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The Palace of Illusions: A Rare Feminist Interpretation of Mahabharatha

Lynda Stanley

Palace of Illusions is a most acclaimed novel of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni which is a reinterpretation of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. She has taken the sprawling Indian epic poem and filtered its central action- the battle at Kurushetra between the Pandavas and the voice of its most enchanting female character, Panchaali, the woman who is wed to the five Pandava brothers. Speaking in first person, Panchaali takes us through her life story from birth to death, weighing at each step along the way her own importance to those around her including family, subjects, and rival factions” indeed, to all of Bharat. Then novel develops Panchaali’s role in key events as well as in relation to the people that matter most to her. Pride appears to be Panchaali’s major weakness, though she is hardly alone in this regard. For the most part, author Divakaruni allows Panchaali ironic distance regarding her own feminine power, for example, Panchaali considers her unique marital arrangement:

Though Dhai Ma tried to console me by saying that finally I had the freedom men had had for centuries, my situation was very different from that of a man with several wives. Unlike him, I had no choice as to whom I slept with, and when. Like a communal drinking cup, I would be passed from hand to hand whether I wanted it or not. (PI, 93)

Her novel, *The Palace of Illusions* takes the readers to the time of great Indian epic *Mahabharata* – a time that is half-history, half-myth and completely magical. It is not just the retelling of a mythological story, but narrating an existing one from female perspectives. She herself, in the author’s note says that:

I was left unsatisfied by the portrayal of the women ... they remain shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of male heroes, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons. If I ever wrote a book ... I would place the women in the forefront of the action. I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men's exploits. (Banerjee, xiv-xv)

Ancient Indian scriptures are truly epic and esoteric. Rajeshwari Rajan observes, "Women in Indian fiction through ages have been represented as embodiment of purity and spiritual power and respected as godly beings on one hand and on the other, viewed as essentially weak creatures constantly requiring the protection of man as their love and master" (Rajan, 98).

The great Indian epic *Mahabharata* delves deeper into this ambiguity in the position of women. It represents and relates power of women to their sexuality. Women's sexuality in the epic undoubtedly becomes a potentially destructive force, but also a highly useful one if it is connected with the patriarchy. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has convincingly retold Draupadi's tale from feminist perspectives.

The life of Draupadi, queen of Hastinapur, wife of Pandavas, reflects the modern times. From the great seer Vyasa's version to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's, readers can notice remarkable differences. It is the fire and energy in Draupadi, the spirit to fight injustice and her multifacetedness that makes her the most mysterious and majestic woman for all ages. Draupadi has always been considered as the impetus and the reason for the holocaust in the Mahabharata, a great war which proved to be *yuganata*, and hence she is termed as *Kritya* (the reason). Divakaruni in *The Palace of Illusions* has taken up the task of reincarnating Draupadi as a woman- mere woman free from her other identities of princess of Panchal, or the queen of Pandavas. Through her tales, dreams, fantasies, fears and retrospections, the novel expounds Draupadi's emotions from past to present to past through mesmerizing series of flashbacks.

The novel begins with Draupadi's almost obsessive interest in her life story:

Through the long, lonely years of childhood, when my father's palace seemed to tighten its grip around me until I couldn't breathe, I would go to my nurse and ask for a story. And though she knew many wondrous and edifying tales, the one I made her tell over and over was the story of my birth. I think I liked it so much because it made me feel special, and in those days there was little else in my life that did. (PI 1)

But, Draupadi makes it clear that King Drupad, as a father, acted according to the dictates of Manu by 'protecting' and 'taking care' of Draupadi. This protective care Draupadi considers to be suffocating ("I couldn't breathe"). For Draupadi the only meaningful activity of her life was to listen to the story of her birth. Dhai Ma, a typical grandmother figure, who is a source of both comfort and wisdom, is solicited to repeat the story of Draupadi's birth. Even though Draupadi was destined for greatness King Drupad does not envision Draupadi's importance in the events to come. Presumably, her name Draupadi- 'daughter of Drupad' only gives her an identity tied to her father, clearly blocking all her prospects of bringing change in the course of history.

