminal space (read the Line of Control) between Indian-administered Kashmir and Pakistan-administered Kashmir'. Their dead bodies lay unburied in an open grave — piled upon each other — in 'the valley of yellow flowers' along the LoC (Waheed 2011: 8). The unnamed protagonist heard stories of Kashmiri boys who had crossed over to Pakistan-administered Kashmir for military training — as though it were a rite of passage — and returned home to fight for freedom:

> Excited, idealistic teenagers; hurt, angry boys wronged by police or army action, vengeful brothers with raped sisters and mothers at home; firebrand youth leaders conjuring up paradisiacal visions of freedom and an independent Kashmir. (Waheed 2011: 24)

These were boys who were coerced, compelled and even convinced to take up arms upon facing onslaughts on their rights and lives. In the Friday congregation in Nowgam, the village on the border where the narrator lives, the Moulvi Sahib denounces:

> Hundreds of us fall to the bullets of the oppressor, to the guns of the kafir [Indian soldiers] every day…. The cruel infidel kills us, tortures us, insults us and treats us like dirt, and then throw us into jail if we protest … in Sopore they killed the entire family of a mujahid after raping his mother and sisters because he refused to say *Jai Hind* in front of them. They didn't even spare his old grandmother — even *she* was raped. (Waheed 2011: 33)

The *moulvi* evoked pain, grief, shame, helplessness, and consensus through the course of his sermon. In a high-pitched voice, he asked, 'What shall we do then, what shall we do?' (Waheed 2011: 34). The crescendo of his charged sermon slides to a pacifist closure: 'I will tell you what we shall do. We shall seek for forgiveness; we shall ask for mercy' (*ibid*.). However, the emotion of grief and anger had already been stoked; the narrator confessed to feeling 'charged and upset … before the deafening silence … smothered any potential spurt of emotion…' (*ibid*.: 33).

A few weeks later, the narrator's best friend Hussain left. Then another friend left — in the hope of passage to freedom — desiring to transform their enduring incapacity to agency, anticipating transition from a liminal condition of subhuman existence to one of dignity and sovereignty.

Kashmiri children are socially, physically, and even psychologically 'caged'. Their liminality is a condition wherein 'incorporation' (van Gennep 1960: 18) into the social fold or 'status elevation' (Turner 1969: 170) for everyone appears bleak. If anything, they are ensnared in their 'in-between', indeterminate status wherein their 'agency' is perceived to endanger others even as they become endangered. The anxious mother of the narrator in *The Collaborator* exhorts: 'this gun-shun business — it's just not going to work, they beat up people very badly, they kill…. And what else does the Army do, kill, kill…' (Waheed 2011: 40). Even those children who chose to 'stay back' are trapped in liminality. Children and youth in Kashmir are often unlawfully detained, assaulted, and abused — deprived of 'normal' experiences that would enable them to transition from one station (be it social, physical or psychological) to another. Worse still, those who witnessed harrowing violence and suffered personal traumas remain psychologically disturbed.[88] Mathew, Vaigai and Devika report the rising trauma and associated mental disorder among children in Kashmir in Children in Kashmir indeed have become 'pawns in a political game where the government wants to punish those protesting against its authority' (Mathew, Vaigai, and Devika 2019).

The Site of Interrogating Nationalism

Imagining and reconstructing childhood in Kashmir can seldom be uncritical. It inevitably entails decrying the disenfranchisement and displacement Kashmiris experienced under the coercive and brutal military protection. For someone who grew up in the tumultuous times of the 1990s, remembering and writing about one's childhood facilitates a perspective where the adult writer engages with his/her community's multiple, overlapping histories. Consequently, writing about childhood not only sanctions the memory of the child to emerge in interconnected ways with(in) one's family and community; it also establishes a context to the child's (and the community's) relationship with larger social and political structures.

Narrativising Kashmir from a child's standpoint 'allows for an ambiguous yet privileged vantage point from which to represent or reinterpret national and cultural crises' (Tierney-Tello 2017: xv). Childhood, in this context, assumes a crucial site wherein troubling questions to the idea of nation and nationalism can be raised. Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* stages the child figure 'as an organizing principle for its investigation of issues of nationalism, history, and colonization' (Hopkins 2016: 43). In embodying the nation, the child protagonist in *Midnight's Children* literally disintegrates at the end of the novel: 'his body, filled with fissures, resists on every level the romance of the unified subjectivity and nation' (*ibid*.: 50–51). Similarly, childhood narratives by Kashmiri authors collectively shred 'the romance of the unified subjectivity and nation' and reveal the iron hands with which nationalistic spirit is nurtured in Kashmir.

Assessing the state of unrest among the Kashmiris and their political affiliations, Alice Thorner, very early on, suggested that the Kashmir conflict could well have been avoided had the Kashmiris been given the autonomy to 'join their destiny with either India or Pakistan' (Thorner 1948: 178). Today, despite the integration, a general mistrust prevails in the form of a continuing legacy of the apprehension that have characterised the Kashmir–India political relationship since the accession on 26 October 1947. The rigged election of 1987 and the denial of a government of their own choice strengthened this apprehension and served as the 'immediate trigger for the insurgency' (Mathur 2016: 28).

Since the 1990s, the Indian state has been set on a course of reinforcing its territorial border and national security, often subjecting Kashmiri civilians to be the collateral damage. As Kashmir turned into a fortress, more often than not, the enemies of the state were even sought out from amongst the civilians in a 'catch-and-kill' pursuit (Bose 2003: 128). *The Collaborator* portrays the landscape of death and destruction in a most compelling manner. The entrapped, disempowered condition of the people — in a sort of liminal existence — is narrated through the alternating consciousness of the protagonist-narrator between the past and the present.

The irony of India's Republic Day celebration in the narrator's village in *The Collaborator* is most telling. On the one hand, the Governor, 'the ruler of Kashmir', delivers a long sermon on his 'duty' to rid of the 'anti-national forces' from the border town (Waheed 2011: 230); on the other hand, the crowd was 'aching, yawning, scratching, moaning, farting' (*ibid*.: 233). He denounces the forces that attempt 'to break Kashmir from India, to chop off what everyone now knows and sees as an integral part of India … the crown on Bharat Mata's head!' (*ibid*.: 231).

India–Kashmir equation primarily rests on securing and controlling India's territorial integrity, albeit the mechanism of this border conservation remains an international concern:

> By suspending the basic civil rights of the citizens of Kashmir, largely disallowing their democratic right to popular representation, accountable government and federal autonomy, and when all else fails — setting up a regime of military occupation across large areas of Indian-controlled Kashmir and unleashing a campaign of sustained repression against its population. (Bose 1999: 763–64)

The Governor in *The Collaborator* speaks for the mainstream politics and the larger mainland Indians' perspective. Kashmir continues to crown Bharat Mata's head at the expense of the civil and democratic rights of its people — a 'high and rather embarrassing price to pay for keeping Kashmir as the jewel in the crown of secular, democratic India' (Bose 1999: 764).

The adolescent narrator powerfully conveys the alienation and apathy of the people when the Governor was delivering his speech on Indian Constitution in English to a group of 'goatherds and buffalo milk sellers' (Waheed 2011: 232). The contempt and utter disregard for the Governor, and most tellingly, on the occasion of India's Republic Day, undermines the spirit of nationalism among the far-removed 'citizens' of India. Repressive measures by the state have only by far managed to invoke a forged nationalism at best or bolster a violent self-determinism at worst. In this mordant criticism of the Governor's speech, the narrator implicates the nation in the feeling of *un*belongingness experienced by the people. By ridiculing the ruthlessness with which the military arm of the Indian state aspires 'to conquer the hearts of the people', the narrator forebodes a failing nationalism among the people (Waheed 2011: 117).

The coercive policies of Indian government have by far only deepened the misgivings about India's interest in Kashmir: protection of the territory but not the people. Malik Sajad, in his deceptively titled graphic novel *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015), captures the experiences of growing-up-days in a heavily-militarised Kashmir. This novel is as much about Kashmir of the 2000s and its past as it is about Munnu (also called Sajad), the seven-year-old boy protagonist. Malik Sajad powerfully depicts the Kashmiris as the endangered *hangul* (Kashmiri stag) — a symbol that requires no explanation. Munnu's childhood is shadowed by premature exposure to warfare tactics and weapons like AK-47s, Kalashnikovs and petrol bombs, not to mention the close encounters with deaths. Munnu's friends in school made petrol bomb out of crushed glass and dead battery cells to teach the 'cowardly Indian bastards a lesson' (Sajad 2015: 127).

Like no other novel, the graphic illustrations intricately chisel the complex pasts of Kashmir and delineate the myriad conflicting issues that continue to inflect 'nationalist' aspirations and discourses in Kashmir. They also bring alive the invasive violence in the quotidian spaces and streets of Kashmir, and the arbitrary violence against the *hanguls*. Although the climate of uncertainty and terror remains the same in the beginning of the millennium, as had been in

the previous decade, *Munnu* foregrounds the changing tenor in the movement for Kashmiri *azadi*, now marred with factionalism and corruption.

Sajad provides an insider's insight into the present-day Kashmiri resistance that 'blame[s] each other for selling out' and thus causing 'cracks in the resistance leadership' (Sajad 2015: 177). The only freedom Sajad could foresee in such circumstances is the freedom that 'will allow people to despise and kill each other' (*ibid*.: 177). If Sajad is critical of the high-handedness of the Indian law-enforcers, he is equally skeptical of the armed-resistance that has further plunged Kashmir into chaos. The narrator of *Munnu* describes the embattled and mutilated Kashmir as 'less like a paradise or a homeland' and more like 'a never-ending purgatory walled by the tall mountains, borders and minefields', where 'numbness buried a lot of pain' (*ibid*.: 214).

A sense of despair and disempowerment prevails. As the revocation of Article 370 annuls the 'special status' of Kashmir, transitioning the political status of Jammu and Kashmir from that of a state (with a certain autonomy) to a fully integrated union territory of India, ethno-culturally diverse peoples of Kashmir have finally become 'full' Indian. The question however remains if the constitutional entitlements are effective in assuaging the 'numbness' in the deepest sentiments of the Kashmiris, considering the past 'failure of the Indian nationalist project to nurture Kashmiri ethno-nationalist identity'; or, will the history of denial and humiliation continue to harbour an 'identity in a direction that is incongruous with Indian nationalism' (Chowdhary 2012: 154)?

Conclusion

Even as these troubling questions persist, Kashmiri narratives (that include depictions of childhood) have etched the collective memory onto a literary memorial — remembering the distressed, disappeared and the dead. These narratives have also superimposed on India's rhetorical fantasy of Kashmir as the crowning glory of India the gory spectacle of death and destruction in Kashmir. They have laid bare the precarious lives of children and, by extension, the lives of Kashmiri communities.

Narrativising the liminal lives of children draws the collective conscience (of the nation?) to the myth of children's innocence and powerlessness that are, ironically, disallowed to children in Kashmir. If the non-state forces prematurely weaponise the 'innocence' of children against the state for their separatist agenda; as a counter-response, the state denies to childhood/children any entitlement the notion of innocence might afford them, thereby justifying state-legitimated measures towards protecting India's territorial integrity. However, at the discursive level, the apparent benignity of the child-subject permits lambasting of the structures that continue to invisibilise the people of Kashmir. If (non-)state actors have used and abused the liminal condition of children for different agenda, these narratives trace the invisibilised (liminal) lives of the people to a resilient presence, however fragmented it maybe. At a

deeper level, the innocence and impetuosity usually associated with children provide the scope to counter India's 'single-minded' pursuit in defining acceptable forms of nationalism. These narratives register multivalent expressions that are often muffled by detention and torture in real life, even deaths for many — voices that express collective anxiety about the future of the distant and diverse Kashmiri communities within the grand narrative of 'one India', riddled with a history so traumatic and haunting.

Notes

1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as any human being below eighteen years.

2 After the abrogation of Article 370, Juvenile Justice Committee of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court reported the detention of 144 children under the age of 18 during 05 August and 23 September 2019. Aneesha Mathur reports the illegal detention of even children as young as nine-year-old, see A. Mathur. The Supreme Court however rules in favour of a report submitted by Jammu and Kashmir High Court denying the allegation of illegal detention of minors post abrogation of Article 370, see A. Vaidyanathan.

3 Schools and colleges remain closed every time there is a political disturbance and military crackdown. Although educational institutions were re-opened after two months of shutdown following the abrogation of Article 370, parents did not send their wards to school fearing clashes and lockdown. With mounting loss of academic session, students expressed their concern about their academic aspirations, see Bhat.

4 van Gennep distinguishes three stages of rites of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation, which he correspondingly associates with 'preliminal rites', the 'liminal rites', and 'postliminal rites' respectively, see van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 11.

5 Leader of Hizbul Mujahideen who joined the organisation when 15-year-old and killed at the age of 21.

6 One of the three-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India (comprising Justices NV Ramana, R. Suhash Reddy and B.R. Gavai) that submitted the report denying the alleged illegal detention of minors after the abrogation of Article 370, see Vaidyanathan.

7 See Vaidyanathan.

8 Mathew, Vaigai and Devika report the rising trauma and associated mental disorder among children in Kashmir in 'Childhoods Lost in Troubled Paradise'.

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Digital Archiving of Resistance through Dalit Camera

Ved Prakash

Abstract: The article attempts to highlight the issue of caste and discrimination keeping in mind the digital tools of documentation. The article primarily focuses on the subject of caste-based ostracisation and marginalisation and attempts to document the significant role that Dalit Camera (DC), a YouTube channel, plays in creating a space of dialogue for people who belong to the margin. The article highlights how social media platforms may extend a sense of solidarity and protest when the oppression of the marginal group does not find representation in the mainstream media. Moreover, the article looks into the online participatory culture when the space for resistance is shrinking by the day. A part of the article also deals with hashtag culture and understands how hashtags can contribute to bring about a change in society.

Keywords: Dalit Camera, Social Media, Resistance, Violence, Caste-based Discrimination

"We will set fire to the divisions of caste
We'll debate philosophical questions in the market place
We'll have dealings with despised households
We'll go around in different path"
— Aadupambe! Aadu!
(Ambedkar Age Collective 2015: 241)

An insight that one could draw from these lines is, no matter how strong hatred can get, there will always be a way to have a discourse with the ones who believe in violence and violations. No matter how many times laws are made a mockery of, there will always be a way to defy the destructive forces by raising the right questions in public and in the marketplace. And no matter

how many times one may draw a line of separation/segregation, there will always be a way to cross the line and go to the other side to know the source of violence. The other side in this context signifies an institution that believes in the policy of oppression. For a Dalit, the source of violence is not anything else but his/her/their own caste. An institution so stubborn that it has managed to survive all these years and, as time progresses, is getting stronger both in public as well as in private, both within and outside academia/academic institutions, both within and outside cityscapes, families, households, villages, streets, lanes, etc.

At present, when hatred has become an intrinsic part of the dominant narrative across the Global South as well as the North, it becomes all the more essential to find avenues towards counter-hegemonic power blocs which oppose the policy of physical as well as non-physical oppression of the so-called 'vulnerable'. Amidst the constant manipulation of the public discourse, there has been a conscious attempt by powerful apparatuses to erase the narratives that highlight the hypocrisy of the hierarchical social order. One initiative which led to the creation of an alternative space of resistance and negotiation is Dalit Camera (DC), a YouTube channel that began in 2012. DC documents stories of struggle and events of atrocities from the perspectives of Dalits in India, it is a crucial online archive that allows historically disadvantaged Dalits to verbalise their oppressive past and present through digital tools. Moreover, once stories of oppression are uploaded on the digital platform, there is a possibility that uploaded narratives will remain open for everyone to access so long as no censorship is exercised by the state apparatus or a corporate establishment. In this regard, digital tools of documentation have proven to be a significant device to build an archive. With the arrival of technology and the easy availability of camera phones, it has become far easier to record and transmit narratives.

With the rise of political censorship in India, the advent of DC that reports caste-based discrimination and violence strengthens the Dalit resistance against the oppressive domination by the caste Hindus. DC was created by Bathran Ravichandran, a left-wing student leader, after he was attacked by the ABVP supporters on the EFLU campus in Hyderabad. DC covers Dalit testimonies and resistance songs by Dalit artists from various corners of India. It also archives the discrimination/difficulties faced by Dalit scholars across university campuses in India. Besides, DC uploads videos that encompass public speeches, artistic performances, personal interviews, academic lectures, memorial ceremonies, documentaries, etc. A collection of debates, interviews, and essays from Dalit Camera found their way in the book titled *Hatred in the Belly: Politics behind the Appropriation of Dr Ambedkar's Writings* (2015) by Ambedkar Age Collective.

The article will look into the participatory online culture which DC has established in a censorious media climate. The article will also examine how

DC has emerged as an effective tool to record the cases of caste-based violence which are often ignored by the mainstream media. Further, the article will engage with how social media platforms have become noteworthy sites of solidarity and resistance when the state machinery fails to deliver justice. At present, DC has more than three thousand videos that have been uploaded on its platform, and it may be an overwhelming task to analyse all the videos. To resolve this issue, the article will look into select most-viewed videos in either Hindi or English since these are the two languages, I am conversant in. The article will follow the methodology of qualitative content analysis, primarily the framework of relational content analysis.

Dalit Camera and YouTube

With the affordability of Internet Access rates, YouTube has emerged as one of the significant points of interaction and resistance. Anyone can record a text and upload it for the world to engage with. YouTube, apart from bringing people together for a mere exchange of ideas, images, and narratives, has also become a significant site of dealing with despised households. In this case, the idea of a household can be both physical as well as virtual. One of the reasons why Dalit Camera has become such an important site of documentation is because narratives of the oppressed often do not find an honest representation in the mainstream. Another important question that needs serious attention is who tells the story? In the Post-Truth world, often legitimate narratives lose their legitimacy. When there is so much propaganda, then who to believe and who not to believe become additional puzzles to deal with. Therefore, it is probably ideal to pick up your pen and write your story or pick up a camera and start archiving and recording. It is important to have visual texts, especially in a world where words are losing out on meaning. Lie has become the new normal and truth and its representation are regarded as fictional. How painful it must be for the one who suffers and yet remains invisible to the world! Dalit Camera is a step towards claiming visibility. And more than visibility, it is a step towards destabilising the power blocs by putting out documented narratives in the public domain to counter lies.

Bathran Ravichandran, now known as Raees Mohammed after his conversion to Islam, tells the BBC that Dalit movements and atrocities against them do not get any coverage by the mainstream media so through Dalit Camera he attempts to give unheard and unacknowledged voices a platform on the internet (Mehta). With a sudden increase in the culture of screens, YouTube has emerged as one of the most-visited sites. In 2018, YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki announced that YouTube has over 1.8 billion monthly logged-in users (Gilbert). One can be certain that the number of users must have increased by now. With such a space at your disposal, an expression or opinion can travel far. The YouTube cover page of Dalit Camera reads: ‘Capturing Stories that Others Choose to Hide’. The entry point into the

article can be the visibility or invisibility of Dalits and the problems faced by them within the mainstream public domain. At present, the YouTube page of DC has eighty-five thousand and two hundred subscribers. When DC was asked about the advantages and disadvantages of being an online platform, it replied that online platforms like YouTube are free and they help in generating a modest revenue to maintain the channel.

With private owners controlling the popular media platforms, it makes them vulnerable to government censorship. In such a scenario, YouTube may seem to be a pertinent space of digression and conversation (Banerji). The institution of censorship is another tool of oppression. The question that becomes significant to address at this point is whether YouTube is free. It is important to mention that YouTube as a space of entertainment and engagement is not entirely uncontrolled. There have been incidents of YouTube erasing content because of its own policies, government censorship rules, and other legal interventions. YouTube is a private enterprise and not a public forum; therefore, it has the legal right to remove content from its platform.

Despite obstacles, Dalit Camera promotes a space of negotiation which can be accessed by everyone. While maintaining an online archive, DC helps in disseminating knowledge concerning Dalit resistance and other issues to do with minorities. DC is similar to a public library in that it allows access to individuals irrespective of the caste the user/subscriber/viewer belongs to. When the space of dialogue without fear is shrinking by the day and people are being incarcerated for their views both personal and political, DC emerges as a noteworthy site of resistance. Moreover, the actual recordings of the site of protest and conflict allow the viewers to have a sense of intimacy in their interaction with the uploaded content. When fake/morphed videos are in constant circulation, DC tries to resist this tendency by providing narratives that keep the ethics of authenticity in mind.

Another important aspect of DC is to merge the digital with the non-digital space. At present, when the culture of the screen has become so common, the gap between the digital and the real is gradually getting obliterated. As a site of protest, the digital has as much of an agency now as any that is organised in person. Today, social media and online pages of various events are playing a crucial role in translating movements from the virtual to the physical. What is even more pertinent is the constant exchange between the digital and the physical. John Postill, in his book *The Rise of Nerd Politics: Digital Activism and Political Change* (2018), talks about the changes that are taking place concerning the politics of our time and how digital tools are affecting the way policies are being made. Moreover, the internet and social media are no longer isolated spaces of interaction; in fact, online participatory culture has been able to bring some kind of an impact on political organisations across the world. In 'Social Protest', the fifth chapter in the book, Postill discusses the contribution of nerds and their knowledge of digital activism on

both society and culture. In the course of the discussion, he mentions various uprisings such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, Taiwan's Sunflower movement, Tahrir Square occupation in Cairo, etc. and argues that most nerds are of the consensus that they need to use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in order to politicise and mobilise people in general. This agreement allowed nerds and their allies to communicate and engage with information across sites so that a sense of virtual community could be created (Postill 2018: 129). DC does the same while documenting various events. It records the content and by uploading the same on its YouTube channel, DC can expand the number of people who support its cause by sharing the recorded interactions of Dalits and other minorities. At present, apart from Dalit Camera, there are various online platforms such as Dalit Dastak, Round Table India, Facebook Page Ambedkar Caravan, Badass Bahujan Memes, Justice News, etc. that are taking up issues to do with the Dalit community. Ashok Das, founder of Dalit Dastak, opines that Dalits cannot rely on mainstream media to take up their causes. Disillusioned by prejudiced coverage, Dalits now have started to use the digital space to tell their stories. By being able to highlight their problems on their own, Dalits have destabilised the traditional power structure that allowed some people to talk while others to remain silent (Raza). Dalit Camera and other web portals make an attempt to point out the hypocrisy of the mainstream.