Despite the constraints of patriarchy she aspires to be an agent of action because she wishes to redefine the role of woman in the context of her life. Her inquisitive and restless spirit never allowed her to let her name and her life to resound merely as a victim of circumstances in the annals of history. She says "And who decided that a woman's highest purpose was to support men ... A man, I would wager! Myself, I plan on doing other things with my life." (PI, 26) This assertion brings to light Draupadi's intention to script her own destiny and not be imprisoned in various belittling constructions of herself. Being the agent of action, she not only decides the course of action but also forces others to face the consequences of her actions.

Draupadi, like every women who strived for freedom, wished to break away from the monotony of her life. She felt stifled leading a cloistered existence in the "mausoleum of a palace". Her greatest frustration is her

confinement to her father's large and gloomy palace. Ironically, her hatred against the restrictions of patriarchy is manifested in her uneasiness and restlessness against her father's house. She tells, "I turned the resentment I couldn't express toward my father onto his palace." (PI 6) Unlike other women in her father's palace she was least interested in decking herself up with jewels and other adornments. Instead she looked forward to learn texts and preaching. Divakaruni explicitly presents the educational system of the time which endangers different norms for the males and females, "... .. a girl being taught what a boy was suppose to learn?" (PI 23) The author presents the patriarchal resistance to female education through Dhri's tutor. Draupadi's inquisitiveness and hunger to learn more and more kept her moving on path of education. But it irritated Dhri's tutor, and to pacify him Dhri used to say, "Most learned one, please forgive her. As you know, being a girl, she is cursed with short memory. Additionally, she is of an impulsive nature, a failing in many females." (PI, 24) In a despising mood the tutor instructs her with a code of conduct set for women by saying, "A Kshatriya woman's highest purpose in life is to support the warriors in life: her father, brother, husband and sons ... Instead of praying for their safe return, she must pray that they die with glory on the battlefield." (PI, 26) This proves that the women of the age were imprisoned in various belittling constructions of one self. However, Divakaruni's Draupadi wove an illusionary world around her, which made her believe that in future things will take shape in the way desired.

Divakaruni subjectively incarnates Draupadi's education as well as her transformation from ambitious princess to revenge-seeking queen. Regarding the multidimensional presentation of femininity, Divakaruni's narrative appears in many ways faithfully modelled on the original, but reverses the perspective by granting the reader insight into the mind of Draupadi.

Draupadi's zeal and enthusiasm to change the course of history leads her to Ved Vyasa's hermitage to learn the secrets of her future. He foretells several disturbing things, which would happen in her life. He tells that she would marry five of the greatest heroes of that period at the same time and

cause a terrible war affecting the whole of India. He also bestows her with the name Panchaali. On returning to the palace, she insists that everyone address her Princess Panchaali.

The name, Draupadi would link her to the father whose control and authority represented the claims of patriarchy while the name, Panchaali would bestow her with a unique identity connecting her to the land in which she was born. Hence this new name transforms her way of thinking, and a new kind of independence comes to her which she could not have experienced with her previous name.

Just before Draupadi's "swayamvar", a sorceress arrives at King Drupad's palace to teach things which would be useful to her in future life. She points out that Draupadi had received the education, though befitting a queen, would not help her to survive in the outside world even for a single day. Her highly sheltered and cocooned existence would make her a misfit for the challenges of life. Describing her education under the sorceress, Draupadi says, "The sorceress taught me other unqueenly skills ... She taught me to close myself off from the sorrows of others so that I might survive." (PI 61-62)

Before departing, the sorceress gives Draupadi two gifts. She narrates the story of Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, and how she had stood for them and their rights after the death of their father Pandu. She also gives her a map containing all the kingdoms of ancient India. Though it is not clear why these gifts had been given to her, it is clear that they have some connection with her future life. When Draupadi shares with the sorceress her apprehensions regarding Veda Vyasa's prophecy, she says:

It's always been that way. When did the innocent not suffer? In any case you're wrong in thinking of woman as an innocent species ... Women contribute to the world's problems in a hundred insidious ways ... I've taught you some better alternatives-if only you can keep them in mind and not be swept away by passion! (PI 66)

The notion of women being weak and powerless is contested through these statements which show the hidden and latent potential of creation and destruction possessed by a woman.