Another noteworthy feature of DC is uploading protest music. Some songs have been archived under the heading of Dalit Songs. The list includes several expressions of resistance. Some of these include Bhimrao Ambedkar and his fight for equality, Justice for Rohith Vemula, Karamchedu carnage,[1] and songs criticising the killing of Dalits and Muslims. Ole J. Mjos, in his book *Music, Social Media and Global Mobility: My Space, Facebook, YouTube* (2012), talks about how social media has contributed immensely in formulating online identities by allowing the users to create profiles on various web portals and how this formulation further allowed the landscape of communication culture to evolve and expand. Additionally, this expansion has altered the way internet users interact. One point that needs to be noticed is that online identities are making their presence felt within the domain of offline space too. DC is assisting in the merger of online and offline identities. On the ground DC may not have a huge workforce, but once the content is uploaded on its YouTube page, it manages to claim to be an establishment that gets support from people across spaces. In the chapter titled 'The Emergence of the Global Social Media Environment: My Space, Facebook, YouTube,' Mjos remarks that YouTube emerged as a significant platform of communication because it allowed users to access, upload, and share online videos without any technical hurdle. It also approved the sharing of URLs on different web platforms. Furthermore, YouTube is free for everyone; users can upload as many videos as they wish. Moreover, YouTube converts the videos in flash format which

means that the uploading and accessing of the content is faster (Mjos 2012: 30). These are some of the reasons why many groups and organisations are using YouTube to reach out. While social media and online platforms may be perceived as significant sites of protest, it is also a reality that many oppressive regimes and governments do not want common people to access information coherently. Zeynep Tufekci, in her book *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (2017), states that many totalitarian systems exercise repression in a subtle way. They hire paid supporters to circulate confusion and misinformation amongst users to create a state of chaos. In such a scenario, it becomes difficult for people to navigate the networked public sphere (Tufekci 2017: xxviii). Moreover, governments can block information not only by developing new forms of censorship, but also by making available data and information unusable (*ibid*.: xxix). While discussing the larger picture of online movements, it is also a reality that a movement may not get a comprehensive representation because of corporate reasons. Therefore, corporate censorship with government assistance is a reality too (*ibid*.: 30). Moreover, Tufekci, in the chapter titled 'Platforms and Algorithms', talks about how the world of algorithms concerning online platforms functions. For instance, Facebook or YouTube develop multiple algorithms depending upon the search history of the users. In such a case, content on such platforms is not uploaded chronologically; rather different content shows up for different users depending upon the search items and search history. No one knows the details of how these algorithms work but there is always this element of uncertainty in the air as to whether algorithms also work to censor data and content to serve the interest of governments. The biggest fear is what if the information of user-profiles is handed over to repressive state apparatuses through multifaceted algorithms (*ibid*.: 134). One cannot be certain about what the future holds for online users, however, one alliance that cannot be overlooked is DC and Dalit Activism.

Dalit Camera and Dalit Activism: An Alliance

This section of the article deals with some of the selected, most-viewed videos on the YouTube page of DC. The first video that I would discuss is titled 'Indu Choudhary: Caste Atrocity in BHU'. It was uploaded on 18 September 2013. Dr. Choudhary talks about how she faced discrimination from the day of her joining as an assistant professor in the Sanskrit department of Banaras Hindu University (BHU). The belongings of Dr. Choudhary were thrown out of her accommodation by the upper caste fraternity just because she chose to speak up for the Dalit community. The newly-appointed faculty had to spend the whole night outside without any support from the administration. This extreme form of humiliation may be a reminder that no matter how many degrees one may get, an individual shall be judged by his or her caste. Dr. Choudhary further states that whenever a Dalit woman dares to speak up, the regressive society attempts to silence her

through harassment, torture, rape, or other forms of violence. Gopal Guru, in his essay 'Dalits from Margin to Margin' (2000), talks about various types of marginalisation when it comes to a Dalit. Apart from social and political marginalisation, Gopal Guru also mentions educational, intellectual, and cultural marginalisation. According to Guru, the Dalits face the worst form of discrimination in the intellectual field. Many Dalit scholars come from the economically weaker sections and therefore do not get the opportunity to develop a theoretical lens to perceive and examine ideas and things. And if a Dalit starts to think about the universal and collective well-being of people irrespective of his/her caste, s/he is punished by the caste Hindus. Guru mentions the case of Bhanwari Devi who was gang-raped in 1992 by the upper-caste men for speaking up against the practice of child marriage in Rajasthan. Many upper caste men felt that Bhanwari Devi had no right to interfere in their family matters. Devi was tortured and assaulted because she chose to speak in a universal language advocating a better society for everyone (Guru 2000: 114–15). Dr. Choudhary did not submit to harassment and she organised the SC, ST faculties of BHU and formed a forum named 'SC, ST Employees Welfare Association'. After the Association came into being, it became easier for SC, ST faculties to work in the University. Dalit Camera also takes up issues to do with both Dalit as well as non-Dalit students on university campuses across India such as Osmania University, EFLU Hyderabad, Hyderabad Central University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, M.G. University, Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, and Jadavpur University. However, it was Rohith Vemula's suicide on 17 January 2016 at Hyderabad Central University which could be considered to be a turning point in DC highlighting the plight of Dalit scholars in Indian Universities. After Vemula's death, DC uploaded several videos of protests against the administration of the University. Vemula indeed left a significant impression on the current struggle of the Dalit movement. It is not as if Dalit scholars were not harassed and bullied before Vemula's suicide, but what caught everyone's attention was the text which Vemula left behind in the form of his suicide letter. What is remarkable is that a section of the Indian media, instead of engaging with the cause of death, raised doubts over Vemula's caste.

N. Sukumar, in his essay 'Living a Concept: Semiotics of Everyday Exclusion' (2008), talks about how educational institutions, which are supposed to be egalitarian spaces enabling a sincere dialogue without imposing segregation, are quite antithetical to the policy of sharing ideas without bias within its precincts. Performing exclusion can be an effective way to isolate marginalised communities from availing resources. The reason why there is still a huge gap between the ones with power and those without power is because no attempt has been made to erase the policies of exclusion. Sukumar writes,

> One important aspect of such exclusion is that it seems to unite the perpetrators at the same time that it isolates the victims. While the "excluders" produce exclusion by collectively expropriating public space and refusing to share social opportunities, the

> excluded experience exclusion as an individual and personal failure – as the inability to participate freely and fully in the social life of the community. (Sukumar 2008: 14)

The tools of education are supposed to empower all those who enter the university spaces with a hope that at last one will be able to leave behind the oppressive past of discrimination and injustice. But where will the students go when education itself becomes a curse?

The next video that I would like to discuss is a brief interview of Ginni Mahi, a Dalit folk, Rap, Hip Hop singer from Punjab. The video is titled 'Ginni Mahi Interview' and was uploaded on 30 January 2017. The roots of Rap music lie in the politics and language of resistance. Being one of the foremost components of Hip Hop, Rap music came into existence in Bronx, USA to fight against police brutality and state hegemony. Parallels are often drawn concerning the body of Dalits and African Americans while talking about the struggle these two groups have had to face resisting the dominant hegemonic forces. Mahi gained recognition with her song 'Fan Babasaheb Di'. The political nature of the song — it highlights the legacy of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and depicts him as a visionary and reformer for the oppressed groups — helped Mahi in forming her identity as a politically-conscious artist. Mahi mentions that she is getting opportunities to spread the message of Ambedkar in various parts of India. Music as a tool of resistance may help in creating a discourse around caste with people on a macro level. 'Fan Babasaheb Di' has more than four and a half million views on YouTube. Mahi states that Bhimrao Ambedkar and his teachings, along with music, constitute an important part of her life. Another song that can be mentioned is 'Danger Chamar' (2015, 2020). The roots of the song go back to a conversation that Ginni had with a friend who wanted to know her caste. Upon replying 'Chamar', the friend responded 'they are danger' (Chhabra) and hence, the title of the song 'Danger Chamar'. The song is a way to claim the caste identity and further subverts the notion of concealing caste.

The next audiovisual text that I shall discuss is titled 'Ramesh Bhangi: Why "Bhangi" Name, and Who Are Bhangis?', posted on 15 April 2013. Ramesh Bhangi hails from Uttar Pradesh who is presently residing in Delhi. Upon being asked by DC, why he added the caste title Bhangi to his name, Ramesh Bhangi replies that everyone in society is obsessed with caste and people are often inquisitive about the caste a person belongs to. Ramesh Bhangi added the caste title so that people know who he is, and where he comes from. Adding Bhangi to the name can also be seen as a political act. As far as the etymology of 'Bhangi' goes, the term comes from Bhanga which means broken. A person who belongs to the Bhangi caste is also addressed as Chuhra or Balmiki. There are several sub-divisions of the Bhangi caste such as, Dharival, Sahotra, Bhatti, Borat, Doms, Ladhar, and Lal Begi. Ramesh Bhangi talks about the discrimination that he has had to face since the time of his birth. In his school, when he was in class six or seven, his Hindi teacher took him to his home to clean the toilet. In 1978, after coming to Delhi,

Ramesh Bhangi registered his name in the employment exchange to be a bus conductor but he was advised by the concerned official to go for the job of a sweeper as it fits the caste profile. After getting the job of the bus conductor, Bhangi, later on, applied for the post of the labour welfare officer as he was educated, but he was denied the opportunity. At the time of the interview with DC, Bhangi was working with the Ministry of Home Affairs, but he states that he would not get his promotion on time, and the primary reason for this discrimination could be the status of being a Bhangi. Even within the Dalit community, there is a further hierarchy within various sub-castes. For instance, as pointed out by Ramesh Bhangi, Chamars feel that they are superior to Bhangis. He suggests that the way forward for the Bhangi community can be a separate reservation. A question that one may discuss is why Dalits are denied opportunities of socio-economic or intellectual upliftment even after getting the required education/degrees? V. Geetha, in her essay 'Bereft of Being: The Humiliation of Untouchability', talks about the untouchable body and the curse of labour. She points out that the untouchable body is seen as the labouring body by the upper caste groups and therefore the denial of the right of knowing (Geetha 2009: 97–98). Even after many challenges, if the untouchable body manages to achieve knowledge, it is looked down upon and perceived with distrust by the dominant groups of society because they expect the Dalit body to engage with jobs that entail physical labour such as cleaning, sweeping, and farming. Sagarika Ghosh, in her article 'The Dalit in India', gives a concise account of the whole struggle of Dalits to claim equality and respect while rejecting the narrow casteist notions often observed by members of the upper caste. These notions can be both subjective as well as objective, direct as well as indirect, apparent as well as subtle. Ghosh also takes up the issue of reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in various sectors including education but despite these legislative and educational quotas in place, things have not changed much. The merit of a Dalit is still perceived with a sense of ambivalence and apprehension (Ghosh 2003: 86). This practice of doubting the merit of a Dalit has further raised concerns about whether educational institutions serve the purpose they are expected to. DC through its online platform attempts to resist bracketing the Dalits and other minorities. Now, DC has its Instagram, Facebook, as well as Twitter pages that further help in generating dialogue around caste-based atrocities.

Conclusion

The article shall conclude with hashtag (#) culture and the role it can play in changing the political landscape of a nation. By using a particular hashtag, one can reach out to a large group of people with similar interest or political leanings without any hurdle. The first hashtag on Twitter was used in 2007. However, it was only in 2009 that Twitter accepted hashtags and introduced a search tool so that users could see who else was using similar hashtags. Soon,

hashtags were adopted by other social media networks too, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest. In 2010s, the Arab Spring hashtags played a significant role in the circulation of information and connecting people with each other. Hashtags allow online users to filter and organise content. Hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #DalitLivesMatter, and #AllLivesMatter have helped in creating communities. With DC having its online presence on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, apart from YouTube, the phenomenon of hashtags can assist in having a wider online outreach. Moreover, hashtags can play a pertinent role in making certain ideas trend in the virtual space. Kyle Booten, in his chapter 'Hashtag Rhetoric: #AllLivesMatter and the Production of Post-Racial Affect', talks about how a hashtag is now equivalent to a political march or a protest. Hashtags are no longer merely the tools of facilitating a political event but they have become the signifiers of resistance in their own ability (Booten 2019: 183). As far as accessing the content of DC is concerned, online users can subscribe to various pages of DC across social media platforms. The purpose of not waiting for others to speak on one's behalf led to the birth of DC. The social media platforms of DC enable people to write their own stories and connect with the larger online community to resist oppression of all kinds. Considering the way India has always seen caste, gender, and communal violence, the need of the hour is to highlight the discrimination and injustice of all kinds which the minorities are facing, and DC is one such portal that has been able to not only emphasise but also document the events of both oppression as well as resistance. At a time when propaganda videos are all around to change the narratives from fact to fiction, it becomes even more essential to remain vigilant in both archiving and circulating data. As far as the scope of future research is concerned, one may take up the online archive of DC's caste-related data that is available in various vernacular languages to extend representation to all those narratives are barely addressed by the mainstream media. Furthermore, another way DC can reach out to the wider viewers is by providing English sub-titles to the videos they upload. This may help researchers in accessing the archive to a greater length.

Note

[1] Karamchedu massacre took place on 17th July 1985, when six Dalits were killed and twenty others were seriously assaulted by people from the upper caste in Karamchedu that is located in Andhra Pradesh.

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Bodily Practices: Corporeal Subjugation and Resistance in Shyam Benegal's *Manthan*

Manmeet Sodhi

Abstract: Corporeality is the materiality or the physical attributes of the body. The corporeal bodies mediate the boundary between social codes and conventions, and individual experiences of body. The constraining nature of social roles inscribed on bodies as well as the bodily experiences of untrodden paths of revelation, strength and surprise, is the focus of analysis. My argument is that the crisis in normative social behaviour occurs and reoccurs when the experiences of lived body explode and implode the set codes and conventions of a society. Drawing from Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, I propose that the subject is subjectified through practices which occur upon and through the corporeal body. Michel Foucault in 'The Subject and Power', claims that the process of subjectification produces subject as well as enables the subject to perform that subject position or destabilise it (Foucault 1982: 781). This signifies the formation of the subject through power relations. In explaining corporeal resistance in relation to the way power acts upon corporeal bodies, Foucault states that the subject reinstates or subverts his subjectification through conduct and counter-conduct. Therefore, one may deduce from the foregoing argument that the corporeal bodies, even when subjugated, in the very materiality, demonstrate a level of agency in determining their place in the world. The framework of subjugation and resistance is proposed in relation to corporeality, with reference to the study of men and women. This theoretical framework centralises the claim that it is not possible to investigate either subjugation or resistance in isolation. They are in relation to each other and one is consecutive of the other.

Keywords: Corporeality, Body, Social Behaviour, Subject and Power

Corporeality is the materiality or the physical attributes of the body. The corporeal bodies mediate the boundary between social codes and conventions,

and individual experiences of body. The constraining nature of social roles inscribed on bodies as well as the bodily experiences of untrodden paths of revelation, strength and surprise, is the focus of analysis. My argument is that the crisis in normative social behaviour occurs and reoccurs when the experiences of lived body explode and implode the set codes and conventions of a society.

Drawing from Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, I propose that the subject is subjectified through practices which occur upon and through the corporeal body. Michel Foucault in 'The Subject and Power', claims that the process of subjectification produces subject as well as enables the subject to perform that subject position or destabilise it (Foucault 1982: 781). This signifies the formation of the subject through power relations. In explaining corporeal resistance in relation to the way power acts upon corporeal bodies, Foucault states that the subject reinstates or subverts his subjectification through conduct and counter-conduct (*ibid*.). Therefore, one may deduce from the foregoing argument that the corporeal bodies, even when subjugated, in the very materiality, demonstrate a level of agency in determining their place in the world. The framework of subjugation and resistance is proposed in relation to corporeality, with reference to the study of men and women. This theoretical framework centralises the claim that it is not possible to investigate either subjugation or resistance in isolation. They are in relation to each other and one is consecutive of the other.

Judith Butler, in 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', claims that the body is primarily a performative entity, which is constantly being made up through a 'stylised repetition of acts'. The repetition itself produces a set of behaviours and reified forms which appear as the natural configuration of bodies (Butler 1988: 519). Michel Foucault, in 'Docile Bodies', claims the body is also an object of disciplinary interventions that regulate domination and hegemony (Foucault 1984: 179). However, far from being a docile and mechanical entity, the body often provides new meanings in efforts to challenge, appropriate and subvert normative structures. Michel Foucault puts in, 'body is a site on which discourses are enacted and where they are contested' (as cited in Mills 2003: 81). To move further, Elizabeth Grosz claims that the body can never be fully disciplined or described by discourse. She underlines the agency of the body, a site of active resistance to inscription, to move with its own patterns and is capable of 'counter-strategic re-inscription' (as cited in Clever and Ruberg 2014: 549). This signifies that body is a site of self-knowledge and potential resistance. Thus, in words of Lisa Blackman, the body is not only acted upon, it acts as well (2008: 25–26).

Here it is important to bring in Marcel Mauss' ideas on learned behaviours of body. Marcel Mauss coined the term 'techniques of the body,' that people learn socially how to use their bodies. The way people move and position their bodies is not simply natural. Rather, people sit, walk, run, swim and

dance in different ways in different cultures, for 'each society has its own special habits' (1973: 72). This indicates that the movement of the body is learned behaviour that is culturally sanctioned through 'a set of permissible or impermissible, natural or unnatural attitudes' (*ibid*.: 76). Pierre Bourdieu expanded this idea that the bodily activities are acquired form of embodied knowledge. Bourdieu employs the term *habitus* to explain how body habits generate cultural features and social structure. He characterises how the body, mind and emotions are simultaneously trained and uses this concept to understand how social status and class position becomes embodied in everyday life (as cited in Low 2003: 12). Saba Mahmood also explains *habitus*, in which moral virtues are acquired through a co-ordination of outward behaviour (e.g., bodily acts, social demeanor) with inward dispositions (e.g., emotional states, thoughts, intentions) through the repeated performance of acts (Mahmood 2001: 215).

As stated earlier, Pierre Bourdieu claims, bodies are trained, shaped and converted into automatic and habitual activity, of what Foucault calls 'docile bodies,' regulated by the norms of the cultural life. Hence, the body movements, routines and presentations are disciplined in order to organise the interior life around the accepted poles of being. The body may all be subject to these norms, but is also subversive of it. This implies that the human is not passive 'being-in-the-world,' but actively participates and grapples with the world. Here, it is pertinent to move beyond the body as the surface upon which power operates (Bourdieu) and the body as the effect of power mechanisms (Foucault).

Hence, I would further my argument that subtle processes of corporeal acts step out of the constraining nature of habitus and reflect the more liberatory elements of play, movement, and unfettered expressions of the self. Simonsen (2005: 3) states that the intensive capacities of a body to affect (through an affection) and be affected (as a result of modifications), signifies corporeal attitudes, having a performative as well as an affective side. Gregory et al. (2009) describes the concept of affect as unformed and unstructured intensities. It is the felt aliveness given in the pre-individual bodily capacities to act, to engage, and to connect. Deborah Gould (2009) sees affect as those non-conscious and unnamed but registered experiences of bodily intensity in response to stimuli exerted upon the body. These registered experiences signify that the organism senses the impingement and the bodily effects. At the same time, these experiences are non-conscious, which implies that this sensing is outside of the individual's conscious awareness and is of intensities that are inchoate and as yet not comprehensible (Gould 2009: 19–20). Deborah Gould uses the word non-conscious rather than unconscious to refer that is outside of conscious awareness, the difference is that the non-conscious perceptions do not require repression.

However, Guy Hawkins (2002) explains that affect is in many senses prior to feeling and emotion, having a feeling is not the same as knowing that it is a feeling. She further claims that being able to name a feeling, to classify feelings within some kind of emotional taxonomy is to render affects available to consciousness, make them knowable, to recognise them. However, one is in effect, participating, before this happens, affect precedes these kinds of classificatory and cognitive activities. Guy Hawkins states that affects remind the body's intensities and multiplicities, of the autonomy of experience. They are surplus, excess: they are about those registers of the self that escape the knowable, manageable subject. She further claims, what is valuable about this account of affect is the way it makes trouble for all those epistemologies that begin with a knowing subject ready to act on the world or be acted upon. She argues, for the body in affect is not subjectivity to the world's objectivity, it is a body in transition, a body in relation. In other words, to respond or to have a response is to be in a relation. Hawkins furthers her argument by referring Brian Massumi who emphatically claims that affect is relationality. Thinking about affect in this way means an abandonment of the subject/object dualism. What is needed instead, according to Brian Massumi, is a notion of continuity and discontinuity that is not framed in terms of opposition but as a processual rhythm. These processual rhythms generate an unexpected, unpredictable surprise and an intense affect. Hawkins states that this opens up an understanding of how we are in and of the world, how being is a kind of ontological tension between manipulable objectivity (reality and all those things that represent it) and elusive qualitative activity (becoming: all those things that break in from the outside, that surprise, that enliven, that introduce unpredictability) (Hawkins 2002).

As noted above, affect, in general, is just a sensible or sensibility not organised into meaning. Affect is intensive because it happens to us, across us; it is not objectifiable and quantifiable as a thing that we then perceive or of which we are conscious. Affect operates on us in divergent ways, differing in kind — the light that causes our eye to ûinch, the sound that makes us start, the image or sound that raises our body temperature. Perhaps the clearest cinematic use of divergent affects and intensities that skew or scramble the faculties can be explained in context to Shyam Benegal's *Manthan* through erotic undertones in the physical stance, the gestures, facial expressions and so on.

Consequently, as stated by Gregory et al. (2009), affects can be described as impersonal or pre-personal, as they do not necessarily belong to a subject or inhabit a space between an interpretative subject and an interpreted object. Rather, affects can be understood as autonomous, in that they are composed in and circulate through materially heterogeneous assemblages. This retains the connotation that affects come from elsewhere to affect a subject or self. Second, affect is equivalent to intensity in that it does not function like a

system of signification, but constitutes a movement of qualitative difference. The relationship between the circulation and distribution of affects and signification is not, therefore, one of conformity or correspondence, but one of *resonation or interference*. The difficulties that affect poses for social analysis, how to describe the circulation and distribution of intensities, have been engaged through the modes of witnessing in the film under discussion.

To further the argument, Shyam Benegal's *Manthan* presents caste as a constant or unchanging form of social stratification that conditions the behaviour of its members. In the film, caste is presented as a constant or unchanging form of social stratification that conditions the behaviour of its members. It is a system that operates at the level of collectives rather than individuals. According to Hugo Gorringe and Irene Rafanell, caste is relational in terms of pure and impure. The caste habitus results in the internalisation of specific embodied characteristics, which constitute hierarchical boundaries and, consequently, structure relationships with other castes. They further assert that caste practices, once internalised, would structure the psychological and bodily practices of individuals. Hence, caste bodies are rendered the (more or less) passive receptacles of social structure (Gorringe and Rafanell 2007: 98–99).

Gorringe and Rafanell (2007: 100) redefined Bourdieu's *habitus* dispositions as: social in origin, acquired in infancy, embodied, durable, transposable, hierarchical and reproductive of the social context within which they originated. This signifies the bodily enactment of certain dispositions are already given and reaffirmed by society. Most importantly, they are embedded in the non-reflexive realm of individuals' activity and, thus, acquire a durable nature that perpetuates the re-production of the social system. Gorringe and Rafanell supporting Bourdieu's claims, states that physical features like postures, accents, ways of walking, even bodily shapes, and so on, can be seen as the result of specific social conditioning. Individual agency is, thus, the by-product of this structural internalisation: it is the un-reflexive activity of a player who has internalised at the profound level of the corporeal — and thus hidden from consciousness (*ibid.*: 100–101).

Frame 1

In the film *Manthan*, Bindu and Bhola convey a low-class and caste harshness of language and physical movement through their embodied disposition. It is observed in the film that caste differentiation is evident at the corporeal level where bodily comportment, mannerisms, ways of speaking and thinking signal caste status. The caste identities are inscribed upon individual bodies through processes of socialisation that inform village life. Despite the presence of a radical activism, Bindu and Bhola act according to internalised dispositions. It is observed in the scene, in which Bhola went to see Dr. Manohar Rao. Bhola did not enter Dr. Manohar Rao's house, called him from the outside, sits on his hunches (as seen in frame 1) and uses idioms like 'Doctor Sahib' that would accentuate Dr. Rao's social status. The posture and attitude characterises dependent *harijan*, and his social reflexes communicate his subordination. Such submissiveness seems to occur automatically, almost without the conscious intervention of the lower caste. The body, thus, is not merely a symbol of caste difference, but the means by which such differences are constituted, perceived and subjectively experienced.

Hence, social interactions between *harijans* and upper-caste Hindus emphasise the inferiority of the former. This can be vividly seen in the postures of subservience among the lowest castes in the village. In the film, it is also noticed that on the approach of a locally dominant caste member, Sarpanch, the village *harijans* assume a hunched posture, lean forward and raise one or both hands in greeting. When conversing with the Sarpanch, their hands are held behind their backs or to their sides and their heads remain inclined. They pay exaggerated forms of respect, which are expressed non-verbally through bodily positioning. They usually stand apart from the higher castes. Their postures and attitudes characterise dependent low castes, and their social reflexes communicate their subordination. They are dependent upon their patrons — Mishra and Sarpanch — for their livelihoods. They are in constant fear that non-compliance to Mishra and Sarpanch would jeopardise their security and their employment. Thus, the submissive postures indicate that the materiality of the body is the medium through which caste is manifested. At 1 hour 15 minutes of the film, the insolent behaviour of Sarpanch towards *harijans* sheds light on caste as a lived reality in the village, and explains the continuing significance of caste discrimination. He tells the *harijans* that they must stand in separate line from the higher caste and to maintain a proper distance in the common areas of the village. Thus, the Sarpanch reminds them their position in a society. This also explains the durability of caste, in which caste bodies are rendered the passive receptacles of social structure; incapable of protest and resistance. It is also observed caste is etched into the social fabric by codes of conduct, governing modes of address (such as Sarpanch calls them *dhol*), their attire and physical positioning in the village. The use of the word *dhol* (drum) for the *harijans* signifies that they are fit only to be beaten.

For Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 63), 'strategic' agency remains once the rules have been internalised. He also states that automatic un-reflexive practices are only transformed to reflexive activity in times of structural crisis when radical changes produce a discrepancy between the internalised worldview and the external world. Thus, Pierre Bourdieu claims, agency is a slip, not a permanent state (cited in Gorringe and Rafanell 2007: 100). Agency, for Foucault (1984: 182), is not a by-product of structural internalisation, but arises from processes that are constituted in and through power relations. In the film, the mutable nature of individuals' practices emerges in the character of Bhola and Bindu. Bhola's aggressive behaviour stems from the oppression of Dalits (as seen in frames 2–5). Bhola reflects the transformative capacity, when the stable and durable habitus is replaced by his contesting voice, clenched fists and raised chest. Bindu's dissonant voice and alternate mode of being suggest the inherent instability of caste habitus. It is here that untouchability is transparently revealed to be an ideological and not a natural condition.

Frames 2–5

Pierre Bourdieu conceives body as a site within which power relations are obscured from the consciousness of individuals (particularly the downtrodden) (as cited in Gorringe and Rafanell, 2007: 100). Michel Foucault rejects the notion of the oppressed bodies as passive entities. Rather than blindly following internalised dispositional bodily modes of behaviour, Michel Foucault (1984:

181) conceives bodies as conscious of being manipulated, trained and tortured. He emphasises that, in studying the effects of power, we need to identify the mechanisms by which bodies are 'disciplined'. Hence, domination is not internalised at an early age, but is an ongoing process of power relationships that operate through bodies and, thus, minds. This not only helps us to understand the emergence of the individuals implicated in power relationships, but also to understand how these individuals emerge with particular consciousness, agency and the capacity for resistance. Gorringe and Rafanell (2007) states that the embodied practices are imbricated both in the stabilisation of the social, and in its reconstitution. Secondly, caste bodies are not only guided by pre-reflexive habitus, but also constantly monitored and disciplined, at the same time transgression is also embodied (2007: 100–102).

The centrality of corporeal bodies can be exemplified in the following sequence of scenes. Chandravarkar, Dr Rao's teammate**,** carries an awareness of an urban and class-oriented concept of sexuality. In one of the scenes, he leers at the women who enter in the courtyard with the milk pots. Women, on the other hand, are subjected to social norms of control in terms of their sexual purity. According to Judith Butler (1988: 519), women's bodily movements, comportments and dispositions are heavily circumscribed by conventions that define what sorts of movements are appropriate to their gender. In Michel Foucault's words, this process of engendering is quintessentially about power and shows how particular forms of power produce particular subjects. In the sequence of shots from 39th minute to 40th minute, a young woman gets up and makes her way out through the crowd who were watching documentary. In the next shot, we see the young woman in the distance followed by Chandravarkar. Here, the young unmarried woman leading the way reflects her sexual assertion (as seen in frames 6–11). This assertion can be seen as going beyond a mere fling and represents a true liberation from repression, in which the virginity of an unmarried woman is more valued. She does not only flout caste codes but challenges and transgresses the very logic of a patriarchal system, wherein, the family in everyday life socialises young girls into normative truth of gendered identity. Although it further indicates that, the power exercised by this young girl is eventually subsumed by patriarchy (as seen in frames 12 and 13). In the later scenes, her father ties and beats the girl in order to mould her into 'normal' as opposed to 'abnormal' forms. Such normalising strategies are used by the family to regulate discipline and achieve the conformity with the established rules and norms of the society.

Frames 6-13
In yet another sequence of shots, the intense moments of physical contact and intimacy between Bindu, a *harijan* and Dr. Manohar Rao implicitly suggest

desire and sexuality through their bodies. Affect, Lisa Blackman (2008: 25–26) argues, is a product of relations between things. One body acts on other bodies. In this way, the world is made up of many strange encounters consisting of multitudinous paths which intersect. In the film, the unconsummated, never directly expressed erotic tension develops between Bindu and Dr. Manohar Rao. The subtle connection between the two is charged with sexual tension. Something passes between them and this is a moment of affect (as seen in frames 14–18). Hence, unconsummated erotic relationship between the upper-caste leader of the co-operative and a married *harijan* woman brings forth, 'bodies [that] are not singular, bounded, closed and fixed, rather open to being affected and affecting others' (Blackman et al., 2008: 16). It is observed that the body works in unpredictable and untamed ways, allowing the body to become 'site of resistance' for achieving alternative modes of expression and self-representation through a corporeally reliant language, instead of the logocentric orientation.

Frames 14-18

In another sequence of shots, Bindu sits down at the mouth of the water pipe, exposing her legs right up to the knees, washing them casually. Dr. Manohar Rao stares at Bindu and yet, almost immediately, averts his gaze, disintegrates and retracts into sullen despair. The scene reflects the unspoken body language in which untamed encounter contests the historical sexual and/or economic repression and exploitation of class and caste. On the other hand, the sensuality of Bindu's body challenges male power and dominance (as seen in frames 19–24).

Frames 19–24

Therefore, the affective turn, in these frame analyses, expresses a new configuration of bodies. Individual bodily agency and feeling was felt to be absent in the idea of the material body. However, in the analyzed film the

individual lived-felt corporeal experiences contest the conceptualisation of the body as discursively shaped and socially disciplined. This clearly exemplifies how domination and resistance are fundamentally embedded in the corporeal. That is, bodies have the potential to transform structures as well as perpetuate them. The physical stance, gestures, facial expressions, articulation of one's life experiences in a particular tone of voice as well as silences, absence of speech, hushed voice are critical markers of both the exercise of power and of agential response.

In my view, the body has both a physical location as much as a socio-cultural construction. We experience our bodies not only in their socio-cultural locatedness but also through our emotions and our senses. We engage with our embodied selves through the experiences of struggle, contestation and confrontation that are critical to everyday life. This adds to our understanding that life is not governed by any fixed norm or image of self. The self is always in flux and becoming.

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Virile Men, Healthy Bodies: Exploring Interiority and Masculinity in *Bayam* Culture

Sohini Saha

Abstract: The article attempts to understand the intersection of health, masculinity, and identity in context of *bayam* (exercise) culture in colonial Bengal and its repercussions in postcolonial times. It seeks to argue how the concept of health emerged during the colonial period, defining the healthy male body, and thereby redefining the identity of Indian men. The article also argues how the efforts to revive masculinity in colonial Bengal become synonymous to reviving health among Bengali men where fragility and weakness were seen as markers of effeminacy. The relationship between health and identity is one of embodiment, and it is in this embodied idea of identity that I situate this article. Through an ethnographic study in the *bayam samities*, *akharas,* gyms, and *vyayamaghars* in Kolkata, this article brings together narratives, memories, alongside histories of these spaces to understand *bayam* culture and its relation to health, masculinity, and identity from the past to the present times. In doing so, it interrogates health and seeks to understand how the present ideas of exercise and gym culture move away or situate themselves in context of a larger history of *bayam* culture in Bengal, India. Bringing in the interior and exterior notions of understanding *bayam* and exercise, health and fitness, in relation to identities, this article seeks to question the same to reflect upon the transition. This article intends to interrogate the said transition and bring into question the idea of this shift and reflect upon the idea of '*bayam* from within' that is argued by men from the *bayam samities*, and *vyayamaghars*. This interrogation of the concept of within or inner body in *bayam* then becomes a ground to understand the embodied practices thereby denying the essential understanding of *bayam* and masculinity.

Introduction

Colonial period has seen a preoccupation with health emerging from the colonial stereotyping of the colonised as frail, weak, lacking in physical fitness and health. Directed specially towards Bengali men for being a weaker race when

it came to physical fitness (Sinha 1995), the question of weakness, frailty, and being 'unfit' I argue, became couched in the discourse of masculinity and identity if not only on health. The emergence of 'colonial masculinity' and its creation of an image of the 'effeminate Bengali babu' was an effort to claim a hegemony and power over them (Sinha 1995). Such a political understanding of health at a particular period of time open us to an idea of health which eludes a fixed meaning and forms an intriguing connection between masculinity and identity. Health moved away from the notion of wellbeing to become entangled with notions of strength, virility, and resilience, deeply connected to one's national and gender identity. This, as Pradip Bose argues, concentrated in context of Bengali men and their 'deteriorating physical health' (Bose 2005) that brought the male body in the forefront of nationalist struggle, becoming the ground to revive strength (health) and masculinity. It is in this context that *bayam* culture spread across many parts of Bengal, where cultivation of the body to garner health and redefine Indian men began.

Foucault, in his seminal work on the *Birth of the Clinic*, discusses the emergence of a 'new medical consciousness' moving away from the clinical medicine to 'anatomo-clinical medicine' in the 19th century. For him the new medical consciousness is perceived as 'open' and 'mobile' where one has to remain 'alert' as illness might 'betray' (Foucault 1973). A betraying illness suggests that illness becomes something that can never be fully known or perceived, or for that matter understood. For Foucault, medicine no longer engages itself into a negative work of 'negating' the illness but instead it establishes 'positive roles of health, virtue and happiness' (*ibid*.: 34). Following Foucault, Gutting argues, how medicine now seeks to define the 'positive ideals' that would determine 'man's ideal physical state' as opposed to being one that merely restores an ill body into a healthy one. Gutting reads this transformation into a move from 'medicine of health' to 'medicine of normalcy' (Gutting 1989: 116). Moving away from this understanding, I seek to see this move not necessarily as removed from the idea of health but to see health itself as based on a positive 'ideal' of 'normalcy'. The shift is, I argue, to an idea that a normality of health predetermines the domain of illness such that a healthy body becomes an ideal which determines what a sick body is. Underlying this new medical consciousness was a paradox where this new idea of medicine grounded itself not only on positive ideals but also on uncertainty, such that it is this very domain of uncertainty of illness that requires it to aspire constantly for an ideal normative idea of body and health. I argue this happens through the emergence of exercise or body care practices that establishes itself into the discourse of health, fitness, and medical knowledge in the context of 19th century Bengal.

Revathy Krishnaswamy, while discussing the emergence of modern masculinity in 18th and 19th century Europe, elaborates on Winckelmann's creation of the 'ideal male body' which exhibited both harmony and restraint

(Krishnaswamy 1999). According to Krishnaswamy, modern medicine was based on the linkages between the physical and the moral, the outer and inner, such that health was not merely an internal condition but something that was exhibited in the aesthetic beauty of the 'ideal male body' (Krishnaswamy 1999: 16). In the same way, Roussean would claim how wisdom would follow from 'physical robustness and good health' (Krishnaswamy 1999: 16). Anyone who fails to 'fit in' to the ideal of this new manhood, would be seen as diseased. For example, nervousness became a disease (Engelhardt 1974). The link between this is formed on the basis of understanding nervousness from the site of emotions, as an overflow of emotions rather than stoicness. This lack of restraint resulted in it being seen as a form of sickness. In the same way, homosexuality and masturbation too became diseases that went against the ideal of masculinity (Engelhardt 1974). Health and diseases came to be defined in terms of certain pre-defined ideals that corresponded to masculinity and morality.

Bayam and the Ideology of Health

The emphasis on regaining health during anti-colonial uprisings focused mainly on *brahmacharya*, semen control, resisting the lure of modernity, and diet control. 'Booklets, pamphlets, and "medical" manuals advocate celibacy, explain its merits, and provide precise instructions on how to control desire and stay health' (Alter 1994: 48). The reclaiming of national identity was then based on an idea of 'national health' (Bose 2005: 26) that brought in the questions of identity in relation health and masculinity. This formed an interconnection between moral, spiritual ideas on the one hand and masculinity on the other, delving into a more 'inner' idea of health and body to reclaim a national identity. My field visits to *bayam samities*, *vyayamaghars*, and *akharas* formed in the early 20th century also brought about a similar understanding of *bayam* and health based on the inner cultivation of the body. One of the eldest *bayam* practitioner, and now a guru in Bajrang *vyayamaghar* in his early 70s, describes *bayam* as *hathe khori dewa* or the beginner's lesson. His narration of his routine life which he refers to as *niyom e thaka* (staying in discipline), emphasised on his punctuality, food habits, diet, and his ability to resist any form of temptations that might disable his routine life. In comparison to present gyms, he narrates their separation from them on the basis of their preparation of boys from within or *bhetor theke*.

In elaborating on how this preparation takes place or begins, he narrates about a newcomer wherein *bayam*'s intricate relation to strength came up. In ridiculing a young boy's thin body, his lack of masculine strength was emphasised which was in need for cultivation. The hard, disciplined routine of hundred to three hundred sit-ups was not based on the development of the body from outside but development of strength from within. It is also interesting how his narration of the boy's failure to live up to the hundred

bayams by falling sick became a way to a making of a man when he returned after overcoming the first day. This coming back for the trainer signified that the boy has been prepared. It was not in the cultivation of the body that they read 'preparedness', but instead in the *nishtha* (dedication) that one gives as another trainer/guru have articulated. This was also similar to how the gym trainer had narrated about his first experience of *bayam* where even after falling sick, he returned to *bayam*, marking a turning point in his life which shaped him. In a similar context in *Bajrang vyayamaghar*, I met a young man in his late teens. While performing the *bayams* he would share his painful experience of his initiation into *bayam* rituals and how it was difficult to move about with the immense pain in his legs. These experiences gave an understanding of *bayam* which situates itself in notions of practice leading to body cultivation from within. This 'inner' idea is something that is created from practices and hard exercises. For the guru in Bajrang *vyayamaghar*, this was how *dom toiri hobe*, or breath/stamina will be cultivated. Breathing, I argue, becomes an essential aspect of *bayam* culture, and it is in this cultivation of breath that it embodies strength.

Locating the Present

In the present world of gym culture, machines predominate, and *bayam* exists in varied forms. *Bayam samities* like *Simla Bayam Samity* and *Hathkhola Bayam Samity* have turned into multigyms, yet have not completely changed into air-conditioned gyms. The spaces still continue with their traditional colonial period layout. Of significance is the Hanuman idol, established in 1926 when *Simla Bayam Samity* was formed. The idol now lies there embodying the history of the place and yet it lies detached from its present. The present gym culture no longer bases itself in the religious and spiritual backdrop but is more towards a secular, rational, and scientific regime.

Not only have the *bayam samities* and places of *bayam*/exercise have undergone changes, but the method of *bayam* itself. While previously the notions of *brahmacharya*, or the fixity of hundred to five hundred *baithaks* were important, it is no longer prevalent today according to one gym instructor. I came across a similar understanding in *Hathkhola Bayam Samity*, where a member was of the opinion that the young men today do not require a trainer and are themselves sufficient in devising newer ways into *bayam*. This was observed by him in terms of how men today practice jogging, and skipping as warm-up practices that were not prevalent previously. Rudraneil Sengupta, the author of 'Enter the Dangal' (Sengupta 2016), was of a similar opinion regarding the need for three hundred *baithaks* or *dands* which according to him is no more considered 'scientific' and that even in the limited number of exercises one could develop a healthy body.

This attaching of a 'scientific', rational understanding to the present exercise regime is a claim they extend in order to prove its efficiency in

opposition to the previous one which accordingly hints towards their 'unscientific' nature. These narratives also suggest a coming up of a new scientific discourse in health which the previous methods supposedly lacked. I, in turn, argue how it marks a shift from one scientific understanding to another. The 19th century witnessed a coming up of a scientific and medical discourse on *brahmacharya* and health based on the 'semen' which is now no more of significance and marks a further shift into newer ways of conceptualising *bayam*. This shift bases on a simplistic idea that necessarily assumes that there existed a relation between *bayam* and health, and that *bayam* existed because it would generate a healthy body where the notion of health was based on certain principles. With the change of those principles the meaning of health has changed. Thus, the logic of hundred *baithaks* (sit ups) becomes a myth today when one devises 'scientific' understanding of doing just twenty *baithaks* and still developing a healthy body. The openness of this field speaks of ideas of freedom and individual choice as opposed to directed ideas. The present ideas reject the previous ones on the basis of myths and for being outdated and 'unscientific'. However, I argue to merely reject the earlier notions of *bayam* on the basis of its outdatedness or unscientific-ness will be reductive. Instead, I read the two ideas of *bayam* as based on separate distinctive principles. I argue that, as opposed to the newer understandings of *bayam* based on means end logic, the earlier understanding of *bayam* was not based on seeing it as a 'means' to garner health, but as an 'end' in itself. It was in those doings *(bayam*) that constituted health and identity, thereby making it perpetually impossible to separate *bayam* from health and, for that matter, identity. It was not that hundred *baithaks* will generate a healthy body, but a belief that hundred *baithaks* entail an engagement with oneself and the body, and it is in this engagement that one can situate the notion of health.

'*Bayam* from Within': Interrogating the 'Interiority' of *Bayam*

The shift also marks a shift in terms of an inner/outer understanding of body, health, and masculinity. Moving away from the inner understanding of a body and health, today fitness situates itself into a creation of a body structure, an outer idea of body based on displays. It is this shift that Joseph Alter reads as a move from 'body' to physique' in matters of physical culture. Earlier the notions of masculinity and health were embedded in ideas of purity, semen, on an interior understanding of the body and *bayam*. The emphasis has been on developing a body from within/*betor theke*. I intend to move towards understanding what this 'inner'/*bhetor* signifies. A relation of authenticity to that of the interiority is always prevalent. When these men narrate how they prepare students from within, they extend a claim of authenticity. From the perspective of a guru/trainer in *Bajrang Vyayamaghar*, it was also spiritual. Bodily cultivation was not seen as distinct from spiritual cultivation bringing

in the idea of the 'spiritual male body', as argued by Alter (1994: 47). This spirituality is often expressed through the concept of breathing or *pranayama* seen as the spiritual connection with the almighty. But what is the basis of this relation between authenticity and interiority? The inner is perceived as untouched by the outside influences in a manner how Goffman (1961) discusses and critiques the idea of a sacred self in social science debates that assume an inner sacred understanding of self, pure and untouched by the social. These associations of interiority with something sacred, pure, and authentic resonate with an essential understanding of an 'inner' domain. But is this domain or interiority essential? Is *bayam* from within hints at an essentialising tendency on part of these men into subsuming their ideas of *bayam* into not only an authentic but also an essential domain?