Draupadi is exhilarated by the thought that she would be able to choose her own life partner when Dhristadyumna cautions her by telling that there would be a test to determine who the most eligible husband for her was. But it was Drupad's intention that Arjun should win the test because if he becomes his son-in-law he would never go against him and support Drona. Meanwhile, news reaches the Panchaala capital Kampilya that all the Pandavaas had died when their wax palace caught fire. Draupadi's entire future hangs on a delicate balance. Even her marriage becomes an endeavor in state politics. The exploration of the female is a practice which is prevalent in many patriarchal communities. Draupadi's *swayamvar* is just a manifestation of it.

Divakaruni also brings in a different bent to the repeated storylines related to Draupadi, by presenting an enmeshed love relationship between Draupadi and Karna. The author goes beyond the ordinary, masculine version of the epic and portrays Draupadi's inclination towards Karna.

Divakaruni's imaginative relationship between Draupadi and Karna represents Draupadi's quest for eternal love. From her birth her thirst for love was unquenched and in Karna's figure, she sought fulfilment of her inner desire, to her, he was an epitome of physical as well as mental strength. After knowing the details of Karna's life from her brother she felt herself more attached to him. "Each painful detail of Karna's story became a hook in my flesh, binding me to him, making me wish a happier life for him." (PI, 87) But at the time of her *swayamvar* in order to save her brother's life, Draupadi forsook her amorous feelings towards Karna and rejects him as his parenthood was in question and he developed an animosity towards her. But even after her marriage with the Pandavas she was not able to forget Karna and often compared her husbands with him. Divakaruni has portrayed this relationship to depict that the choices given to women were mere illusion and they are actually exploited for state purposes. Draupadi's family wanted her to marry a man

who could help them achieve vengeance against their enemies instead of letting her marry the one she loves and desires. Draupadi's illusions pertaining to her husband and her nuptial life are soon broken due to Kunti's ostensible decision and she is forced to marry the five Pandavas. This instance is an example for objectification of women. Here Draupadi was treated as a mere object when she was ordered to be shared among five men. Though she desperately wished to leave her father's mausoleum" her marriage made her realize her inequality with regard to freedom, as well as reputation. Her "unconventional polydrous marriage" (Hoydis 10) bore the risk of presenting her as an insatiable whore. Moreover, according to special marital arrangements as directed by sage Vyasa, she was split between her husbands, spending a year with each, her virginity restored each time when entering a new husband's bed. She becomes aware that in contrast to her husband's, she "had no choice as to whom I slept with, and when. Like a communal cup, I would be passed from hand to hand whether I wanted it or not." (PI 120) Through this incident Divakaruni highlights gender ideology and patriarchal hegemony prevalent during those times. Similarly, she tells that the later marriages of her five husbands with other women were also political arrangements of some sort or the other. This is an instance of the commodification of women that existed in the societal setup leading to their marginalization by the hegemonic patriarchal power.

Divakaruni also portrays Draupadi's relationship with Kunti as typically that of the daughter-in-law – mother-in-law scenario. Like every women Draupadi was left choiceless and to obey her mother-in-law's haste decision. The former was even denied the natural pleasure of wedding night. She had to lie on the floor with a "rat-nibbled" mat near the feet of her husbands maintaining certain distance. Besides, Kunti even tests her cooking abilities and Draupadi passes in this test and is praised and applauded for her culinary skills by the brothers. Above all Kunti even offered Panchaali to Karna, her eldest son, in order to rescue her sons from him. Panchaali says, "To entice him further, she'd offered me up to him as a prize! Was there no end to her manipulations?"(PI 280) All these cause Draupadi to resent her mother-in-law. But this tug of war between the two smoothed when Draupadi became aware

that Kunti had to watch her sons fight against each other and kill each other. She thought “... for the first time I became her daughter-in-law- I did something for her that she hadn’t demanded ... I found that by some inexplicable osmosis Kunti’s secret had become my secret. I, too, would guard it now.” (PI, 281)

In many ways the novel is a Bildungsroman that chronicles Draupadi’s process of gaining knowledge about herself and the world. The rebellious, yet also somewhat naïve girl eventually becomes a governess and wife, whose advice is frequently sought by her husbands. After a decade of married life and being mistress at the eponymous palace of illusions, Draupadi appears noticeably emancipated. This is not just due to the power to rule over a place and family of her own but because, as Vyasa tells her: “You no longer care what people think of you, and that has given you a great freedom.” (PI, 180) It is an at least partial liberation from outside judgement.