This inner body or preparedness from inside, I argue, is not an essential domain but one that is cultivated through *bayam* itself, through acts of breathing and other bodily practices. *Bayam* entails not just an outward development for these men but an inward experience which brings into being the sentient body. It is the sentient body, that one feels and understands as an inward experience. However, this sentient body or the inner body is not just 'felt' but also cultivated. This cultivation happens through various bodily practices of disciplines, including diet control, semen control through the practice of *brahmacharya* and breath-control through breathing exercises. Breathing has remained a core aspect of *bayam* whether of present or of past times. The question of *prana* or breath has been central to pranayama and also *bayam* and exercise regimes. In *bayam,* breathing and strength come together as the repeated exercises help in creating stamina which is based on the power of breathing. In my conversations with one of the Gurus of the *vyayamaghar,* the aspect of *kumbhak* came up. *Kumbhak* is a practice of breath retention and control. Although in *bayam, Kumbhak* may not significantly remain in practice, however, the practice of breath control through breathing exercises is significant in *bayam* or any form of exercise regime which is often seen as a pre-requisite as discussed by Joseph Alter (1992). When men in the *bayam* tradition speak of an inside, they refer to the inwardness of experiencing the sentient body. This idea of the inner body comes up in the works of Sundar Sarukkai and James Morey, who through Merleau-Ponty, argue for a possibility of an 'inner' body (Ponty 1968; Sarukkai 2002; Morey 2018).

Sarukkai, in his work on 'Inside/Outside: Merleau-Ponty/Yoga' (2002), discusses the realm of the inner body and shows the possibility of retaining an understanding of an inner body without falling into the dichotomy of inside/outside. He does so by bringing in Merleau-Ponty's (1968) conceptualisation of dimensionality and describes the 'inner' as the 'phenomenological experience of dimensionality' through acts of 'eating' and 'breathing' (Sarukkai 2002: 463–64). He describes 'inside not as a side', but a 'quality of sides' which 'captures the boundedness of sides and the invisibility of perspective itself'

(Sarukkai 2002: 464). This idea of an 'inside' is created by our understanding of the distance or space that separates the front from the back thereby giving us an idea of the back. Thus, for him, we are aware of our inner body as we experience it through dimensionality, a 'space' that constitutes the 'inner body'. This space for him is experienced through acts of eating, breathing, hunger or pain, and other sensations that generate an experience of the 'inner' body (Sarukkai 2002). James Morey discusses in a similar line of thought by bringing in the concept of lived body, and Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversibility through the act of breathing in context of *pranayama*. According to him, the reversibility of breathing through inhalation and exhalation brings the outer body in relation to the inner. It is in this relation between the 'outer' and 'inner' that defines the 'lived body' for Morey (2018).

In *bayam* too, such an interaction becomes possible through the bodily practices of *bayam* which includes not just exercises but also diet control, semen control through *brahmacharya*, and the cultivation of breath or 'stamina'. Each of these practices remains central to the *bayam* tradition of the *vyayamaghars*, *akharas* and *bayam samities*. They are not just grounded on the body but those that are embodied to redefine an 'inner' body which is not essential but 'lived' and cultivated. Similar to Sarukkai, this 'inside' is felt and experienced through these practices. However, unlike being only a relation between inner and outer, I argue for a possibility of an inner body which is not pre-given but one that is constituted through the *bayam* practices. In the earlier notions of *bayam*, the idea of inner strength and power is emphasised. The idea of *bayam*'s efforts to produce from within and generate power located within reflects on an understanding of embodied strength rather than an essential and naturalised idea of strength. This inside, I argue, is cultivated through the bodily practices of semen-control, breath-control (*dom*), control of diet, and the painful regimes of exercises. This embodied idea speaks of an inner realm but does not necessarily reduce into an essential grounding of an inside that is there only to be invoked. Reflecting on Sarukkai (2002) and Morey (2018), I argue, that the 'inner' is then not essentially an 'inside', a material domain existing by itself but is constituted through the very act of creating the power or strength in the form of breath/stamina/strength through the embodying of *bayam* practices.

Conclusion

The reference to an 'inner' body or 'inner' realm in *bayam* then is one that is based primarily on bodily practices, and therefore is open to the vulnerabilities of the same. This emerged from narratives of men who devote themselves into these practices. For example, the question of semen-control becomes a vulnerable domain when night emissions become difficult to control for my interlocutors. In a similar way, loss of breath becomes a vulnerable position and a continuous effort in maintaining it becomes the norm. This was evident

from witnessing men engaging into heavy exercises and the loss of breath that resulted from it. Thus, the interiority is not one that is an untouched essential domain. As much as the practice cultivates an inner body, it also makes it vulnerable.

While there is no essential idea of health in context of *bayam* culture or exercise regimes that would distinguish the past to the present era, health has remained an elusive category, a 'normative' ideal that one has to aspire for. Thus, the move from an inner idea of health to an outer or external idea of fitness and body collapses when one understands the inside not as an essential inside but an embodiment of the *bayam* practices. While health was couched in the essentialising ideals of masculinity and morality that based itself in semen (*birjo*) and an inner idea of body and strength to claim a national identity, today's idea of *bayam*/exercise bases itself on rational ideals and scientific notions of fitness and performances. In both cases, health and fitness seems to be essentialised in relation to varying ideals of the period, that seeks to aspire for an ideal normative notion. Yet I argue, these 'ideals' are nothing but practices of *bayam* which open them to the vulnerabilities of their failure to perform or maintain thereby perpetually keeping them in a realm of uncertainty.

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A Counterspace of Justice: Critiquing a Juridical Narrative of Spatial Compartmentalisation

Upamanyu Sengupta

Abstract: On 4 October 2019, the Bombay High Court declined recognition of the Aarey locality in the north-eastern suburbs of Mumbai as a forest, paving way for the construction of a Mumbai Metro Rail car shed there. The judgment reasoned that certain parts of Aarey were already in use by other establishments and a non-contiguous wooded stretch could not be considered forest land. The court's use of contiguity as a qualifying criterion betrays a utopic idyll of forests as necessarily excluding urban spaces, and vice-versa. Convinced of a fundamental dichotomy between the forest and urban/rural settlements, the court remained oblivious to the possibility of their coexistence. This perception of the forest as an absolute other diametrically opposed to inhabited spaces meant for the court that one had to give way to the other. As a result, this perceived mutual exclusiveness of the two spaces indirectly paves way, within the framework of the text of law, for the depredation of forest lands. I have tried to show in the essay how the petition against acquiring of the Aarey forest land could be read as positing a sustainable alternative of reimagining the forest as a heterotopic space.

Keywords: Forest, Judgment, Contiguity, Urban Spaces, Heterotopic

Introduction

Cities of the Global South such as Mumbai find themselves increasingly strained for space. Bursting at the seams, expansion of the city's limits exacts a terrible environmental cost on the mountainous forest regions of the Western *ghats* on which Mumbai lies. In view of this, balancing the city's expansion with conserving its natural green enclaves such as the Aarey forest region to the north-east of Mumbai becomes important. In this essay, exploration of this spatial dynamic through Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia — a term that broadly designates spaces of difference/exception which reflect, counter

as well as subvert conventional spaces and standard practices of spatial ordering has been done (2008: 17). As a concept, heterotopia is uniquely suited to examine how spaces such as urban forests function through 'non-linear, non-homogeneous operation of multiple overlapping factors' (Cowherd 2008: 275). I deploy this notion to analyse the 2019 *Vanashakti & Ors v. Union of India & Ors* judgment (more commonly known as the Aarey case) delivered by the High Court of Bombay on allowing construction of metro car sheds at the Aarey Colony in Mumbai. In the process, I bring out how the judgment's inclination to understand forests and urban environments as rigidly defined and partitioned spaces overlooks alternate paradigms of imagining spatial relations.

The Aarey colony has for long been one of the last green covers of the city. Over the past seventy years, parts of it were leased out in stages to various companies and especially small and medium level enterprises to address the growing population and resource needs of Mumbai. As noted in the judgment, most notable among these was the allocation to the Aarey Milk Company in 1948 for setting up a modern milk-producing plant and related infrastructure in what was then the eastern outskirts of Mumbai (2019: 10). Despite these constructions, Aarey remains till date a heavily forested region with sporadic urban clusters dotted around its peripheries. In 2016, the forest became a flashpoint between the green activists in the city led by *Vanashakti*, a Mumbai-based not-for-profit organisation, and the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL) with the latter's proposal of acquiring 33 hectares of land to construct the central metro car shed ('Aarey Preservation'). The matter was first referred to the National Green Tribunal and eventually reached the High Court of Bombay which ruled in favour of the MMRCL on 04 October 2019. In its thirty-nine-page judgment, the court ruled that the MMRCL could stake a claim over Aarey as the stretch could not be categorised as a forest land owing to parts of it being already in use for other purposes. Though the Government of Maharashtra decided to relocate the project in October 2020, tussles over economic feasibility of such a move continue (*The Hindu*: 2020).

Judgments as Texts

In analyzing the judgment's conception of forest space in Aarey, this essay straddles across the disciplines of law and literature in an echo of the dissonant formations of heterotopia itself. It aligns with the ethic of deriving across disciplines resources and tools contextually relevant for the study. Repositioning a judgment as a text to be analyzed requires bringing together disciplines not altogether compatible. At the same time, this enables a shift and reformulation of knowledge contours in keeping with the opportunities such an opening offers. As Lawrence Grossberg observes, this understanding of inter-disciplinarity presupposes 'a rigorous and pragmatic approach to gaining

whatever knowledge is necessary to map a particular context and answer a strategic question' (1996: 145). Within the context of this research, such a paradigm posits juridical arguments as cues to understand the competing discourses on the organisation of our cities, the partitioning of various spaces within them as well as how these fare in relation to crucial questions of sustainability.

The choice of judicial discourse is especially important because of the bearing it has on any case. As the jurist Robert Ferguson points out, outcomes of cases pivot around how the issue at hand gets framed in juridical discourse:

> [A] judicial decision lies in the question that judges decide to accept as the basis of their deliberations. This question and its competitors are peculiar as well as central to the judicial opinion — so peculiar and so central as to make the interrogative mode the methodological anchor of judicial rhetoric. Every court makes a fundamental decision about the question before it, and the wording in that first decision controls all others. (1990: 208)

Thus, for Ferguson, judgments hinge around questions as much as on rationalising their claims. These questions, in turn, motivate the outcome of a case by lending it a direction. So, when talking of competing narratives, we refer not merely to the contesting claims put before the court, but also the options open to the judges in terms of selecting between the points of contestation, or the questions, themselves. Any judgment then proceeds to construct a narrative of what is the most important question at hand for it to decide. To that extent, judgments are not mere application of legal principles to the circumstances at hand. Instead, they involve actively tailoring the principles as well as circumstances to bring them on the same plane. To that extent, judgments engage in a process of meaning making not unlike literary texts and can thus be subjected to select elements of literary analysis.

Furthermore, literary studies introduce a critique of the element of certainty that law and legal codes guarantee. In their bid to define a problem and prescribe a viable solution, legal texts often trade nuance for certainty. Forced to operate in terms of fixity and rigour, legal codes often paper over finer cracks in a case in order to arrive at a resolution. Law then, risks becoming a play of binaries where codes are either obeyed or violated. Literary analysis of legal questions calls into question these limiting, constraining tendencies. It helps break the disciplinary protocols that entrap the working of law. In highlighting the dynamics of meaning creation a legal text engages in, the interpretations it privileges and the ones it leaves out, literary analysis opens up thoughts and reflections that escape codification. This is especially pertinent in rulings on issues involving environmental disputes where laws struggle to keep pace and respond to the rapidly unfolding global climate crisis. Imagining newer forms of sustainable living can overcome the limits imposed by conventional forms of classifying and organising spaces and habitats. As environmental

thinkers such as Timothy Clark points out, '[a] crucial claim of green criticism, after all, has always been that the environmental crisis is a crisis of imagination, that new ways of imagining and conceiving humanity's relation to the natural world are needed, and that literature, art and criticism can be at the vanguard of this' (2019: 84). In this framework, literary analysis can contribute and enable both legal thinking and action when dealing with issues of environment and sustainable growth of human habitats in close proximity to forested regions like Aarey.

Spatiality through Links

Heterotopias as a spatial category are marked by ambivalence. For one, despite the suffix '-topia' (derived from the Greek *topos*, meaning place), they are not concrete places, but networks of relations existing among different, even incompatible places. Whether as boarding schools, psychiatric hospitals, gardens or as cemeteries, all instances of heterotopia are more relational than ontological, framed always in comparison with other places. This is exactly why Foucault begins his lecture by emphasising heterotopias as 'counter-emplacements' that are nevertheless real and offer 'a sort of mixed, in-between experience' of all other places (2008: 17). His model marks a shift from emplacement, of fixing, centering on a place and delves instead into an exploration of fluid, relational spaces. Each of Foucault's examples of heterotopia is thus a real-life place whose heterotopic qualities emerge only in constantly evolving relations with other spaces. Thus, while the cemetery is defined in terms of its changing relation with civic and medical concerns of the world of the living, the garden as a site of cosmic assembly perfects that world (2008: 20). On the other hand, institutions such as prisons and asylums harbour deviants and seek to restore them through routines that emulate social norms to their extremities (2008: 18).

As evident from these illustrations, opposition between these spaces is only one aspect of the relations. They could also complement and extend one another. Prisons, for instance, both break social codes of propriety and strive to reinforce them. Gardens withdraw from the humdrum of daily life but also celebrate as public spaces a shared, community-based aesthetic of togetherness. More than opposition then, it is relations of difference that serve as the unique currency of heterotopias. While ordering of spaces conventionally proceeds along lines of symmetry and smoothing out of differences, heterotopias thrive on the jarred, uneven edges of differences. Thus, Foucault describes them as 'utterly different from' all other places (2008: 20), thereby underscoring this characteristic that sets them apart and even distinctly identifiable. Not only do they misfit in their surroundings, but also starkly foreground this dissonance. In the context of cities, spaces as diverse as shopping malls, beaches, museums, and gated communities among

others have been identified as sharing this trait of being asymmetric with respect to their surroundings (Johnson 2013: 796).

At the same time, heterotopias also remain relatable. They selectively share codes with their surroundings, draw on them and yet hem them together in a different ordering. Thus, Foucault explains the theatre as an assembling of 'a series of places alien to one another' in deviation from their standard layout. As individual constituents, they still remain as in a cinema, recognisable as the three-dimensional spaces even though the relation between them stand transformed in a (then) two-dimensional projection (2008: 19). For someone navigating these spaces, they offer a prospect of coming across as unfamiliar and tantalisingly familiar. In fact, this sense of familiarity and accessibility, however fleeting and tenuous, is essential for heterotopias to function as an ever-evolving network. This is what marks out the heterotopic network as a simultaneous concentration and diffusion of spatial relations. While the meanings and values of each of the constituent spaces aggregate on the network, no particular one of them can function without undercutting and dispersing of its effects by the others. As a result, heterotopic networks never attain a state of equilibrium.

In networking together only some aspects of disparate spaces, heterotopias reveal them not as neatly defined or delimited but as extending into one another. Thus, heterotopias emerge by 'displacing metrics of everyday life with either metrics vaster and more macrocosmic or more minute and microcosmic' (Faubion 2008: 32). Intermeshed in a larger web of relations, each of the spaces registers an imprint across the network while also rendering them vividly scrutable. As an object of study then, the networks appear simultaneously more expansive as well as minuter. Studying juxtaposed spaces demands we pay attention both to how they spill over beyond their regular boundaries and then remain intricately nested with other spaces that have similarly breached their boundaries. The nature of networking that heterotopias set in motion is thus meticulous and intensive as also magnified and extensive at the same time. This balancing between extremities in connecting spaces is fundamental to heterotopic networks.

What aspects or features these networked spaces highlight also factor crucially in understanding a heterotopia. Bringing together disparate spaces involves a process of selecting parts of them. As a result, only certain parts of these spaces get highlighted while the remaining ones are muted down. To the extent that such foregrounding is always partial, the constituents of a heterotopic relation are always distorted and disproportionately arranged in what James Faubion identifies as simultaneous exaggeration and reduction. Just like the patterns of interlinking discussed in the previous paragraph, each of the spaces in this network is limited, reduced and fractured while also being amplified and extended by virtue of its correlation and contrast to all the other spaces. These enlivened spaces of flow alter how they come to

be seen and witness a 'reversing [of] the mundane monotony of everyday routine spaces' and thus enable liberating new perspectives into spaces like the myriad localities of a city (Faubion 2008: 32).

Heterotopias then are premised on multiple disjunctions. On the one hand, these networks of spatial relationships are not in consonance with their surroundings, and on the other, their constituents too are at odds with one another. I posit these series of discontinuities within a tripartite scheme. To begin with, fragmented spaces are displaced from their original setting and recontextualised as constituents in relation with other similarly fragmented spaces. This *mode* of concatenation of spaces however, does not achieve a harmonious continuity and leaves jagged edges, as it were. As an effect of this, the kind of space that comes into being is rife with connections erratically framed and tenuously sustained. In a heterotopic makeup, differences between these displaced and fragmented spaces are not quite reconciled and result in a spatial arrangement defined by incongruity. Thus, the heterotopic condition lends itself to be summarised as 'a spatially discontinuous ground' (Sohn 2008: 44).

Heterotopias in Urban Spaces

In view of the characteristics discussed above, a forest space like Aarey situated amidst built urban spaces emerges as a classic example of the heterotopic space. The threefold discontinuity involving the constituent, the mode, and the effect of heterotopic formations is also at work in how such forests could be imagined as spaces of exception that are not easy to categorise. As the following paragraphs show, forests in proximity to urban, built environments, do not necessarily sit neatly either as spaces of wilderness or as spaces of inhabitation. In fact, they constantly challenge the presumptions with which we might approach and conceive of categories. To that extent, such forests as heterotopias counter all possible attempts at being classified either as wilderness or as built environment. What results is not so much an opposition to these spaces as new ways of experiencing them. Reducing heterotopias to a function of pure opposition misses out their ability to imitate and, in some sense, even better the regular spaces. Thinking of them as counterspaces highlights instead their contrastive as well as imitative roles as played out within the threefold movement of discontinuity. My critique of the Aarey case judgment posits this interplay between contrast and imitation as a basis for more sustainable spatial practices.

Cultural Constructs and Conservation Dilemmas

Before delving into an analysis of the judgment, there are two riders I wish to put forth. First, given the paper's focus on an urban forest, ecosystems will be referred and studied as cultural constructs, in terms of how societies and cultures perceive them. I do not see the natural world as solely a cultural

construct but study only those aspects of it that are of relevance to the cultural and social life of human beings. I also recognise, in tune with thinkers such as Emily Brady, that seeing the natural world for its own sake presages our more empathic engagement with it (2003: 24). However, as a species, the interfacing of culture, society and utility is a lens we just wish away when engaging with the natural world, and in this case, a forest ecosystem. We see, understand, and evaluate the environment in cultural terms even as we remain aware of it being 'other than human' (*ibid*.: 53). Rather than thinking of these two diverging perceptions as being at odds, it might help to see them as essentially differences of degree than of kind. In other words, even as we stay alert to the separation between the human and the natural worlds, we recognise that certain aspects of the natural world impact human society and culture more profoundly than others, and vice-versa.

And second, in proposing a heterotopic model of imagining space, this article attempts to steer clear of a general dilemma all conservation efforts pose. Emily Brady (2003: 241) enumerates them thus: between restoring the past, preserving the present and intervention to reshape the future. As I see it, each of these approaches presents a problem of its own: first, a restoration along those lines remains contingent on our limited understanding of the 'original', 'undistorted' landscape, and risks resulting in a modification of the landscape along lines that prove detrimental in the long run; second, preservation against change stymies and checks the natural tendency towards evolution, transformation and growth that is inherent — it has a stunting effect; and third, a degree of intervention will be necessary, both ethically and for reasons of utility, to ensure that the natural resources are not ruined and do not upset or impair the links that exist between 'us' and 'them'. The heterotopic model promises a calibrated deployment of these three strategies in varying combinations and in keeping with the specific requirements of a particular situation.

Claims before the Court

The main contention of the Vanashakti, the petitioners against the construction of the car shed in the disputed land hinged on Aarey's being markedly different from its urban surroundings. As the text of the judgment itself notes, this distinction is validated by previous descriptions of the stretch variously as a 'green-zone' or as an 'unclassified forest' (2019: 16) despite parts of it being used for non-forest purposes too:

> It is pleaded in paragraph 4 of the petition that the petitioners seek to challenge the destructive activities in the form of construction and commercial activities proposed at the Aarey Milk Colony ('Aarey') which was earmarked as Green Zone as per the sanctioned Development Plan: 2014-2034. It is pleaded in the said paragraph that Aarey is contiguous to the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and is having a natural tree cover, most of which is forest species and the area is rich in biodiversity. It is pleaded

> that Aarey has 12 tribal hamlets and is the natural habitats of insects, birds, reptiles and leopards. (2019: 9)

Aarey was thus posited as a place which brought together of a motley of spaces within its boundaries. In doing so, it offered an effective counterspace to the localities surrounding it by both representing as well as subverting them. It is neither entirely a forest space devoid of any urban footprint nor a part of the urban, built environment. Even though it squarely belongs to the city, it carves out a space where that urban sphere gets only a fragmented access. In doing so, it marks a break from conventional constructs of both types of spaces — the urban as well as the wilderness. As a heterotopic space, Aarey functions perfectly as a space both 'open and isolated, of controlled access and egress' (Faubion 2008: 31).

Aarey simultaneously collates as well as challenges the spaces it brings together. It sets up a different yet relatable frame of reference to gauge those existing spaces in the city as well as in the forested areas of Mumbai. In the process, it reveals a network of dependence that exists between these spaces and yet not always apparent. Thus, a major defense of Aarey has been the role it plays as a foil for Mumbai's urban sprawl even as it addresses the space constraints of the city by housing office districts and residential areas which, in turn, depend on the city for their supplies. For the petitioners, any plans for development in Aarey had to take into account the existing networks of co-dependence in the stretch and it revolved around two considerations First, the role of Aarey as a natural habitat for various species where further constructions threaten to disrupt the sensitive symbiotic balance that had evolved between these. Second, that the existing built environments too were an integral part of Aarey and could not possibly be reversed. Thus, their argument was presented more as a mitigating claim, a proposal for a way forward for an urban forest and not so much a plea for righting past wrongs. Their claim for sustaining both the spatial types in Aarey posits a heterotopia that brings together both the forest and the city spaces and affirms that the two can coexist without ceding completely to each other.