After Yudhisthir’s fatal loss in the game of dice, Draupadi is informed that she has been gambled away “no less than a cow or a slave.” (PI, 190) She is forcefully dragged into the court, and she describes her situation as “the worst shame a woman could imagine was about to befall me- I who had thought myself above all harm, the proud and cherished wife of the greatest kings.” (PI, 193) The most private space of womanhood was encroached and the silence of the royal; members present in the court as well as the paralyzed reactions of her husbands ignited her fury. When her nakedness is exposed, it is Krishna who appears as an answer to her prayer, saving her from shame by miraculously extending her sari, the endless folds preventing the final satisfaction of the voyeuristic stares. Consumed by anger and desire to regain her lost dignity, Panchaali propounded the fatal and dreadful curse of the battle, which proves to be a “Yuganta” and will destroy everybody. She vows not to comb her hair till “the day I bathe it in Kaurava Blood.” (PI, 194) Significantly she chooses to give up part of her traditional femininity for revenge, as particularly in India shiny fragrant hair symbolizes female beauty.

Despite the image of victimization, the scene is also a clear assertion of female strength and agency. After sealing everyone’s fate, it makes Panchaali

aware of her illusion about romantic love. The situation triggers a painful act of emancipation for Panchaali who is forced to protect herself as men fail her, while learning how “emotions are always intertwined with power and pride.” (PI 195).

Throughout the narrative, the desire for and the execution of vengeance is presented as the central trait transcending the boundaries of gender, yet affirming them at the same time. Although Panchaali’s desire and speech trigger the war, she does not actively fight in it but remains confined to a position of eyewitness. At various points in the story it is implied that a woman’s body is incapable of fulfilling a mission of revenge. One night during battle, Panchaali dreams of killing her brother who is disguised as a Kaurava prince. The dream expresses her feeling of despair from watching everybody close to her die, from facing her own impotence and guilt. Transformed into a man in the dream, she experiences a feeling of sameness, a kind of gender-empathy. In contrast to this brief imaginary switching of gender, Panchaali’s half-sister, Sikhandi, undergoes a permanent change, being transformed into a “great and dangerous warrior” (PI 44) in order to partake in the battle. Although her appearance and behavior are markedly different, she describes her new identity thus: “When I awoke, I was a man. And yet not completely so, for though my form was changed, inside me I remembered how women thought and what they longed for.” (PI 46) She retains this ambiguity about her gender. Watching her in battle, Panchaali notices how she still looks “male from a certain angle, female from another.” (PI 256) Like Panchaali, Sikhandi is driven by vengeance and rebellion against men’s greater freedom of action. Early in the narrative she describes an insight in the inevitability of emancipation, similar to the one Panchaali has during her shameful disrobing in court. She argues that women need to fight for themselves to restore their dignity because, “wait for a man to avenge your honour, and you’ll wait forever.” (PI 49) Inspired by Sikhandi’s sex change as the ultimate liberation from the restrictions of womanhood, Panchaali is aware from the start that: “I, too, would cross the bounds of what was allowed to women.” (PI 51) As shown above, her behavior frequently transgresses the boundaries of traditional femininity, e.g. her outspokenness,

her education and her polyandrous marriage. Furthermore, she fails to display a strong attachment to her children, valuing her independence higher than motherhood. To be at the side of her husbands, she leaves her sons behind, barely recognizing them years later. The narrative underlines how the trajectories of the characters of Sikhandi and Draupadi “away from ‘traditional’ femininity are towards vengeance” (PI 220), feminine vengeance thus forming a major plot-driving force, but, perhaps more importantly, constituting a dominant strand of femininity in both original *Mahabharata* and its feminist retelling.

The last part of the narrative adds another dimension. During the battle Panchaali is most shocked to find that her self-perception is completely at odds with the opinion of the women around her, who, consumed by their own suffering gaze only in fear at “the witch who might, with a wave of her hand, transform them into widows.” (PI 258) The portrayal of the battle of Kurukshetra and its aftermath present perhaps Divakaruni’s most radical modification of the plot of the original epic. The focus on the subjective female consciousness is here broadened to draw attention to what is omitted in the older text: “But here’s something Vyasa didn’t put down in his Mahabharata: Leaving the field, the glow traveled to a nearby hill, where it paused for a moment over a weeping woman.” (PI 298) Highlighting the grief of the women, the narrative presents a different angle of the morale of the battle between families and thoroughly blurs the distinction between kin and enemies, between winners and losers. After the battle, the grieving widows try to jump onto the funeral pyres. Faced with a mass sati, which would add unimaginably to the tragedy of the war, king Yudhisthir is rendered helpless: “If it had been a battle, he would have known what kind of command to give his men. But here he was at a loss, paralyzed by guilt and compassion and the ancient and terrible tradition the women had invoked.” (PI 312) This crisis forces Panchaali to finally prioritize sisterhood over her own interests and emotions. She steps forward to address the crowd, speaking as a woman and mother sharing their grief and manages to avert more deaths. The devastation of the war, which had made Hastinapur “largely a city of women” (PI 322), triggers a further change of Panchaali. She takes action, but this appears now to be driven less by personal than political

interest and feelings of community: “It was time I shook off my self-pity and did something. I resolved to form a separate court, a place where women could speak their sorrows to other women.” (PI 323) Divakaruni’s feminist agenda underlines this almost utopian vision of a new city rising from the ruins, now a haven of safety and respect, a place of equality for women: “And even in the later years . . . , Hastinapur remained one of the few cities where women could go about their daily lives without harassment.” (PI 325)

The analysis has shown that Draupadi is far from a univocal representation of the ideal Indian female, always torn between devoted wife and independent, outspokenly critical woman. Divakaruni’s narrative can be seen to highlight this perception of femininity. Moreover, the plurality of roles within the story can itself explain the shifts and inconsistencies in Draupadi’s character. Divakaruni makes this tension one of her focus points and presents Panchaali’s distress and suffering caused by the fragmentation of her different selves. This is illustrated once more by Panchaali’s decision to follow her husbands on their final journey. Again she is both loyal wife and rebellious woman, as no other before her had ever attempted to climb the Himalayan Mountains. . When her strength starts to desert her, she reflects:

Perhaps that has always been my problem, to rebel against the boundaries society has prescribed for women. But what was the alternative? To sit among bent grandmothers, gossiping and complaining, chewing on mashed betel leaves with toothless gums as I waited for death? Intolerable! I would rather perish on the mountain . . . my last victory over the other wives How could I resist it? (PI 343-44)

This shows the complex mix of emotions and demonstrates the ambiguous, finely tuned assessment of Panchaali’s character. It portrays her as a model of female empowerment and courage but casts a clear critical-humorous glance on her vanity and desire for admiration. Even her death is staged ambivalently in this regard. When she jumps from the pathway it appears to signify a brave acknowledgment of having reached the end of her powers and as a final cry for attention because her last tormenting thoughts are about which

men in her life would have turned around to come to her rescue. Panchaali's death appears as liberation and resolve of the contradictions of her identity: "I am beyond name and gender and the imprisoning patterns of ego. And yet, for the first time, I'm truly Panchaali." (PI, 360)

Many see Draupadi as an early feminist because of her fearlessness in admonishing those who harmed her or her family. Draupadi existed in a time when a woman's role was to serve her husband, as Milton said "He for God and she for the God in him" was true in those days. The unique relationship between Draupadi and her husband is what makes her story so exceptional. Draupadi was anything but a conventional wife; she was smart, bold and would lead her husbands into action.

But, fiercely independent with a streak of stubbornness, she was constantly aware how her actions would one day change the course of history. It was love at first sight when she rested her eyes on Karna's statue. Although she gave up this love to protect her brother and fulfil her destiny, she spent the rest of her life regretting this decision and pining for Karna's affection. However, that did not stop her from being a dutiful and loyal wife to her five husbands. She was the one they turned to for advice on governance; her opinion and judgment were highly regarded. She was the brain behind the Palace of Illusions, a place where she developed a sense of belonging like no other, and which was the root cause of the great Kurukshetra. She shared a love-hate relationship with her mother-in-law, Kunti. Draupadi was in awe of Kunti's steel of determination, but detested the power she wielded on her sons. There was a subtle ongoing tiff between the two, for Kunti could sense Draupadi's affection for Karna and Draupadi, in turn, was one of the first persons to uncover how Kunti abandoned Karna. If each of her thoughts and actions was a pearl, then the silver cord that strings Draupadi's life together is Karna.