Intertwined Spaces in Aarey

In this conception, Aarey enables localised challenges and counters between the urban and forest spaces it harbours. As a heterotopic space, Aarey does not merely reflect the reality of spaces outside its ambit, but also sets up a mirroring network within itself, where both the spaces contrast and throw each other into relief. In revealing its own workings, the heterotopic space of Aarey functions as a counterspace by projecting both the detrimental as well as redeeming aspects of its constituent spaces. It exposes as well as compensates through an alternate paradigm of spatial understanding where the wilderness and the urban environments coexist. As a heterotopic space, it

exhibits not just the mismatch between the juxtaposed spaces, but also how these spaces can in fact be thought of as networked. As is evident in this case, the mismatches could be both physical and cultural in nature in that the meanings that are ascribed to physical spaces play a crucial role.

As heterotopias foreground these mismatches and coexistences, it becomes possible to reconfigure our understanding of the individual spaces of the forest and the city. Their mode of bringing together the constituent spaces posits them in relation to one another instead of the neatly partitioned spaces they are conceived to be. In that sense, Aarey as a heterotopia is outward-looking. It does not merely harbour spaces that have withdrawn from their regular boundaries, but in highlighting this displacement, escapes getting pigeonholed as a definable space. As a counter space, it both hosts as well as exemplifies the phenomenon of withdrawal.

In its mixing together of spatial identities then, a counterspace such as Aarey posits an element of mobility. It is a space without a definite location, but very much a locale. It cannot be assigned a specific point but needs to be imagined as a flow, a traversal sprawled across a significant part of the city. I argue that the assimilating tendency of heterotopic spaces comes to the fore in such an imaginary. Even as it highlights contrasts, heterotopic spaces also alert us to the fluidity of formal distinctions. Attributes of a particular place/space are not thought of in essentialist but in referential terms within spaces like Aarey. They point to the fact that boundaries between places such as the urban, built environment and the forest as a wilderness, while existent, are neither fixed nor settled. They need to be constantly negotiated and realigned, especially when it comes to devising solutions within a sustainable framework to challenges posed by rapid urban expansion.

To the extent that it is an imperfect amalgamation of two contrasting spaces such as the built, urban environment and the forest, Aarey 'entails an always faltering, incomplete process, without synthesis, a dialectics at a standstill, an unstable interruption or suspension' (De Cauter and Dehaene 2008: 94). For Vanashakti and the other petitioners it was vital that this aspect of the stretch be preserved and secured. In doing so, they were not so much proposing an idyllic escape from the urban environs as a model of cohabitation embracing the claims of both livelihood and sustainability. Like in other metropolitan conurbations, immigration and a relentless drive for acquiring additional living space is an undeniable reality in Mumbai. The petitioners attempted to reconcile this with the need for preserving the city's green spaces. This was not premised on effacing the claims of one in favour of the other in order to classify Aarey within a rigid spatial identity. True to its heterogeneities, Aarey could not be described as merely one particular type of space in the city but an assemblage of many incompatible spaces.

The Oversight

As we see, this is exactly what the judiciary overlooks. To begin with, the bench delves into the intricacies of defining a forest and determining an approximate quantum for the tree cover it ought to have. A significant portion of the succeeding part of the judgment then examines precedence in an effort to glean a workable definition since neither the government of Maharashtra, nor the Forest Act of 1927, nor the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 provide one (2019: 23). In doing so, the court eventually reasons that Aarey could not for the present purposes be considered a forest as 'land had already been diverted to non-forest use and the Aarey land does not form a contiguous part, requiring there from to be inferred what was originally a forest has degenerated and the clock cannot be put back' (2019: 38). In other words, it fails to see a rather balanced and rational argument made for cohabitation and recasts it in terms of presuming that only an unbroken and continuous wooded stretch could qualify as a forest. Instead of an imaginary of a place where seemingly contradictory elements can be brought into coexistence, it conceives the problem in terms of absolute, non-negotiable contrast between wilderness and the city.

This paves the way for interpreting Aarey, already fallen and sullied in the court's gaze, open to all non-forest activity without a possibility of initiating measures to check and contain their spread. It would seem that the judiciary was not able to imagine a continuum between built and forest spaces rather than holding the two up in stark opposition to one another. In failing to set aside monolithic conceptions of zoning and spatial gradation, the judiciary ends up interpreting the petitioner's claims too as idyllic. Thus, contiguity was understood purely in homogeneous terms rather than as juxtaposition of competing counterspaces. This compartmentalised, non-referential imagination of contiguity is what defines a utopic space and makes for its unreality as opposed to the stark chaotic reality of heterotopia. As a result, the judiciary is unable to see a viable future for Aarey as a green cover that has already started losing space to the built environment. Upon failing to straitjacket it as a forest, they decide to open it up for further construction.

Imagining Sustainability

Conceiving forest spaces in and around cities in terms of cohabitation instead of stark opposition between the built and the wild could lead to more sustainable outcomes. In such scenarios, imagining the forest space need neither exclude the built environment, nor effect what Cronon (1996) describes as a 'flight from history' of its surroundings. In fact, a measured and balanced intermixing of the two could underscore the sheer dependence of seemingly incompatible ecosystems. This is particularly of relevance at a time when our cities find themselves strained for space and forests remain dependent on increasingly fragile conservation measures. Being able to see the forest as a heterotopia —

a sphere of unlikely juxtapositions — paves the way for reimagining values its constituents hold for us without adversely affecting the existing spaces. Within this framework, partial depletion of a green cover would not necessarily disqualify its entitlement to environmental protection against unplanned urban expansion. At the same time, identifying even a discontinuous green cover as a forest stretch would preserve all built environment within its fold.

Evidently, the judiciary understands an ideal forest as wilderness untarnished by human presence. Aarey, that harbours swathes of built environment, does not make the cut on this count. The judgment follows this line of reasoning despite no obvious constrains of how the law books define a 'forest'. As the text itself points out on multiple occasions, the category remains ill-defined and vague even in precedents. What sort of a space then does the bench envisage a forest to be? What qualifies as a forest? Clearly, a presumption of forests being uninhabited wilderness, a *terra nullius* of sorts, drives the court's stance in the case. Ecologists such as William Cronon caution us against viewing forests in the narrow exclusivist terms of wilderness:

> Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation–indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history. It is not a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can for at least a little while longer be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization. Instead, it is a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made. (1996: 7)

Forests cast in such idyllic images of wilderness reflect our own impulses of classifying and parceling ourselves as much as our surroundings. The myth of 'untainted' wilderness mirrors our own distinct and oppositional identity vis-à-vis the rest of the natural world.

Such a stance falls short of being a sustainable development model on at least two counts. On the one hand, exoticising wilderness places it at a conveniently safe distance. Wilderness or less ambitiously, forested areas, place their own demands towards conservation efforts. These can range from commitments to localised, micro-level reduction efforts of wastage, consumption and so on. Positing the wilderness as a remote and inaccessible location promises an escape from such constraints and the attendant lifestyle changes they threaten to bring about. At the same time, stowing away the best of sustainable behaviour for wilderness also potentially absolves one from being more responsible and attentive to one's own immediate and arguably mundane surroundings. For Cronon, this danger underpins all ideas of wilderness. It risks tricking us to take our daily spaces for granted and '[w]ithout our quite realizing it, wilderness tends to privilege some parts of nature at the expense of others' (1996: 22). Thus, our locales are seen as irredeemably claimed for our needs and purposes and therefore opposed to

wilderness. In offering a two-fold escape, such a spatial perspective allows for a continuous deferral of our commitment to more sustainable living and action.

To this end, it might be useful to return to a primary distinction Foucault posits at the start of his essay. Reflecting on the history of spatial hermeneutics, he pitches for making a shift from emplacement-based understanding to a relational conception of space. This involves thinking beyond the ethic of fixed, static and defined emplacements and seeing spaces as ever-evolving networks. It would seem that Foucault suggests that all space thus has a heterotopic side to it in that it could always be linked, and often in radical, unpredictable ways to another. While this offers a model of dynamic adaptability uniquely suitable to our resource-constrained cities, it also unsettles spatial boundaries. To the extent that judicial institutions frame a narrative in conceptualising these boundaries through texts like judgments, they could offer crucial starting points in effecting this shift. As Jacques Derrida (1992: 20), in distinguishing an act of performing justice from mere conformity to the law observes, 'justice always addresses itself to singularity, to the singularity of the other, despite or even because it pretends to universality'. Breaking away from the mould of conventional stratified spatial understanding defined by precedence to a more heterotopic conception of juxtaposed spaces might have just introduced such a singular, exceptional turn in the context of this judgment.

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Articulating Fear of the 'Known': Reading the Tiger in Fiction on the Sundarbans

Ankana Das

Abstract: This paper presents an account of the human and nonhuman paradigm in the fictions written on the Sundarbans. I look at the representation of the Royal Bengal tiger in these selected works, namely, Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's *Sundarbane Sat Bacchar* (1955), Shibshankar Mitra's *Sundarbane Arjan Sardar* (1956), Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2008), and Mitali Perkins' *Tiger Boy* (2015). I argue why we should re-examine the agency of the Tiger upon the lives of humans instead of looking at it soon-to-become-extinct wild creature. A diachronic view has been put forward about how the Anthropocene has permeated in the fictions surrounding the mangrove.

Keywords: Sundarbans, Tiger, Fear, Human, Nonhuman, Animality

> … [T]he People of the Sundarbans still understand what the rest of us pretend to ignore: that all who share the sacred breath of life — the chital and wild boar, frog and fish, idiot and genius — are made of meat.
>
> Sy Montgomery, *Spell of the Tiger* (1995; 38)

How we seek to define the nonhuman animal depends on cultural variables as it does on the animal's discernible biological differences. Throughout history, humans have shared existence with animals in myriad ways. Either keeping animals as domestic familiars or as captive slaves, killing them for food or on rarer occasions being killed by them, defines the basis of this coexistence (Ingold 2004; Armstrong 2011). In fiction, its representation often follows a systematic portrayal of its 'animality' through metaphors of fear. Fear here is backed by notions of the animal in its un-human like form, devoid of humanism

but at the same time inhabiting around the human subject. Furthermore, poetic imagination of the potential of the animal's animality serves as an articulation of the limitations of the human experience in a way that assists in the thoroughgoing discussion in the field of cultural production, drawing on the social conditions responsible behind its creation (Bourdieu 1994).

Closely considering fiction on the Sundarbans, recurrent reference of the Royal Bengal tiger invokes both fear and pity. The image of the tiger in these fictions challenges perspectives of 'animal studies' if we seek to locate it in the domain of science which is limited to reading the animal through its exposure in the field of biology. Plus, poetic imagination is consciously limited to actual depictions of the animal in its habitat, which invokes both fear and intimacy in a problematic manner. For a larger perspective of the interplay between humans and the tiger, one must venture beyond normative readings of the tiger as a soon-to-become-extinct wild creature but re-examine its agency upon the lives of humans. It is in this scope, that this paper explores the way in which the animal roams around the literary landscape, treading carefully along and against the discourse on animal conservation. How do the modern authors of the 21st century envision the future of animal–human coexistence, contrary to those writing in the 20th century? In what ways has the Anthropocene permeated into the literary imagination of human–nonhuman coexistence? These are some of the concerns this paper addresses. Shibshankar Mitra's *Sundarbane Arjan Sardar* (1956) and Mitali Perkins' *Tiger Boy* (2015), have been taken as primary texts for evaluation, along with Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's *Sundarbane Sat Bacchar* (1955) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2008). Though these texts, this paper highlights the representation of the Tiger — the normalised notion of fear of the islanders is starkly contrasted with the unimaginable awe of the foreigner. These texts represent a tenuous balance between an understanding of human–animal conflict on the one hand and an aggressive search for rationale, reliant on the idea of fate or destiny on the other. Interestingly, the buoyancy in this problematic juncture is maintained by the invocation of fear, which merges the two into a perfectly imperfect hunt for recognition of the agency of animal.

The Royal Bengal Tiger in Pre-Colonial Writing

In *punthi* texts or in vernacular traditions, literature on the Sundarbans depicts a complex conflict between humans and nonhumans. The creative function of these texts was primarily to engage with the society which is both dramatic and philosophical at the same time. Therefore, the narratives that emerge out of such practice showcase a unique coexistence of humans and nonhuman animals. Mostly dominated by tales of the Lady of the forest — Bonbibi — and her divinity, these tales espouse nature's superiority and authority over the animal kingdom, including humans. Here, animals do not simply exist as metaphors to sophisticated human emotions but as crude harbinger of a

certainty that animals are and should be a part of human existence, which is manifested in repeated invocation of fear and anxiety over the otherness of the animal.

In several versions of the tale of Bonbibi, the nonhuman animal appears in the form of divinity. The tiger in these *punthi*s (in *Bonbibir Johuranama*, *Raimangal*, etc.) is represented as an upper-caste sage, known as Dakshin Rai who is worshipped by the people of the Sundarbans as a god. His divinity partly stems from his Brahmin origin, and partly on his prowess as a Bengal Tiger, known for his appetite for human flesh. Dakshin Rai in some stories is also the legitimate king of the Sundarbans. Following Durkheim's espousal of the characteristics of totems, the Bengal Tiger can also be considered one, which acts as a unifying symbol amongst the people of Sundarbans. It is a figure of fear and worship at the same time.

Pre-colonial narratives surrounding the tiger, in *Johuranama* and *Raimangal*, thus contextualise the element of fear in a divine framework, where fear dictates a brand of eco-consciousness. On the contrary, colonial representation of the tiger was of a typical manner. Among others, W. W. Hunter, and F. E. Pargiter's records in archived colonial documents demonstrate the islanders' vulnerability to threats of tiger attacks. Postcolonial narratives of man–nature conflicts on the other hand mainly valorised human victory over the nonhuman, where notions of fear are almost nonexistent. For example, in *Sundarbane Sat Bacchar*, Bibhutibhusan's portrayal of the wilderness comes with a sense of human entitlement to nature. However, when it came to the neoliberal state's narratives of these conflicts, the question of the human was pushed back, while those around wildlife conservation were brought forward.

Negotiating Human–Nonhuman Intimacy: The Tiger in 19th Century Fictions

In representing the man-eaters in fiction, authors resort to invocations of fear to heighten the sense of terror only to be followed by horror. The study of fear, as espoused by Gray, is a clinical factor which relies on two very important concepts of psychology — motivation and personality. Here, the 'actual danger' may be significantly different from the 'potential danger' but its impact on the wellbeing of the individual remains powerful (Boissy 1995).

The literary animal seldom invokes fear, because more often than not, it is emblematic of other human emotions. Through metaphors and allegories, animals in fiction are served a backseat to the main theme of the text, which revolves around the human subject. This Kantian perspective of looking at animals as 'passive citizens' is ruptured in fiction on the Sundarbans, where animals are active participants to the plot and the storytelling. Animals in these fictions do not solely exist to further human events but reverses the equation altogether. Surprisingly, here human emotions are emblematic to the wilderness outside.

Writer Shibshankar Mitra, writing in the late 20th century, can be considered the most important modern author who wrote fiction on the Sundarbans. His fiction displays an array of emotions in human beings which are representative of the *abad* or the forest. Mitra demonstrates a dilemma in his prose where he battles to draw a line between animal rights and human rights. He announces that the tiger is unofficially the King of the Sundarbans but goes on to extirpate that by a demonstration of human strength over the animal. Shibshankar Mitra's *Sundarban Samagra* (1964) was published at a time when tiger conservation or wildlife protection was not common in mainstream literature. Despite that, Mitra portrays a thorough picture of the Sundarbans where humans and animals live in harmony with nature. They coexist in a manner that did not require any intervention (in terms of conservation efforts) other than that of the divine, definitely not governmental. His stories depict the lives of the people of the Sundarbans in a way that naturally exist. His stories do not morally trip the readers into wanting to preserve the 'exotic mysterious beauty' of the forest or the tiger, because Mitra does not write of any disruption in the system.

Contradictory to Mitra, Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's *Sundarbane Sat Bacchar* (1955) presents a total fictitious account of the Sundarbans which reminds us of colonial accounts. *Sundarbane Sat Bacchar* is an adventurous tale of a teenage boy Nilu, and his journey through the Sundarbans. He learns about indigenous hunting techniques from a tribal boy who he befriends and spends his time learning about the nuances of life in the Sundarbans. Bandopadhyay glorifies human actions and superiority over animals in a way in which the animals take a back seat but they neither act as metaphors of poetic imagination nor do they act as perpetrators of fear. They exist to further Levi Strauss's idea of looking at animals as symbolic manifestations of classifying the social order of things. Animal representation for Bandopadhyay plays with the understanding of similarities and differences in the realm of nature, and at the same time hints at the superiority of the morally aware being i.e., man.

In *Sundarbane Arjan Sardar*, Mitra writes about the protagonist Arjan, and recounts his adventures in the Sundarbans. Arjan being a native of the Sundarbans does not engage in ultra-heroic activities to satiate his masculinity, nor does he merely go out to 'experience new things' as Nilu, the protagonist from Bibhutibhushan's *Sat Bacchar* (1955) does. Fate engages Arjan in tumultuous adventures one after the other which tells of the negotiations that humans and the nonhumans of the Sundarbans have to deal with daily. A large part of Mitra's narratives deals with the portrayal of the islanders' need to approach the forest for livelihood. And in this endeavour, Arjan seldom had to face the tiger, and was attacked by them. In one instance, Arjan lost his companions to a tiger, which made him hunt the tiger and single-handedly kill it. This, along with other instances, earned Arjan the fame of a very strong

and brave man, who was often employed by others to protect them from tiger attacks while in the forest. The conflict between human and animal is important here, because unlike writers of a later period, who portray this struggle by partially blaming it on humans, Mitra writes of the tiger as solely an animal, capable of only animosity.

Mitra presents the forest in his works as a battleground for humans and the natural elements. In this battle, humans often manage to establish sovereignty over animals by killing them. Mitra's tigers are not an embodiment of Dakshin Ray, the tiger deity but are simply animals which exist to further the threatening living condition of the islanders. Humans cannot coexist peacefully with man-eaters lurking around them and it is in these conflicts that arise out of it, which tells of the politically charged nature of 'coexistence'. Likewise, human–animal conflict is followed by humans' physical supremacy over the animal. In *Arjan Sardar*, Mitra endows the fictional character of Arjan with strength capable of killing a tiger. While human supremacy is dealt with, Mitra also believes that animals have intellectual capacities. This manifests in the narrative techniques employed to represent the tiger as a very cunning and meticulous animal and also as a dangerous vengeful monster. Uses of modern artillery like guns are celebrated as tools of victory for man over the nonhuman animals. Here, modernity endows man with superpowers over animals which they did not have earlier. Arjan does not question individual freedom, rather embraces a masculine idea of superiority which can only be attained when one has in possession a non-native weapon to injure animals. But at the same time, Mitra takes utmost care to sculpt the character of Arjan as a humane character who kills not for the sake of it but for survival.

Though written around the same time, Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's *Sundarbane Sat Bacchar* offers a completely contrasting outlook to the human–tiger interface. The novel is an adventure of Nilu a Bengali boy, who gets kidnapped by *mag* (Portuguese) pirates to the Sundarbans, but eventually befriends the son of his captors. Bandopadhyay paints a very romantic idea of the Sundarbans in the novel. The narrative also flows in a continuous array of one adventure after the other with Nilu in the Sundarbans, encountering animals which were not found in the Sundarbans when Bandopadhyay was writing the novel. He writes of an encounter of Nilu and Monu with a Rhinoceros at the Sundarbans where they went to hunt down the animal but eventually failed to do so. As a matter of fact, according to the 1878 Statistical Account of the Sundarbans by Hunter, there is mention of Rhinoceros, but they went extinct by the 20th century due to degraded ecological circumstances. The duo, Nilu and Monu, also engage in activities such as hunting tigers and deer from the forest and also catching fish. For Bandopadhyay, tigers did not feature as a threat to the islanders of the Sundarbans as much as the Indian government does. He talks about the police as inhuman tormentors of the mag community. This portrayal of the state as an element of threat instead of

the man-eaters echoes with present-day concerns of the islanders. The tiger in these narratives loses its ferocity and exotic identity and becomes a mere liken to any other non-animal agent of threat — in this case the coastal guards and the police.

Fear and the Bourgeois Certainty of Everyday Life: The Tiger in Contemporary Fiction

Moving away from those representations of the tiger as a ferocious animal, lurking around to prey on humans, in the texts produced in the Anthropocene, the tiger becomes a mascot for conservation reverberating Jalais' espousal of the 'cosmopolitan' perspective. There are various ways of interpreting the animal — it can either be defined under the umbrella of human rights, as a potential threat to human existence thereby valuing humans over animals. Or, it can be addressed in terms of Animal Rights, where the presence of humans in a protected wildlife reserve comes under criticism. This second phenomenon is very modern and is a Western outlook, as we can argue that the need for protecting animals comes from the fact that their existence is affected by human occupation, mostly colonisation. Unlike human rights, which is universal, irrespective of class, ethnicity, nationality or population, animal rights have a starkly different outlook when it comes to defining the rights of the animal. The protection of animals, and the rights entailed to them are not just tailored according to human convenience, but the same rights are violated too by humans.