The most modern feminist touch occurs late in the novel, in Hastinapur, with the Pandava brothers safely in power. The kingdom, depleted of its men by the war that Panchaali helped to bring about, is filled with widows and orphans. Panchaali and other Pandava women establish a court for such women,

to help protect these unfortunates from the unscrupulous; in order to give the court teeth and enforce their rulings, they pool their financial resources “to set up the destitute in homes of their own and buy merchandise to start businesses for them. In time the women’s market become a flourishing center of trade in the city ... We trained those who showed interest in learning to become tutors for girls and young boys”

The writing with the intent to place women at the center of the work has been another one of Divakarunni’s enterprises. There may be critics who feel that her work is not what they would consider radical. But if we look at the world as it is, placing a woman in the center of a work is radical enough, giving her the humanity, allowing her to tell her story. It makes her into a hero because she is interpreting the world for us through her eyes. As during the war at Kurukshetra, where only Panchaali can be an indirect observer of the tragedy she caused by her pride and offended dignity. But Divakaruni’s work do not plead for one gender against the other. Rather through Panchaali’s experiences, she is made to understand how to grow beyond her own pride and her own ego, although she wants to become a subject and wants to have power in society and in relationship with her five husbands.

Draupadi, in Chitra Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusions*, journeys from being a woman repeatedly made the subject of narration by patriarchal narratives to becoming a woman who subjectivises narration itself, in the process, overthrowing the narratives that have constructed her womanhood through centuries. By becoming both the narrator and agent of action Divakaruni’s Draupadi recovers the voice of womanhood.

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Hardy, the Unexplored Nature Poet: Aesthetics of Biodiversity in his Selected Poems

Shilpa Mathew

Literature by virtue of being what it is - creative, imaginative, emotive and expressive - could be seen as engaging with the human mind and the natural world at every point. The rising ecological conscience all over the world is one of the main reasons for the emergence of the study of literature and environment. The countryside, wilderness and the city have been represented in and shaped by literature since ancient times. Thomas Hardy is one of the most renowned writers in English literary history. Though Hardy is acclaimed as a great Victorian novelist, he was always a poet in spirit. Late in his career, when Hardy felt that he had no more to say in the form of prose fiction (which he had always regarded as inferior to poetry), he returned to his first love, poetry. He wrote poems in an era when the belief in Nature and God was being destroyed by the advance of science. Hardy had published eight volumes of poetry. Most of his poems reveal Hardy's attention to the natural world. His poetry offers few allurements of verbal grace or metrical felicity, but it has pure lyrical inspiration, the vision of a poet and the veracity of an undeluded mind. It can be seen as intellectual poetry, full of distinction and personal idiom, yet often beautifully lyric. "The Darkling Thrush" and "An August Midnight" appear as poems about writing poetry, because the nature mentioned in them gives Hardy the inspiration to write as illustrated in the lines:

An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul

Upon the growing gloom. (Tomalin 1-4)

In “The Blinded Bird”, Hardy displays his love of the natural world and his firm stance against animal cruelty, exhibited in his antivivisectionist views and his membership in the RSPCA. In “Under the Waterfall”, Hardy says that he experiences heavenly bliss by being one with Nature, i.e., at the very sight of a little valley fall. Although his poems were not initially as well received by his contemporaries as his novels were.

Hardy is aptly considered to be a ‘transition poet’ as he is the last Victorian and the first modern. Like Hopkins, he made several experiments in writing poetry. When we heard the name of Thomas Hardy, what comes to our mind first? His famous novels like *Tess*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Far from the Madding Crowd* and so on. i.e., he is mainly even now remembered as the famous Victorian novelist rather than a poet of simplicity. Hardy, as a Nature poet must have been very unfamiliar for many.