Mitali Perkins' *Tiger Boy*, published in 2015, inverts the common practice of reading the animal through human emotions but reading humans in possession of 'animality'. Perkins' tiger is the emblem of peace, reading which one can literally ignore the fact that a huge number of villagers fall prey to tiger attacks every year in the Sundarbans. Perkins' use of metaphors regarding the animal is limited to talking about it in terms of its majestic features. The image of the tiger here doesn't invoke any fear owing to its 'cosmopolitan' outlook ascribed to it. It reminds of Annu Jalais' espousal of a 'cosmopolitan' reading of the tiger, where she examines ways in which the Bengal Tiger has been represented, reproduced and validated through its connection with nature. She critiques the narratives on the tiger where she highlights the "power play involved in the urban stories on wildlife" (Jalais 2008). Following Philippe Descola's assertion of controlling the social, Jalais questions the common understanding of the tiger and says that its representation fluctuates through conflicting perspectives seated in deep-rooted prejudice. She specifically calls out those conceptualisations which singles out the tiger from its habitat (which includes human inhabited villages as well) for a skewed agenda of denying the islanders their due place in the politics of wildlife conservation. Jalais argues for the use of the term 'cosmopolitan' where she says that the idea of a cosmopolitan tiger obliterates

the profound differences between several lived experiences of the people of the Sundarbans with the tiger. She says that '…today's universally propagated ideas about tigers ultimately act to the detriment of 'other' tigers because they do not allow an engagement with alternative ways of understanding animals and wildlife' (Jalais 2008). Here, a question of class and culture ensures as driving factors behind understanding the animal. The core of this discussion successfully elucidates that no matter what the debate is, whether around conservation of tiger or natural resources or deforestation in the name of 'development', the 'implicit measuring rod remains its Western definitions' (Jalais 2008).

Human engagement with the nonhuman animal takes various shapes in the fiction on the Sundarbans. The conflict between the two is so often that humans live with the constant fear of attacks from the animal in a way that they have normalised this fear. This fear can only be understood when a foreigner; or the 'other' engages with the Sundarbans. Authors mainly explore this 'otherness' through the characters belonging to the urban population and their endeavours at the Sundarbans. For example, the characters Piya and Kanai in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* provide useful perspective into the topic. The tale follows Piya, a marine biologist and Kanai, a city-dweller, into the interior of the Sundarbans, and touches upon relevant topics surrounding the delta. In several instances, Ghosh portrays a raw picture of the life of the islanders, where fear of animals is an everyday phenomenon. *The Hungry Tide*, being written by an anthropologist, displays both sides of the conservation agendas and also adds to the literary field an appropriate articulation of the fear for the tiger. It is through these two characters' experiences and discovery of the unknown, do we explore the fear lurking around the creeks of the Sundarbans. Otherwise, the native characters' normalised notion of the fear factor falls short in articulating this anxiety. But there are authors who tend to romanticise this notion of fear, and the deathly conflicts. This kind of representation paints a romanticised version of the Sundarbans, where the forests along with its inhabitants are mystified. While we talk about the conflicts between humans and animals, the intimacies between the two should also be looked at. The intimacies are rare, and are only represented through instances where humans engage in killing the animal. It is only during the struggle that both human and tiger explore a form of intimacy which is destructive in nature. Thus, to some extent, human–animal conflict and human–animal intimacy go hand in hand in case of the human–animal relationship in the Sundarbans.

Articulating Fear of the Known: Towards a Conclusion

Montgomery's words at the beginning of this paper, articulate the fear of the tiger, exemplifying the unique conflict between humans and animals in the Sundarbans. It is unique in the sense that this kind of human–animal conflict is found nowhere else in the world — where animals prey on humans as a

norm. And this conflict is common because it happens regularly there. As mentioned earlier, tigers maul humans on a daily basis and humans live under that threat in such a way that they have internalised this fear thoroughly. Here, a generalised hermeneutic 'fear of the unknown' is replaced by the fear of the *known*. In addition to that, the image of the tiger activates a disciplinary concern, which is only possible by extending the reading beyond its original context. The paradox of the animal's animality and the treasure that it protects (forest produce) though seems mythical and fictitious, allows us to read the fear it perpetuates in a different light.

The manifestations of fear in the fiction studied in this paper are prompted by incidents that also provoke the possibility of a systematic 'othering' of the animal. It can be said that this fear arises from the fact that the animal is devoid of preconceived notions about itself, echoing Derrida's animal (2002), which when looks at us, 'we are naked before it'. This position assumes a superior seat from the animal but somehow the fear associated with it intensifies. The inability to understand the animal's animality in other words is the foundation of any acceleration of fear. In hunting stories, this fear is often replaced with other notions of imperialism. Hunting the 'known' is profoundly different from being hunted by the unknown. Hunting in colonial times reinstated the power dynamics of the colonisers and the colonised where the difference between the colonised humans and their nonhuman counterparts blurred into a chaotic becoming. Game animals or what they were referred to, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are currently species that have become either extinct or are endangered (Beinart 1990).

In present day, the Royal Bengal Tigers in the Sundarbans stand at the brink of being severely endangered but still it manages to pose as the greatest living threat for human life. This fear manifests itself in the construction of imaginary boundaries resulting in associating the tiger as the protector of the wilderness, which the state seeks to preserve as well. The religion of the Sundarbans, of that of Bonbibi also reverberates similar concerns, depicted in the religious texts. In this regard, can we assert that literature has always perpetuated in humans the fear of the unknown for a greater underlying cause? Do authors use the tiger only as a symbol of upholding ecological concerns? The answers to these lie in the deeply entrenched nature of the texts of the fictions which not only have introduced to the readers the tiger, but also at the same time allowed us to ponder over the animal's agency and the powerless inhabitants of the Sundarbans, who despite falling prey to the animal will still venture into its territory in search of livelihood.

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Runaways and *Gun Island*(s): In Search of a Home(land) away from 'Home'

Jaya Yadav

Abstract: This article undertakes a comparative study between *Gun Island* (2019) by Amitav Ghosh and *The Runaways* (2018) by Fatima Bhutto, which (de)construct and reconstruct certain frameworks as counter-hegemonic discourses, which then undercut Western notions of migration, 'homeland(s)', and power. The multiple connotations attached to 'homeland' are evident in both texts. On one level, a 'homeland' may be read as coinciding with one's national identity, linked to questions of citizenship, and therefore one's race, ethnicity, and culture. On another, it may also be a space that exists outside, or far away from one's place of living or birth, not tangent upon limiting understandings of 'belonging'. In such instances, the 'homeland' may be based on shared faith, or the *Ummah*, exemplified in *The Runaways*, and on common languages, cultures, and histories, seen in *Gun Island*. These two seemingly unrelated novels function as part of a larger study on South Asian literature, a term which may be seen as more indigenous than labels of the 'Global South'. Ghosh and Bhutto present an alternative view to unveil issues of gender, class, race, and ethnicity, which undercut dominant readings of 'migration', and portray different parts of South Asian through a cartography of linked experiences and histories.

Keywords: Homeland, Identity, Nation, Belonging

The 'Global South' can be seen as a political, geographical, and social space, from which a Western gaze creates a representative emblem of the 'Third World',[1] its various ethnicities, languages and cultures. However, it is important to delineate the processes of the formation of this label, as well as problematising its definition as well as appeal. The 'Global South' becomes an interesting site for interrogating literary spaces in order to reimagine borders, identities, and altering ideologies in an increasingly conflicted world with hyphenated nationalities. The appropriation

of the nomenclature defining the 'under-developed' or 'developing' world, as seen by the West, ranging from 'Third World' to 'Global South' demarcates limitations and signifies the power to (re)name lying beyond their reach. The modes of production in terms of hegemonic ideals remain in the hands of the West, perpetuating hierarchical systems in an arguable age of neocolonialism. Amidst these questions of who controls contemporary trade, travel, and therefore accessibility to expressions of identity and representation, themes of displacement, discrimination, and violence emerge, connecting travel across an interconnected world.

In the contemporary world, the negotiations between nations in terms of soft power dissemination rely on cultural exports, such as literature, music, food, and technology. Countries, which may not have been at the centre of colonial trade in the 19th century, now occupy important sites of popular culture.[2] On the other hand, stereotypes from the old world continue to perpetuate racist views on people, with inflections and contradictions of the new one. Without centring one's own understanding of the 'Global South' on Western discourses, whose means of production still do not lie with its constituent citizens, still to an extent 'Orientalist' in language and orientation, one must move to analyzing literature which emerges from the region. This study is dialectically conflicted as the two authors in question, Amitav Ghosh and Fatima Bhutto, occupy spaces of privilege through class, language, and as 'diasporic' writers of fiction and nonfiction. Moreover, it is imperative to locate the politics and anxiety of a colonial language[3] vis-à-vis the emergent concerns of the region.

The larger arena of literary studies evidently does not remain unaffected by these emergent concerns. Amitav Ghosh's recent fiction has seen a trend to market itself in alignment with contemporary issues such as global warming and migration (*The Hungry Tide*, 2004; *The Great Derangement*, 2016). Bhutto's oeuvre as an author has evolved from autobiographical non-fiction (*Songs of Blood and Sword*, 2010), to fiction dealing with themes of minority representation, nationalism (The *Shadow of the Crescent Moon*,[4] 2014), and terrorism (*Runaways*, 2018).

This article charts out parallels and overlaps recurrent in these formations vis-à-vis *Gun Island* (2019) by Amitav Ghosh and *The Runaways* (2018) by Fatima Bhutto, which (de)construct and reconstruct similar frameworks as counter-hegemonic discourses, which undercut Western notions of migration, 'homeland(s)', and power. The multiple connotations attached to 'homeland' are evident in both texts. On one level, a 'homeland' may be read as coinciding with one's national identity, linked to questions of citizenship, and therefore one's race, ethnicity, and culture. On another, it may also be a space that exists outside, or far away from one's place of living or birth, not tangent upon limiting understandings of 'belonging'. In such instances, the 'homeland' may be based on shared faith, or the *Ummah*, exemplified in *The Runaways*,

and on common languages, cultures, and histories, seen in *Gun Island*. These two seemingly unrelated novels, function as part of a larger study on South Asian literature, a term which may be seen as more indigenous than labels of the 'Global South'. Ghosh and Bhutto present an alternative view to unveil issues of gender, class, race and ethnicity, which undercut dominant readings of 'migration', and portray different parts of South Asian through a cartography of linked experiences and histories.

It is interesting to note that the centrality of technology to both texts bind them in a study examining the effects of the global and the local in the 'glocal'. The widespread reach of technology in these two narratives sheds light on the changing relations of class, caste, and gender in areas where identity markers circumscribe lived realities. The constraints of lack of accessibility are undone by the availability of mobile phones and cheaper Internet, both root causes that drive the narratives and the characters on to newer journeys, not possible in the previous world order.

Gun Island (2019) uses the backdrop of its predecessor *The Hungry Tide* to intertwine ecocritical concerns to other contemporary ones, such as refugee migration. *The Hungry Tide* interacts with readers as a retelling of the Morijhapi massacre, questioning limiting discourses on environmental conservation. *Gun Island* refers to the protagonist of the former novel, Kanai, as the uncle to Dinanath Dutta, calling himself 'Deen' in America, who is a rare book specialist. He exemplifies the figure of the *bhadralok*,[5] upper class, and 'successful'. He lives in Brooklyn and spends winters in warmer Kolkata, attending weddings. He runs in to Kanai, who questions his knowledge of Bengali myths, located in the folk culture of the Sundarbans. The region becomes an important site to understand travel, identity, and issues tempered with in this glocal region.

The novel begins with a play on the title, translating 'gun' as *bundooq*, refiguring a medieval history, where the plot unravels across the permeable regions of Venice and the Sunderbans, through map making, deciphering allegorical myths, unmitigated travel, with an air of adventure, stemming from privileged positions of class, granting social mobility. In an atypical Ghosh-esque fashion, Deen is a character whose dependency on 'reason', Western knowledge systems, and a biased method of understanding the world, in terms of travel and communication, becomes a blind spot in seeing things in front of his own eyes. He meets Nilima Bose, an ageing relative, who shares the myth of the *Bundooqi Sagar* with him. Deen has never heard of this figure, instead we get an insight into his Western-trained academic mind, as he did his PhD on the connections of such tales to the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian subcontinent. Deen does not credit the locals of being narrators and creators of these tales in their own right. She suggests that Deen should visit the Sunderbans himself. He remains unconvinced, but as Piya, the cetologist from *The Hungry Tide*, caretaker of Nilima's cooperative in the islands, insists, he decides to go for a day.

Deen arrives in Lusibari, where he meets Tutul, now called 'Tipu', due to his choice of Americanising his name (like Deen), who shocks him with his precocious behaviour and information on Deen himself. As they travel to look for *Bondooqi Sagar's* shrine on an island, Deen is confronted with an alternate belief system to his own. This is not only in terms of myths, but also Deen's existence in the world as an 'educated' man. Tipu asks him, 'so you *believe* in passports', (italics mine) heightening the discord between their realities. Tipu's insight into the Sundarbans leaves Deen feeling uneasy. As they find the shrine and meet Rafi, the grandson of the old shrine keeper, a series of mystical events unfold. Deen observes certain symbols, which he is unable to interpret.

Tipu and boatman Horen leave him alone for some time to bring back the boat, where suddenly, a snake attacks him. Tipu, while saving him is almost fatally struck by its venom. When Rafi hears this, he too is shocked for there has never been a real snake inside the shrine and has only mentioned in the narrative. They hurriedly leave the island to save Tipu, whilst he has fits and tells Deen to inform Piya about someone named Rani. None of this makes any sense to Deen, as he calls Piya, who rushes back from Bhuvneshvar to Tipu's aid. Piya informs him that Rani is the name of the Irrawaddy dolphin upon which her work centres around. The pod is in danger, as was Tipu, underlining climate change concerns to a human one, highlighting the intertwined relationship of the two. However, Deen leaves feeling shaken and goes back to his home in Brooklyn without being able to make any sense of the events, which occurred at the shrine. Tipu emails him questions regarding Shamans and myths, without revealing his motives.

Over this period, Deen gets in touch with Cinta, his longtime friend and a prominent academic in the field of medieval Venice, who invites Deen to stay with her. As he later travels to Venice, to visit Cinta again, he runs in to Bangladeshi labourers, waiters and other working-class migrants, including Rafi. Rafi informs him that his Indian identity is hidden away from everyone here, as most of the migrants have come from Bangladesh.

A settled social worker Lubna, also from Mardipur,[6] the same district where Deen's family hails from, acts as a mediator between the migrants and the Venetian authorities. In the midst of Deen's discoveries of a Bengali Venice, Cinta helps him make connections between *Bondooqi Sagar*'s tale to factual events that took place in Europe and Asia during the same time. When Deen draws the symbols found on the wall of the shrine, Cinta exclaims the plausibility of the tale as a realistic one. Deen is stunned and to add to the upheaval in his mind, Piya contacts him, informing him of Tipu's runaway scheme with Rafi. Deen confronts Rafi, who tells him of his arduous journey as an 'illegal' migrant, first travelling with relative ease from the Sundarbans to Dhaka, then to Libya, Turkey and finally Italy.

In a turn of events, a migrant ship arrives at Venetian shores, only to be stopped by the authorities from entering Venice. Tipu is one of the many passengers aboard. A storm creates havoc across Venice and international media is called in to report on the atrocious behaviour of the Venetian government. Reporters make Rafi and Tipu's story viral across the globe and eventually the refugees are saved due to international pressure from organisations.

These series of episodes unfold several themes of the novel. Firstly, the labeling of migrants as 'refugees' or vice versa as 'illegal' migrants unmasks the double standards of Western society appropriating these terms as negative or seeming positive, or even benign ones. In Venice, Ghosh paints a stark picture of the lives of the working class, who are almost wholly from Asia, catering to the demands of a white, and elitist Venice, which survives on the basis of their labour. Tipu's and Rafi's movement first from West Bengal to the East and finally to the West signifies current travel routes often taken by migrants in search of safer terrains and livelihood. It is ironical to note that the once colonised, now are moving along the same sea routes, which were once exploited by the colonisers. Their search of a new home, is made possible by their use of technology such as smartphones. Whilst in the Sundarbans, Deen hears of the *dalals* working on both sides of Bengal from Tipu, who finds travel between the Indian side and the Bangladeshi side easy. He tells Deen, 'All you have to do is cross the river….' He calls the trade, 'the people moving industry' (Ghosh 2019: 60).

The multiple layers of their travel find root in their interaction with the Global South, where other migrants come from neighbouring regions, creating an economy of dispossession and displacement. It is interesting to note that though on the one hand, Rafi and Tipu seem to be exerting their agency through accessibility to technology, possessing the latest phone models and using weather alerts to prepare for ill-fated cyclones. On the other, in the Global South affected severely by climate change, its citizens become the first respondents to natural and manmade disasters. In spite of shedding light on the lives of the Sunderbans, one must point out that the primary narrator of the novels remains to be Deen, who sheds his flawed 'reason' and aversion to things, which appear backward to him. Whereas Cinta, continually is able to find the bridge between reason and belief, alternate knowledge systems and superstitions. She contrasts Deen's limited ability and visibility to make connections, literally and figuratively across oceans and continents.

Similar concerns are addressed in Fatima Bhutto's novel, *The Runaways* (2018). The text traces the lives of three distinct characters, Monty, a Pakistani born into an elite family; Sunny, a British Asian; and Anita Rose, who belongs to a religious minority in Pakistan. The story unfolds with their individual lives, leading to their tumultuous intersection at the heart of ISIS, in Iraq. The beginning of the novel traces their journey into their own sentiments

with alienation, Islam, and later fundamentalism. Similar to Ghosh, Bhutto too uses factual cues to weave her narrative. Sunny struggles to identify as either fully British, facing racism in his only home, Portsmouth, or fully Asian as an only child of a widower, who migrated from India. He meets his cousin who has returned from a stint with ISIS in Iraq, who teaches him the ways of fundamentalism, emphasising on the evils of the West, and the need of resistance in terms of violence. 'We're the periphery, we'll never be the centre. We're not like them. They don't understand our people, our cultures,' Oz states, gesturing to Londoners (Bhutto 2018: 137). Sunny's desperate need for self-identification and home leads him to follow in his cousin's footsteps, as he travels to Iraq from Turkey with a British passport.

On the other hand, Monty lives in Karachi's most affluent neighbourhood, Clifton, chauffeured by another Pakistani minority, as his driver is Pashtun, whilst his father complains of Uber drivers being over religious in London. His aristocratic mother decides to become a devout follower of an Islamic leader and suddenly stops wearing jewelry. She instructs her servants to now wear the *hijab*. In the midst of his formulaic life, Monty falls in love with a new, mysterious student at his school, Layla. Through her, Monty finds a new way of seeing things around him, including looking at his mother in a new light. When Layla suddenly stops coming to school, Monty refuses to give up looking on her. A well-meaning friend to him reveals Layla's sex tape, citing it to be 'unclassy'. He finds videos emerging on the Internet of Layla giving sermons to join ISIS and fight for 'freedom'. Monty leaves his glass house life behind, and ventures onto an expedition given to him by the leader of ISIS together with Sunny.

Anita Rose leads a contrasting life in the same city to her peer Monty. Her 'conversion' into Layla comes as a surprise to the reader. From being the school going daughters of a domestic help, residing in real life Karachi's largest slum, *Machar* colony, to now an outspoken student at Karachi's affluent American School, her evolution is striking. Her class and religious alienation begin at a young age in school where the other students constantly bully her. Her brother Ezra finds it difficult getting any sort of work, where his name gives away his religious background. Their neighbour, Osama, who introduces her to poets such as Habib Jalib, and the theory of Marxism, helps out their family. When she calls him comrade Sahib, Osama replies, 'don't you see the irony in that?' (Bhutto 2018: 51).

As the plot runs in parallel to the lives of the other characters, a new character is introduced as the student at Monty's school, Layla. She stands out in the American School of Karachi, she dons a headscarf on the way to school, smokes on the premises and influences Monty's life with a new, alternative perspective. Another issue raised through the altering and opposite figures of Layla and Monty is that of language. When Layla asks Monty if he does not feel the depth of *urdu* while browsing for books in their American,

and therefore English-centred school, Monty is unable to respond as Bhutto points out, Monty had been only thinking in English his entire life. Layla asks Monty, 'Don't you feel strange speaking a language everyday that's not your own? But Monty had never spoken anything besides English?' (Bhutto 2018: 106). In sharp contrast, Layla has heard English spoken at the rich households her mother works at and has learnt it through Osama, who decides to teach her.

The question of English as a problematic medium is apparent throughout the novel, one must note that the novel too is in English. Whether it is writing back to the Empire,[7] or a continuation of its inherited hierarchical legacy remains an unanswered one. Sunny, who has grown up in England, grows resentful of the insidious racism he faces at school, later on as a woman spits on him in the bus, and as he sees his father fail at fitting in this foreign land. He finds no solace at clubs, gyms or mosques. When his cousin Oz arrives from Iraq, he is introduced to a world of hate-filled slogans and newfound enemies such as women and the *Shia* community. He begins to feel a purpose and sense of belonging with the *Ummah* and decides to go to Iraq, where the ISIS tests him physically and ideologically. His journey with Monty captures the rupture of the movement, which seeks to unite them in a 'holy' war. Iraq ironically becomes a 'homeland' for Sunny, Monty and Layla.

Before her departure from Karachi, Osama is saddened to hear Anita Rose calling herself Layla. Her brother, in order to raise his job prospects, names himself Feroze. He takes up numerous jobs, making enough to move his sister and mother into a small flat. It is from here that Anita Rose, now metamorphosed into Layla, goes to the American School in Karachi. It is evident that the money for the exorbitant fees does not come from Feroze's new source of income. He takes Layla on her first ever trip outside Karachi, to Dubai, in order to 'provide' for his clients through his sister. Layla returns home, not speaking for days after the episode of sexual assault.

It is the betrayal by her own brother that pushes her to seek freedom, ironically through inclusion as a fundamentalist gaining momentum on the internet through her fiery messages, calling people to join the war against the terror and hegemony of the West. The reader sees strains of this even whilst she is at school. She argues with her teachers, articulating a postcolonial response to the mode of education provided, which is not available at the school. She critiques her teachers and their limited perspective, a discourse which other students in her class are not able to identify, or imagine. She confronts the content of her lessons and asks, 'What about Partition? Millions killed in the course of weeks. What about the Dirty Wars in Latin America, tens of thousands disappeared and murdered in football stadiums? #they were all browns owedont care' (Bhutto 2018: 88). This call to a linking of events in the Global South become symbolic for other issues that arise in the novel later, as Layla becomes a spokesperson for ISIS.

Her leap into another faith stems from her constant alienation and feeling of unbelonging. It is tragic to see that in the end the same organisation, which places her on a pedestal almost killing her once her past is discovered. Even in a new, religious 'homeland', it is women whose pasts shadow their future, whereas for men, the same judgments are never declared. Layla even in her pursuit of an ideal homeland, based on religious ones, is unable to escape the binaries of gender discrimination. It is Monty who follows her trail in to Iraq, closely following her videos that save her from being executed. The novel's climax remains unclear whether she and Monty will make it out alive from the heartland of warfare.

Sunny's execution of other human beings acts as a reference to real beheadings recorded by the ISIS, infamously named as 'Jihadi John'[8] by the media, which were published online. His English accent, which Monty has never found to be so pronounced (Bhutto 2018: 412) accentuates during the execution of an innocent man. Bhutto's narrative runs inversely parallel to Ghosh's in terms of the directions the characters tracing their own placement in the Middle East. Sunny moves from West to East, whereas, Layla and Monty move East to West. Bhutto borrows from news headlines, in order to maintain a believable reflection of the events that take place. This, which acts as an insight into the minds of the three, characters and their personal roads to fundamentalism, strained with the need to find a home in the midst of hopelessness.

To conclude, both the texts by Ghosh and Bhutto arise from specific locations in the Global South, which problematise questions of identity, alienation, accessibility and the role of technology in today's world. Though their characters follow different directions in terms of geography, their underlying desire for a 'home' and acceptance follow a similar trajectory. It is an affective state based on a lack of identification in the nations they are born in, and their growing dissatisfaction with their lives. This is an echo from the region, which mirrors other issues emerging from the Global South. One may argue that these texts shed light on communities who lie at the margins in their respective societies and do not easily 'fit' in the rubric of nationalistic discourse. Layla and Sunny are both minorities in the land of their birth, and seek validation through religion. Due to their difference with the majority population, they are bullied at school, and mocked at throughout their lives. Religious extremism grants them a certain sense of 'belonging' and freedom, previously denied to them either on the basis of their skin colour, and gender, as well as religion. Tipu's and Rafi's journey symbolises the syncretic nature of the people and landscape of the Sunderbans, that refutes political borders, and acts as a metaphor for the porous amphibian like experiences they go through. Their choices and use of resources to travel, and transcend boundaries of class, caste and religion find room for belonging

in the heart of Venice, which through a history of transnational trade, appears as a 'homeland'.

More analysis may be done on the role of language in these texts. Does the medium of English increase inaccessibility to such narratives wherein real people from such marginalised communities may not possess the privilege to read them? Ghosh's and Bhutto's own privileged positions posit them in a complicated situation, as they appear to 'speak for the subaltern', without granting much room for further discussion on the role of the author and narrator. Overall, these novels provide insight into reimagining(s) of 'homelands' and the experience of alienation which prompt many to escape to other 'homelands' in search of 'belonging'.

Notes

1 Alfred Sauvy first introduced the term 'Third World', constituting of countries which remained unaligned with the Communist Soviet bloc or the Capitalist NATO bloc during the Cold War.

2 One example is that of the rise of K-Pop and K-Drama, with South Korea's boy band BTS bringing in $4.65 billion dollars to its GDP. Korea also is a popular destination for plastic surgery, especially amongst young people.

3 Reading literature in English, to borrow Meenakshi Mukherjee's terminology, is the 'anxiety of Indianness'. As English continues to be a means of social upward mobility, whose access remains with the elite of the subcontinent, studying literature in the same language continues to occupy an ironic space.

4 Bhutto's first novel, moves away from her memoir, and recreates the lives of the minority community living in Waziristan. They are met with violence through the hands of the 'nationalistic' Pakistani State and Army through systematic schemes of occupation.

5 Joya Chatterji explored the rise of the Hindu majoritarian *bhadralok* in Bengal during the colonial period in her book, *Bengal Divided*: *Hindu Communalism and Partition*, linking it to caste and communal politics.

6 During the partition of British India, several districts from Bengal became part of erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Ghosh invokes prepartition identities on the basis on shared language and culture in the region of the Bengal delta.

7 As coined by Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991).

8 This was a name given by media to Mohammed Emwazi, a British citizen, believed to be behind executions of hostages taken by ISIL from 2014 to 2015, whose face was not visible in the videos released by the terrorist organisation. His distinct British accent was prominent in all of them.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ghalib: A Wilderness at My Doorstep

Author: Mehr Afshan Farooqui
Publisher: Penguin Random House India
Year of Publication: 2021
Pages: 260 (Excluding appendices)
Reviewer: Amit Julka

> *Qatre mein dajla dikhai na de, aur juzv mein kul*
> *khel larkon ka hua, deeda-e beena na hua*
> To not see the entire river in a drop, and whole in the part,
> Is a mere game of young boys, not observation
>
> -Mirza Ghalib

Mehr Afshan Farooqi's *Ghalib: A Wilderness at my Doorstep* offers an incisive look on the life of Mirza Ghalib, perhaps the most famous poet of the Urdu language. Writing something new about a poet whose life has been covered in television serials, films, and numerous books is not an easy task, but the book manages to unsettle the hegemonic narrative that has been passed down to us. The book also manages to go beyond that — it does not merely tell the story of a poet, but that of a tumultuous time in the history of early-modern India as well. Thus, like the verse by the poet (see above), a good way to understand the author's effort is to see it as an exercise in gazing deep into the drop in order to see the river.

As the book's subhead 'A critical biography' indicates, the author has tried to bring to light the discrepancies in the standard narrative of Ghalib's life. According to it, Ghalib is said to be born in Agra in 1797, and right from his childhood takes a fancy to Persian and Urdu poetry, emulating the style of the Persian poet Bedil. After publishing some poetry in Urdu during his initial years, he switches to Persian for a substantial chunk of his life, before returning

to composing mainly in Urdu. His literary career is also characterised by a process of self-scrutiny, which leads to him culling or editing many verses from his earlier *divans*. The latter half of the book also focuses on his attempts to establish himself as an authority in Persian, and his enthusiastic adoption of print, a relatively new medium at the time (chapter 6–8).

Farooqi's book brings this popular narrative under a critical lens, starting right from his birthdate (chapter 1) to the reasons for his removal of his earlier verses (*mustaradd kalam*). She also examines at length the reasons behind Ghalib's shift to writing predominantly in Persian (chapter 4 & 8), and also the complex nature of identity and linguistic politics that were at play during the era. Throughout the length of the book, what struck me was the clarity and the comprehensive nature of her technique — she adroitly combines discourse analysis with a very Foucauldian process of literary archaeology. Hence, even for those not particularly interested in the poet's life, the book serves as an exemplar of methodology. At the same time, what is remarkable is that the method remains an undercurrent, never overwhelming the rich narrative, as a result of which, the book manages to capture the interest of a non-specialist audience.

The book lies at the intersection of several discourses — academic/mainstream work on Ghalib, English and Urdu commentaries on his work, and lastly it is a work that simultaneously lends itself to literary, historical, and political interpretations. The author has engaged extensively with the work of Hali (Urdu), Kalidas Gupta Raza (Urdu), Malik Ram (Urdu), Ralph Russell (English), Frances Pritchett (English), Shamsur Rehman Farooqi (English/Urdu), among many others. However, I would also argue that due to its accessibility, the book can also be seen in conversation with a more popular genre of writing on Ghalib with which the author does not engage directly. I am specifically referring to popular texts through which non-Urdu speakers have accessed Ghalib, which includes both films and television serials on Ghalib, and good introductory books by authors such as K.C. Kanda, T.P. Issar, and Sarfaraz Niazi (there are also some unmentioned nefarious examples in this category, of authors who are themselves non-conversant in Urdu or Persian and appropriate the work of lesser-known scholars). While these works have helped popularise Ghalib in places such as India, where literacy in the Perso-Arabic script is declining, they usually focus on the poet's work in Urdu, and reproduce rather than challenge/clarify the dominant narrative about his life. In this regard, the author's choice of an informal roman transliteration is also helpful in ensuring that the book is relevant to a broader audience.

A key aspect of Ghalib's life which is discussed at length in the book is the tension between Ghalib's work in Persian and his Urdu oeuvre, and his prioritisation of the latter over the former. Furthermore, Ghalib's self-identification as a poet and master of Persian is also characterised by his

contempt for Persian poets from India (which is ironic given that Ghalib was born in Agra). Farooqi argues that this conscious effort to distinguish himself from Indian Persianists was reflective of the decline in Indians' confidence to claim authority over the language in the later Mughal/early modern period. In this context, she also mentions Ghalib's *Dastanbu*, his account of the 1857 revolt, composed in *Dasatir*, a supposed pure form of Persian devoid of all Arabic loanwords.

The book correctly identifies this predilection for *Dasatir* as an attempt to establish himself both as an authority on Persian in India and to construct an Iranian intellectual lineage (p. 219). However, the considerable evidence cited in the book may allude to other dynamics at play. The privileging of *Dasatiri*, the supposed older form of Persian, over the standard register of his time perhaps might be an attempt at overcompensating for his Indian birth by claiming to be more Iranian than Iranians. Furthermore, Ghalib's dubious mention (and possible invention) of his Persian mentor Abdus Samad, who was according to him a Zoroastrian convert to Islam is also pertinent to this debate. If Ghalib did indeed invent Samad to bolster his claim of mastering Persian, then it certainly is interesting that he gave Samad non-Islamic origins. There might even be a link, if only a slightly tenuous one, between his privileging of pre-Islamic Persian and the invention of a formerly Zoroastrian Abdus Samad. Ghalib's attachment with Shia Islam and his simultaneous fascination with pre-Islamic Persia is further supported by the extract of Ghalib's letter to Imam Bakhsh Nasikh cited in the book (p. 206). At the same time, the book reminds that Ghalib's fascination with other beliefs wasn't merely a way to claim his links with the larger Persian sphere, but also a testament to this cosmopolitan worldview, as attested by his *masnavi* on Benaras (*chiragh-e dair*).

This tenuous link between language, religion, and belonging may have been accentuated after the revolt of 1857, in the aftermath of which, Muslims of Delhi and elsewhere were singled out and massacred by the British. Although the book does not quite argue in this vein, Ghalib's decision to eschew the use of Arabic words in Dastanbu may have also been subconsciously an attempt to under-emphasise his own identity as an observant Muslim in front of a vengeful regime.

Perhaps a happier account of this onset of modernity can be found in the chapters on the rise of print as a medium, and Ghalib's unusual prescience in understanding the role it was to play in the dissemination and reception of literature (chapters 6–7). The book captures in fascinating details Ghalib's interaction with Naval Kishore as well as other publishers of the time, and the time, his unusual attention to detail and proofreading of his manuscripts (chapter 7). Furthermore, all academics reading the book will understand and appreciate the wonderful detail in which Farooqi describes Ghalib's meticulous editing of his manuscripts. These insights add yet another colour to Ghalib's

complex relationship with Indo-Persian antiquity and modernity. Like the line from his famous Urdu verse, *kaaba mere peeche, kaleesa mere aage* (the Kaaba is behind me, and the church stands in the front), Ghalib was simultaneously engaged in a process of claiming a past and yet was keenly perceptive of the winds of change around him. Ghalib's enthusiastic adoption of modernity would soon find other takers within the Indo-Islamic universe, most notably Sir Syed, but also in a different *avatar* — the Deobandi school.

Finally, there are some aspects of Ghalib's life which the book does not engage with, and perhaps that leaves some room for future work on the subject. Most prominent among these is Ghalib's deep and complex relationship with Shia Islam, which is reflected in his poems in praise of figures like Ali and Imam Hussain. Furthermore, as a non-specialist, I would have liked if the author had given the readers a more elaborate tasting menu from Ghalib's expunged verses. However, given the limitations of a biography, these might be better suited for a separate book on Ghalib's *mustaradd kalam*.

Farooqi's book is a great and long overdue addition to the field of Ghalib studies and literary history. More than the answers it provides and the facets of the poet's life that it clarifies, the book's value also lies in possibly spurring a new set of questions for those who love Ghalib, and those who are trying to understand not only the man, but his *zaman-o makaan* (time and space).

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Joginder Paul: The Writerly Writer

Editor: Chandana Dutta
Publisher: Routledge
Year of publication: 2021
Pages: 288
Reviewer: Fatima Rizvi

Contextualising a 'Banyan Tree'; Reading Joginder Paul[1]

Joginder Paul began writing in early youth, publishing intermittently, while pursuing a career in education, till he took up writing as a fulltime vocation sometime in the seventies. Fusing, developing and perfecting genres and elaborating simultaneously upon his art and its raison d'être in his essays to achieve a kind of efflorescence, he began to be perceived as a very significant voice in Urdu fiction sometime in the 1960s. His works mirror his philosophies, his diverse experiences, deep psychological insights, his politics and principles,

through a variety of themes. In him, the political is in fact, inextricably, the personal. Paul's writings are deeply sensitive and sustained articulations that compel his readers to cogitate and make up their minds about situations at hand. He is a self-conscious writer who invites his readers to participate in the writing process experientially. It is with good reason that this comprehensive collection of stories, extracts and critical essays, reads Paul as a writerly writer, a fact Chandana Dutta, editor and contributor, elucidates critically in her Introduction.

Joginder Paul: The Writerly Writer is part of a larger project — the Writer in Context series, co-edited by Sukrita Paul Kumar and Chandana Dutta. The series aims at contextualising or rather, trans-contextualising Indian language writers against their times, their milieu and their experiences. The series aims to focus comprehensively on each writer (in context) and his/her craft and place him/her in perspective with a view to contributing towards better understanding. This is the second in a series of twelve analogous volumes, the first illustrating Krishna Sobti and her art. It is neatly divided into eight complementary sections comprising fiction, personal and critical essays, memoirs, critical studies, interviews, a detailed biographical chart and a bibliography, which engage a reader and seem to actually talk to one another. The volume presents many previously untranslated or translated but 'scattered' (xvi) Urdu works in translation along with some English language readings by Paul and several academics.

While Paul was adolescent and his literary consciousness still evolving, and when he began writing as a young man, the Progressive Writers' Movement was at its zenith; its ideals were normative for most writers investing in social change. By the time he took up writing as a vocation, the movement's ideals had begun to be replaced by the *nayi kahani* or the *naya afsana* (new story) with greater focus on human consciousness — particularly that caught in the throes of the great, contemporary flux. Paul contributed largely towards the evolution of this form and is in fact among its most celebrated writers. His stories combine the sociological–humanist concerns of the Progressives and also ratiocinate profoundly on the human predicament. 'Begore', translated as 'Without Graves' by Sukrita Paul Kumar (from *Be-irâdâ*; 1981), is a fine example of this osmotic blending, conceived with immense empathy and elucidating the desperation of a people surviving on the very fringes of human existence. Paul experienced the communal horror of the Partition along with trauma of migration from Sialkot to Ambala. Soon after, marriage mandated relocation to Nairobi. He returned to India sometime in the 1960s. Even in his early stories set in Nairobi, Paul comes across as a keenly observant, deeply sensitive, adaptable and accommodating soul that understood that human nature remains the same; human experiences are more or less similar though locations, circumstances and situations differ. 'Manda', translated as 'The Slump' by Chandana Dutta, unfolding in a posh club in Nairobi is a fine

example of this. Paul wrote about the Partition much after the dust had settled on the mayhem. 'Fakhtayein', translated as 'The Flight of the Doves' by Nirupama Dutt, reveals that uprooting physically from the place of belonging can leave deep psychological and emotional scars that never heal; that damages are irreversible. The extract from *Khwâbrau* translated as 'Sleepwalkers' by Sunil Trivedi and Sukrita Paul Kumar exemplifies that one can drive a Lucknowite out of his hometown, but cannot prevent him from carrying his Lucknow with him wherever he goes, and this idea is naturally extendable to all the uprooted who cannot help continuing to nurture a strong sense of belonging to their homeland. Joginder Paul is among the few Urdu writers who both perfected and popularised *afsânche* (micro stories or flash fiction), an epigrammatic form first employed by Sa'adat Hasan Manto to drive home the horrors of the Partition in 'Siyâh Hâshiye' ('Black Margins') in Urdu fiction. Ranging between two lines and two pages and covering a variety of themes, Paul's *afsânche* are deeply philosophical, richly layered microcosms embodying macrocosmic reality. 'Kargil', translated by Keerti Ramachandra for instance, poignantly recreates a war scene to emphasise futility at various levels. Anwar Pasha's essay '*Jogindar Paul ke Afsânche: Basîratoñ ke Charâ!h*', translated by Mohammad Asim Siddiqui as 'Lamps of Insights: Joginder Paul's Afsanche', throws light on Paul's dexterous creativity as regards this form.

The Writerly Writer includes several essays by Paul (in English and in translation) wherein he expounds his literary orientations and stylistics; his politics; the purposiveness of his art and his commitment to social cause. They reveal that he identified with each of his characters and experimented with form, content and style and believed in the 'primacy of creativity' (164). Despite growing up in a Punjabi household speaking Punjabi at home, Paul chose to write in Urdu, the language whose culture and tradition he absorbed as a student. He explains that he believed in the dynamism, malleability, and adaptability of Urdu which could be refreshed in accordance with place, age, and culture. Inherent in his medium of expression is the inherent adaptability of the language, its hybridity, inclusivity, and the idea that Urdu belongs not to a single community but anyone who wishes to own it — ideas Paul explicates in his essay '*Nayâ Urdu Afsânâ: Zubân aur Bayân ke Masâil*', translated as 'New Urdu Fiction: Issues of Language and Expression' by Ambar Ahmad. Stories in *The Writerly Writer* reveal this hybridity which is in fact Paul's hallmark, for in the dulcet tones of his Urdu are the spirit of the age, the signs of the times, pragmatism and illustrations of the different cultures within which his stories are set.

Several translators recount how they strove to surmount some of Paul's engaging linguistic experiments which sometimes posed serious challenges. Dotted with purposive metaphor, Paul's Urdu is at times purist and times ordinary, conversational or straightforward; Punjabised or liberally smattered with Punjabi words, expression and sensibility. Sukrita Paul Kumar discusses her own and Hina Nandrajog's experiences with translating ideas of sight,

sightlessness, insight, looking without seeing, and perception in Paul's novel *Nadeed* (*Blind*); Sunil Trivedi narrates how familiarity with the composite Indo-Muslim cultural heritage significantly enabled his translations of *Khwabrau*. Snehal Shingavi, Vibha Chauhan, and Meenakshi Bharat explain their strategies and delineate how they dealt with Paul's ingenious usages and improvisations of the Urdu language; his inclusion of multiple registers, dialects and varieties. Keerti Ramachandra narrates her translational and editorial experiences with Paul's translations.

Paul's essays deliberating upon his friend and fellow writer Wazir Agha and the elder Premchand belong to the genre of the literary *khâkâ* (pen-portrait) popular among the Progressives. Qualifying as personal *khâkâ*s, are Krishna Paul and Usha Nagpal's intimate reflections on Paul. Coupled with his own biographical essay, they enable familiarity with him and his ways. Another such *khâkâ*, a touching memoir and an elaborate obituary delineating Paul as a humanist and an artist par excellence, is Zahir Anwar's '*Aisâ Kahâñ se Laûñ ki Tujh sa Kaheñ Jise*' (literally, 'How Shall I Get One Who Compares with You') translated as 'My Incomparable Baba: A Tribute to Joginder Paul' by Smita Mishra Chaturvedi. Anwar recalls a line from Ghalib to emphasise that Paul was matchless.

The Writerly Writer tables Urdu scholarship on Joginder Paul, most which has been translated for the first time. Essays and conversations with his contemporaries and fellow writers and critics Sharib Rudaulvi, Qamar Rais, Wazir Agha, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, and Ali Ahmad Fatmi provide invaluable insights into Paul's ideas on art and aesthetics while also providing a glimpse into the rich and varied Urdu literary scene. Satirist and partition immigrant Fikr Taunsvi (Ram Lal Bhatia) who like Paul, upheld the *Ganga-Jamunî tehzîb* or the syncretic Indo-Muslim cultural tradition, sheds light on some of Paul's sterling qualities which contribute fundamentally to his writings in '*Jogindar Paul par ik Taqrîr*' translated as 'A Speech on Joginder Paul: Some Insights' by Ambar Ahmad.

A comprehensive chronological chart by Abu Zahir Rabbani demarking significant milestones in Paul's life and his literary and professional career, and a bibliography complete this comprehensive collection. A number of contributors, Indian and international, have made *Joginder Paul: The Writerly Writer* possible. It is an invaluable text for an Urdu studies or literature in translation scholar and also a very engaging reader for a freshman.

Note

[1] The banyan tree metaphor is borrowed from Ali Ahmad Fatmi and Zahir Anwar's essays.

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New Postcolonial Dialectics: An Intercultural Comparison of Indian and Nigerian English Plays

Author: Sarbani Sen Vengadasalam
Publisher: Cambridge Scholars Publishing
Year of Publication: 2018
Reviewers: Mala Renganathan & Deboshree Bhattacharjee

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and Wole Soyinka (1934–) are giants of literary traditions apart from each other. However, there are threads that unite both. Both Nobel laureates belong to British colonised nations, and both rose to fame on two grounds — their rootedness in their culture and their leanings towards Western cultures, the influence of which allows them to start a dialogue with their roots, people, with an equal awareness of the crossroads of cultures that their works witness.

Sarbani Sen Vengadasalam's book *New Postcolonial Dialectics: An Intercultural Comparison of Indian and Nigerian English Plays* comes as a whiff of fresh air in its new approach to postcolonial reading of the cultural landscape of India and Nigeria through the interface of the plays of Rabindranath Tagore, Badal Sircar, and Wole Soyinka on the intercultural platform. While postcolonial readings towards critical understanding of texts are becoming clichéd critical exercises these days, Sen's book, engaged in a clean reading through the intercultural framework in six well thought-out chapters, creates crossroads of the postcolonial dialectic and its equally balanced intercultural scaffolding.

Conceptualising the above terms of postcolonialism and intercultural encounters in both Indian and Nigerian plays, the book accentuates the need for postcolonial dialectic housed in an intercultural analysis. The book discusses individual pre-independence plays of Tagore and Soyinka for analysis in the first two main chapters. Next follows the comparative reading of Soyinka's play with Badal Sircar's individual plays. Such intercultural readings of pre-independence and post-independence plays of both Nigerian and Indian playwrights create an interstice of interaction. The last chapter tops it all with its research findings that draw simple, logical but interesting conclusions from the study.