To begin with his most important and remarkable nature poem, “The Darkling Thrush” – Hardy personified all of the things in the poem, even the inanimate objects or elements of nature like ‘snow’, ‘ice’ and ‘frost’. He compared them to humans and their characteristics. e.g. ‘Frost’ & ‘Winter’ take the place of people as key figures. He devoted many poems to birds or he makes reference to birds in. The beat and rhyme scheme is really simple and it is also very easy to understand and picture. Morgan states:

Hardy was able to paint a very sorrowful picture of this dying bird, in a winter storm in just a few lines. Winter’s cold desolation and hibernation as symbolic of human emotional staleness, literal decomposition as a spiritual metaphor of death giving birth to life i.e., the continuity of life. Hardy’s poem describes the Nineteenth century as an ‘afflicted century’ which lacked a congenial living atmosphere because of its several contracting and dogmatic philosophical trends and political anarchy. (149)

Hardy wonders at the cleverness of nature, the ability of man to find personal clarity while reflecting amidst the serenity of nature.

In the beginning of the poem, the speaker gazes into the patch of tangled bushes, he can only see death and destruction.

There is no music or happiness here but only sorrow, pain and suffering. This winter is not the pretty snow that we see in X'mas, but it's gray and grimy. The whole world seems mostly dead. This poem was written towards the end of the year and all of the nature seems to conspire to mourn the passing of the century. This particular reflection of thought is seen in many poems of Romantic poets. The sense that the outer world will mimic or manifest your own emotions, a very Romantic notion (as in Wordsworthian or Keats). (Brooks 98)

It is probably getting late. All the happy ones are curled up by the fire and enjoying dinner. So there is life out, but not near the speaker as he is standing alone leaning towards a gate and observing nature.

The countryside is frozen into an icy, unwelcoming landscape. As our speaker stores out into the gloom, he is reminded that everything around him is on the fast track to death and decay. No life seems to stir. Then all of a sudden, out of all that silence, death and never ending grayness, our speaker hears the most unexpected sound; a bird singing and that is our little bird, the thrush which isn't in the best of shape. It's been beaten badly by the weather and the bird seems as old and death bound as the year itself. But that doesn't stop it from singing its heart out. It is bound and determined to share every last ounce of joy in its soul. But our speaker is bewildered at the thought that why would the bird waste its last breath in a song that no one will hear and how could anyone be joyful when the world is so disappointing. However, he is content to know that something out there sees a reason to exist and to be joyful – even if he can't comprehend the reasons himself.

Then the speaker recognizes the truth that 'ecstasy' doesn't come from without, maybe it comes from within. The speaker is even a little comforted by the thought of the bird's company and the speaker is trying to think like the bird. But this momentary happiness is not going to turn him into a complete optimist, but his ability to appreciate happiness when he sees it, is something worth noticeable. The speaker is willing to let the thrush sing its heart out in peace.

To quote Mallikarjun Patil, "Hardy finds this to be an aged thrush bringing a hope to mankind through an ecstatic evensong. And the regrets for his failure to know some blessed hope which the bird knows" (113). Thus this poem is about Hardy's optimism and human possibilities for progressive enlightenment in the world. Even though the old bird is stuck in the middle of a nasty storm, it has managed to do what the speaker has been too scared to do i.e., to forget about the odds and just sing. It is trying to amend the "growing gloom" (Tomalin 55). The speaker is gathering momentum as he continues to hear the thrush singing. The striking aspect of this poem is that it's not another human being that brings our speaker this revelation, it is Nature.

Hardy's love for nature mainly includes his love for the lower creatures. His love for the dumb animals is admirable. In the poem "The Blinded Bird", Hardy writes that the birds that are disturbed by human activities, still thrive and sing their songs of joy and sorrow. Hardy glorifies the bird by asking. To quote from the poem:

Who hath charity? This bird
Who suffereth long and is kind,
Who hopeth, endureth all things?
Who thinketh no evil, but sings?
Who is divine? This bird. (Tomalin 6-10)

He is surprised how the bird can sing with so much enthusiasm even when it's badly wounded. To quote from the poem:

Blinded eye yet – a wing
By the red – hot needle thou,
I stand and wonder low
So zestfully thou canst sing! (Tomalin 16-20)

Hardy's genuine love and compassion for birds is quite clear. When Hardy was invited for the celebration of the centenary of Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in January 1924, he strongly pleaded for the welfare of birds. Hardy's second wife, Florence thought that the poem served to demonstrate the poet's passionate hatred of injustice and barbarity towards the lower animals. F.L. Lucas sums up Hardy's vision and virtue in the following words:

He never forgave the world the red streak of cruelty that runs through all its beauty: and the divine he found, not in Heaven, but in the cage of the blinded bird that sings on still with unembittered gaiety though man with a red-hot needle has burnt out both its eyes. (45)

Hardy has the virtues of truthfulness, sincerity and compassion.