The book builds bridges between the Swadeshi and Negritude liberation movements as resistance movements against colonialisation, while reading the neocolonial encounters and their fluxes, and setting off one against the other in an intercultural and temporal framework of postcolonial approach. The glimpse into history, politics, and literature that Sarbani brings into her holistic reading merits attention. The intercultural readings of Tagore's *Red Oleanders* and Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* in separate chapters

highlight the author's precise and meticulous readings of both texts and intercultural texts.

A glimpse into what Ms. Sen attempts overall is reiterated here. Chapter One introduces the coloniser's use of culture as a site of rule by describing culture in a postcolonial scenario of the colonial histories of India and Nigeria under British rule. The study of Tagore and Sircar on the platform of interculturalism helps comprehension of the intercultural practices across eras. Tagore's advocacy of syncretic interculturalism with a holistic attitude gets reflected in the book in this manner: 'no civilisation was self-sufficient or could survive if isolated' (16). While Rabindranath Tagore's *Red Oleanders* (1925) focuses on the pre-partition era, Badal Sircar's *Procession (1983)* is examined to consider the post-partition role of drama. The efficiency of Sircar's intercultural, synthetic theatre in portraying modern Indian reality in this play, not critiqued adequately so far, is a failure that this book intends to address and recompense. On the African front, Sen's book examines Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959) and *The Road* (1965). Soyinka's intention was not to advocate either a return to the womb of the past or to the portals of the West, but to take his audiences to new stages of awareness. The above two works represent two eras, with each of these writers approaching English as an intercultural dialectic. The final section of the chapter views all the major theories of post-modern school to arrive at a suitable mechanism for the study of intercultural texts. Thus, the book offers interculturalism as the dialectic of interpretation that would appreciate rather than blur the differences between literary works.

The second chapter views Indian interculturalism in the pre-Partition era in relation to Tagore's *Red Oleanders*, initially dwelling on Tagore's socio-political-religious background that shaped his philosophy of life and interculturalism.

Tagore's choice of syncreticism practiced in his Santiniketan educational project, while also recognising the horrors of capitalism and materialism as the grave outcome of World War I — all these are reflected in his plays *Red Oleanders*, *Muktadhara* and *Malini* as the use of theatre for change.

With an attempt at an intercultural analysis of *Red Oleanders*, Sen presents a critique of dehumanisation and colonial cannibalism, further suggesting the productive potential of colonialism to bring cultural synergy.

Sarbani's attention to Nigerian interculturalism in Chapter III indicates her adept handling of the purview of the British rule and its crippling effect in Africa. In discussing Soyinka's interculturalism, Sarbani opines that Soyinka, like Tagore, never believed in complete negation of cultures and offered the idea of Neo-Negritude that helped Nigeria reclaim its roots.

Further, Vengadasalam attempts to study *The Lion and the Jewel* in relation to Soyinka's intercultural philosophy, by observing the cultural encounter in the play.

As Chapter Four moves towards the post-independence era, Vengadasalam makes a smooth transition in her arguments from pre-independence to post-independence theatres in India. Citing the theatre of Badal Sircar, she underlines the necessity of a new theatre for India to face new challenges awaiting the nation and its people. For the neocolonial problems such as corruption, unemployment, broken families, casteism, illiteracy and individualism led the youth to the Naxalite Movement.

In Sarbani Sen's opinion, Soyinka's handling of time and use the of songs and dances, reveals the Yoruban culture, while his play with words introduces a new way of embracing western culture without giving up one's roots. According to Vengadasalam, *The Road* portrays the failure of Nigerian dream as Nigeria fails to cope with the challenges of neocolonialism at every sphere of life like religion, education, politics and society. Thus, through an intercultural study, Vengadasalam propagates the realities of post-independence era as well as the theatrical innovations of Soyinka where native and alien cultures coexist.

Vengadasalam's last observations rest in a comparative perspective of the intercultural aspects of the four plays to show that the intercultural dialectic has not only brought out the interculturality of the writers but also the similarity and difference in their content and dramaturgy.

Such a critical enquiry into the colonial cultural encounter of India and Nigeria done in an analysis of intercultural play texts also attempts a justification for the intercultural dialectic as the tool to understand the postcolonial experience of India and Nigeria nevertheless engaged in a simultaneous, nuanced understanding of 'interculturalisation' as a rewarding resistance strategy.

The most interesting aspects of the book are the following: how the analysis of the Swadeshi interculturalism of the Tagorean era paves the way to the post-Independence Nigerian interculturalism; a comparative perspective of varying responses of countries under colonial to the cultural encounter; theatrical representations of such responses through theatres of Tagore, Sircar and Soyinka; the commendable choice of the right plays for such an analysis; the simultaneous presentation of interculturalism as a new and effective tool of postcolonial study that would help in understanding postcolonial literature beyond resistance theory; the books' advancement of a new dialectic and its justification of the role of drama and dramatists in social reformation; focus on drama opening up novel ways of approaching drama as a site of cultural assimilation and the role of dramatists in nation building, especially in the postcolonial scenario; an extra dimension to postcolonial and cultural studies as a tool to comprehend interculturalism and to access the role of theatre as an intellectual weapon.

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Sarbani Sen Vengadasalam's book is a useful addition to any serious scholarly collections on drama studies. It is also a very informative book for an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the subject of drama, interculturalism, postcolonialism, and neocolonialism.

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Populism and Its Limits: After Articulation

Editor: Prasanta Chakravarty
Publisher: Bloomsbury India
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Pages: 296
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Reviewer: Ritwick Bhattacharjee

In-Human Populism

With the turn of the third decade of the new millennium, as the globe reels under the weight of seemingly limitless populist politics and Populism in politics, the immanent apocalypse reveals itself sooner than conceived. After all, stories of violence for national cleansing flood the news waves on a daily basis. One is reminded of Stephen King's mammoth of a novel, *The Stand*, in which necessities of eugenics result in the creation of a super virus which, in its accidental leak, ends up destroying ninety-nine percent of the human population. Those who are left, yet, find camps in which they seem to existentially belong to. Each side is led by a supernatural entity fighting for the 'people' within against the 'anti-people' elite (in either a technological sense or the moral one) without. That this leads to another extinction event soon after the previous one does not surprise. There seems to be a natural tendency of such campaigns that King exploits: of automatic and rather obvious concentrations of the friend and the enemy that Carl Schmitt, too, injects into and as the political. But, even as vestiges of the populist structure *The Stand*, it is equally about so much more than this Populism of the community self and the dissected other: with not only human beings, with *human* teleology, making up the 'people' and their despised antipodes but the leaders of either of the camps themselves located as affected and affecting beings. This latter strand is perhaps more important than the ostensible invincibility of

methodological and methodical populism especially since it presents the limits at which Populism, both as an action in and enquiry of the political, finds legible constraints. For, the apparent limitlessness of the populist call to arms, in spatial and temporal coordinates, necessarily finds at least two chains of restriction: firstly, at the level of those who either need action or are the agents in action and, secondly, at the level of the action itself. What is needed, then, is perhaps an active breaking of the populist not simply within its conceptual manifestations of either this or that (as the populist right or left) but of the framework itself.

It is this void that Prasanta Chakravarty's recent book, *Populism and Its Limits: After Articulation*, seeks to fill and, in doing so, becomes somewhat of a seminal publication. The book is neither about the locations and functions of populist manifestations and articulations of power nor an exploration of the ways leaders and/or political parties deploy populist engines for simple gratifications of their own needs and ends. Such an interrogation, Chakravarty seems to believe, looks at merely one object of the populist form rather than the intricate processes of that form, within and as itself, that realises that singular object. Instead, thus, the book looks at the human, in their variegated existential aspects, as they negotiate their own lived realities–as either leaders or the led–and finds populism neither as an airy academic intellectualisation nor a war cry but a summation of certain kinds of human political exigencies. The twelve chapters of the book, thus, in Chakravarty's own words,

> hope to address what lies at the very inception of the populist compulsion-primal moments of anger that give rise to *arche* forms of rifts, the insatiable penchant for gratification and accessible pleasure, certain sub-lunar reciprocity between love and hatred, hypertrophic pride, morbid anxiety, stupefying panic and deep reveling in scapegoating, perennial hopes to morally cleanse the society of every evil, craving for a quick remedy and mitigation from social and personal animosities and, at the same time, turning collectively and gleefully violent in achieving our desired goals (31–32).

As such, *Populism and Its Limits* undertakes a fairly interesting project. It begins at the beginning, at the 'inception of the populist compulsion', and characterises that moment of germination as itself a coming together of various human affectations, congruent and incongruent alike: gratification, pleasure, love, hatred, anxiety, panic, hope, and desire (among others). For, *thinking* human interaction, as Chakravarty points out rather poignantly, is at the heart of these impulses: *thinking* as it makes the human find existential connection (or disconnection) with another human. The book, then, renders Populism as a specific illumination of a matrix of actions and events that the thinking human being both gives rise to and, simultaneously, participates in.

The first part of the book, 'First Principles', begins with Milind Wakankar's essay 'The Rift' that presents (in actual relation and temporality) the modern human, languishing in a cultural negativity, as existing in a break between the west and the east where any and all possibilities of reconciliation have already

happened in the (or an) antiquated past. Thus, the chapter argues, there is just a rift between God and the good and the repercussions thereof. The second chapter, 'The Passage of Hate' by Sanil V. looks at hate not as a negativity but, in a stark opposition to the love of logocentric and transcendental entities, a catalyst towards spiritual and existential salvation. Shaj Mohan's essay, 'The "Ismos" of the Many', brings in a closure to the first definitional section and presents an argument for a (re)consideration of not just Populism as a political event but the conceptualisation of people that seemingly construct it. The second section, 'Conjectures', opens with 'Beyond Reason: The Subject of Desire and Enjoyment in Populism' by Gautam Basu Thakur and Meghant Sudan to look at the possibility of pleasure, and the desire for that pleasure, which codifies movements towards the populist. The authors use a Freudian–Lacanian framework to inject jouissance into the subjects of Populism and figure the latter within their desires to be. The next essay 'Agonism and "Revolutionary-Becomings": Mouffe, Deleuze and "The Populist Moment"' by Raghu Menon Jayakumar seeks to work through Chantal Mouffe's formulation of a left heavy agonism to reconstruct the possibilities for the democratic political through deconstruction of the left–right opposition. Samir Gandesha's next chapter, titled 'On the Deconstructive Logic of Populism', addresses a rather large and looming elephant in the discourse of Populism: that of left populism and how, at its heart, it reignites the conflict between the people and the powerful by re-injecting antagonism between the 'real' hardworking people and the dominating oligarchy. Gandesha does so by reading Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism and then critically negotiating his engagement with Marx. The seventh chapter of the book, 'Populism Lite', is by Chakravarty himself where, through John Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government* and the ideas of the third Earl of Shaftesbury, he presents the immanent presences of populism within modern liberal operations as they enforce certain ominous political boundaries to contain any and all deviancy from their own versions of a dogmatic Truth. Chakravarty coins the term 'Populism Lite' to describe the indifference that the modern liberal thought harbors in its functions in order to maintain the liberal simplifications of social change and moral positions. Rajarshi Dasgupta's essay 'The Borrowed Geographies of Neoliberal Neighbourhoods: Populist Governance in India' opens the next section of the book titled 'Expositions'. In the chapter, Dasgupta interrogates the actual relationship between the leader and the led and the repercussions that such relationships have on the economic and lived realities of the people being shepherded by particular leaders. This examination effectively allows Dasgupta to see what the framework of populism in its distinctiveness from other modes of democratic proceduralities is. The next essay 'Individuation and the Authoritarian Public: Rajelakshmy's *A Path and Many Shadows*' by Urmila F. and Nikhil Govind focuses on Rajelakshmy's Malayalam novel *A Path and Many Shadows* to find possibilities of resisting

authoritarian populism in the evolution of gender roles. Yadukrishnan PT's subsequent chapter 'The Popular, Populist and the Political in Priyadarshan's Films' shifts the critical focus of the book towards cinema as it interrogates two Malayalam films — *Aryan* and *Adhwaytham* — to argue that Malayalam films of the late 1980s and early 1990s created a populist idea of the disenfranchisement of upper caste youths as Kerala shifted its political strategies and economic realities and focused on the Dalit community. This allows the chapter to effectively bring out the modalities of the creation of the populist as systems of governance see essential overhauls. Continuing the interrogation of the visual media, the next and final section of *Populism and Its Limits*, 'Branchings', opens with Parichay Patra's 'The Non-Populist Popular and the Cinematic Apocrypha' and ends with Debraj Dasgupta's 'The Future of Non-Populism' to see, in two different ways, the functions of the obverse of populism, in and as non-populism, and its creation through and presentation as works of art.

Such a project, as Prasanta Chakravarty *Populism and Its Limits: After Articulation* is, might not be enough to either cancel or delay the apocalypse (real or metaphorical is yet to be decided) that King writes in excruciating detail about. However, there is a hope that comes tied with Chakravarty's book: of not only the necessity but also a beginning of a sustained discussion of how populism, to use Chakravarty's concept once again, originates; comes to Being. This book, thus, is not just an exercise in an abstract formulation of a singular strand of political philosophy. It locates, alongside, humans: in their ups and downs, in Being and non-Being, in the negotiations with themselves and others, in perceiving and being perceived, in art and philosophy, in one state of political site and in then in another, in Time and Space, in good and evil, and in God and the Devil. It serves a need and fills a vacuum with the expectation that changes of existential conditions, if any, aren't rendered hollow.

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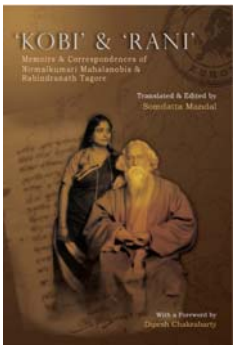

Kobi' & 'Rani': Memoirs and Correspondences of Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis & Rabindranath Tagore

Translator & Editor: Somdatta Mandal
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Reviewer: Shyamasri Maji

The present work is a collected volume of personal narratives of Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis and letters of Rabindranath Tagore, translated from Bengali into English by Somdatta Mandal. As evident in the title, the narratives throw light on the interpersonal communication and relationship between 'Rani' (Nirmalkumari) and 'Kobi' (Rabindranath Tagore). It certainly reconnoiters what Dipesh Chakraborty observes in his erudite Foreword to this book as 'the question of friendship with women that Tagore sustained throughout his life' (iv).

The scope of the work is wide as it includes three major sections — *With the Poet in Europe* (*Kobir Shonge Europey*), *With the Poet in the South* (*Kobir Shonge Dakshinattey*) and *On the Road and Beyond It* (*Pathe O Pather Prante*) as well as three articles in the Appendices. The first two major narratives and the articles in the Appendices are by Nirmalkumari, whereas *Pathe O Pather Prante* is by Tagore. Nirmalkumari's travel experiences in India and abroad with Tagore were written many years later. She relied on 'memory' primarily for retrieving the past. Some critics complain that her memoir is repetitive and trivial, but Mandal argues that '[m]emory can never be an uncomplicated straightforward retrieval of objective data; it is selective as well as subjective. It is also a reconstruction which involves a certain amount of fantasy added to fact' (xvii). Nirmalkumari used memory as the narrative tool in the travelogues and in the three articles — '*Om Pita Nohosi*' (Appendix A), '*Tamaso Ma Jyotirgomoyo*' (Appendix B), and 'The Article in Anandamela' (Appendix C). The first article reflects on the poet's perception and analysis of some *shlokas* from the *Upanishads*; the second one pays obeisance to the poet through 'a long reminiscence' immediately after his death; and the third one recalls his love for birds and animals.

In her Introduction to the book. Mandal refers to what Tagore told Nirmalkumari a month before his death — 'You are one of my last friends. I know even if others go away, you will not leave me' (vii). This comment reflects on the deep bonding between the two. Gradually, one realises that this bonding is a transcendental experience which enlightens the soul by

redefining the meaning of life and death. In Appendix B, particularly, Rani ruminates on the significance of the mantra *tamaso ma jyotirgomoyo* ('lead me from darkness to light') after the death of the poet: 'I have seen how he endured the death of his near and dear ones in such a quiet spirit and now also saw how patiently he bore the pain of his own death' (519). Her reminiscences in this article convey the message that such unfathomable quietness can be cultivated through empathy, love, introspection, and self-chastisement (499).

The relationship between Nirmalkumari and Tagore offers an overlapping trajectory for exploring the inter-generic alliance between 'travelogue' and 'memoir', and the narratives provide scope for reviewing this as inter-disciplinary dialogue between history and literature. The translator has thoughtfully devoted a particular section ('Relationships') in the 'Introduction' to convey the profundity of this relationship. Nirmalkumari aka Rani was the wife of Prasantachandra Mahalanobis, the renowned statistician who founded the Indian Statistical Institute in Calcutta. Tagore knew Prasantachandra since his teenage days and over the years had found in him 'a confidant, friend and companion with whom he could share a lot, ranging from his creative work to his personal matters' (Mandal viii). After their marriage, Rani received the same affection from the poet. He called her *bouma*, which is an address of affection for the daughter-in-law in a cultured Bengali family. The following extract from the 'Introduction' clearly explains Rani's place in Tagore's life:

> Since the beginning Prasanta and Rani accompanied Tagore on many of his trips. So it did not take long for Rani to become a part of the Tagore's household. She took care of the poet's needs when they were travelling and at his request would stay for long periods of time with him at Santiniketan. In fact, apart from the time she spent at Giridih…and from her intermittent stays at Kolkata, Rani somehow managed to come in close proximity to the poet, as did his daughter-in-law Pratima Devi and other ashramites. (Mandal ix)

Rani's attachment and proximity to Tagore contributed significantly to understand him as a man of the world and the home. One cannot miss the overtones of pride and joy she felt when she observed that the public halls, the galleries of the universities and other public places in different cities of Europe thronged with a welcoming crowd to receive the *Kobi*. On the one hand, she was an awe-stricken admirer of his cosmopolitan personality, and, on the other hand, she, like an anxious family member, was deeply concerned about his deteriorating health and did not hesitate to rebuke him for writing till the late hours of the night. Her urge to perform both the roles sincerely often put her in dilemma. In *With the Poet in the South*, she refers to such a situation when in the stillness of a night at Bangalore she saw the poet writing *Sesher Kobita* and reciting from it: 'I had come to scold him for waking up for the whole night and writing, but I stood there almost breathlessly in case my presence disturbed him' (382).

The six-month tour to Europe was undertaken in 1926. Although *Kobir Shonge Euuropey* (*With the Poet in Europe*) was published forty-three years later, in 1969, Rani's detailed description of the poet's visit to Mussolini's Italy is immensely appreciated for its historical value. It refutes the controversy centring on Tagore's support to Mussolini's Fascist propaganda and produces evidence against it by narrating how the poet's views were misrepresented to the print media by the Italian translator, Professor Formichi. The poet himself had the least idea that he had been trapped as he had mistaken Formichi's vigilance for admiration. Prasantachandra had guessed it and had collected evidence from the Italian newspapers which published the manipulated version of Tagore's views. However, it was not easy to convince the poet that the grandeur of public development in Italy was a façade until he met Croce, the renowned philosopher.

The lesser-known facts of Tagore's personality, such as his child-like innocence to trust people, his camaraderie with Charles Freer Andrews, his fascination for his own pillow and affectionate gripes against his dear ones, his gastronomical preferences and toilet anxieties, have been described with utmost 'feminine' warmth. Tagore reciprocated to this unconditional love by surrendering himself to Rani's care, hospitality and even admonishment. Yet, it was not solely the female persona of a homely caregiver that endeared her to him. He had found in her a close companion with whom he could share his personal anguish, daily experiences, and intricate feelings through letter writing, when she was not with him. The poet wrote around five hundred letters to Rani (Mandal xiv). In 1938, he specifically selected sixty of those letters and published it as *Pathe O Pather Prante* (*On the Road and Beyond It*), which is the third series of *Patradhara.* Tagore's emotional confession of his dependence on Rani during his tour in Europe finds an expression in the 'Introduction' to this volume. It is an acknowledgement of true friendship:

> By submitting all the unexpected problems to be resolved by her, I had shamelessly spent my days in peace while receiving a lot of care and nursing from her. At the end, when we completed our European tour and boarded a ship from a Greek port, they kept on staying abroad. As I moved towards my homeland, I continued to keep our companionship alive through letters. (390–391)

Rani's observant eyes for appreciating the local and the global made her a unique travel writer. An interesting aspect of her writing is that she includes the intriguing history of the much-delayed publication of *Kobir Shonge Europey*. Her Brahmo background and her marriage with Prasantachandra Mahalanobis certainly contributed to her modern outlook, but she herself was a sensitive individual, and this aspect of her personality is reflected not only in her ruminations on the poet, but also in the descriptions of places, cultural differences and people. In the photographs attached in the book, she is seen as a sari-clad lady rooted to her culture even during her sojourn in the foreign lands. In a fancy-dress party organised in an international cruise, she

represented herself as a Bengali bride. Her candid description of the European society and people represents clearly that her travel experiences as an Indian woman were quite different from those of the Indian men who by then had adapted the Westernised ways in professional, linguistic and sartorial orientations. Her experience in Naples counters our assumption that the Western society is liberal in cross-cultural interactions:

> As I kept on walking along with my two male companions, the crowd behind us gradually started to swell. In the end, people from behind started pulling the end of my saree. After seeing the vermillion dot on my forehead, some of them started asking what that was. Was that the mark of blood in the parting of my hair? Which country did I belong to? Did we come from Egypt? Egypt was the limit of their imagination. (*With the Poet in Europe* 39–40)

The above extract not only documents the occidental gaze that stereotypes the oriental as exotic but also addresses the issues of racial and cultural politics from the postcolonial perspective of a woman traveller.

This collection is a significant contribution to the fields of world literature and Tagore scholarship, both of which have flourished due to translation. It fulfils its mission of taking Tagore to those who cannot read the original texts in Bengali. Considering all factors discussed above, the translator of this eponymous volume deserves hearty praise and critical acclaim.

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