In the poem "An August Midnight", the speaker is a man supposed to be a writer on whose table various creatures enter, is shown in perfect harmony with the birds. To quote from the poem:

Thus meet we five, in this still place,
At this point of time, at this point in space.
My guests besmear my new-penned line,
A bang at the lamp and fall supine.
'God's humblest, they!' 'I muse, yet why?

They know Earth – secrets that know not I. (Tomalin 7-12)

Hardy is a great humanist. He is humane in every respect of his long and stormy life. His humanism is not only for human beings but also for all animate

and inanimate objects of the earth. The poem points to the Existentialist Hardy for whom, a tiny moment – the meeting of five insects (moths, longlegs, flies) banging aimlessly and self-destructively on the speaker's night lamp. The philosopher – poet is stirred by the minutiae of life to muse on the nature of being. As Neil Wenborn remarks:

Its' two short stanzas imbue a seemingly trivial encounter black and white a writer and four insects in his room at night with a kind of hushed awareness of the mystery of life on their shared planet. The poet's study during the creation of a poem involves us very directly in the act of poetic apprehension. Indeed, in a daring superimposition of the literal and the figurative, Hardy locates the action on the very page, the narrator is writing. (47-48)

Thus the first two lines, which evoke the setting with the economy of a stage-direction might also belong to this 'poem within the poem' – a poem, the insects interrupt and redirect by their equally stage like arrival. "On this scene enter" (Tomalin 125) and in the second stanza, "Besmear my new-penned line" (Tomalin 125), alter even as it is being committed to paper. The ironic courtesy of the second stanza, "We five, My guests" (Tomalin 125) subtly deepens our growing sense of equivalence between the narrator and his visitors, hinting at a similar equivalence between his creative efforts and the comic ungainliness of their instinctual and repeatedly thwarted attempts to get at the light. This, the poem seems to say, is how we might look to the eye of God. There is more life and intensity felt by Hardy when he is with the insects and birds.

Hardy is now recognized as one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century. His verse had a profound influence on later writers, notably Philip Larkin, who found Hardy enabling.

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Exploring the ‘Mindscape’ of Select Indian Renaissance Poets in the Context of the Colonial Encounter

Nair Anup Chandrasekharan

The nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of literary activity in English across the Indian subcontinent. The roots of this social and literary ‘renaissance’ were set in Bengal before they branched out to the rest of the country. The introduction of English education system expedited the process of social and cultural transformation. The establishment of the printing press, the improved communication and transport systems in the form of the railways and the steamers helped the developments reach the other parts of the country.

With the advent and the subsequent establishment of the British in India, the English education system, language and literature came to form an integral part of the educational structure of the country. Western education brought about a shift in perception and issues of social relevance were raised and established notions were questioned by poets like Derozio. For example, in *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, Derozio echoes the sentiments of Raja Rammohan Roy and eminent reformers of the Academic Association and highlights the condition of Indian women who were deprived of a voice of their own, forced into loveless marriages and were victims of barbaric practices like Sati. Toru Dutt, using Buttoo as a trope highlights the class and caste differences that existed in the nineteenth century Bengal.

Poems like Derozio’s ‘The Legend of Shushan’ and the ‘Hymn to the Sun’, bring to the fore the synthesis of the influence of English Romantic poetry and influence of the forgotten classical Sanskrit texts, back in vogue in the nineteenth century India because of the translations of the Orientalists, who had rediscovered, reinterpreted and repackaged the Indian myths, folklore

and history for popular occidental and oriental consumption. The nineteenth century did not just witness the fusion of the Sanskrit and the English schools of thought but Toru Dutt, for instance, beautifully amalgamates the Christian and Pagan elements in 'Savitri' to communicate an essentially Hindu situation when she describes the pitiable condition of the Hindu widows using the symbol of the rock which is a Biblical symbol as well, as it suggests the tortures, inflicted on Prometheus.

The influence of the Indologists like William Jones, Sir Charles Wilkins, Colebrook and others is also evident in the way in which Derozio in his poems like 'The Golden Vase', *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, 'The Enchantress of the Cave' etc, and Michael Madhusudan Dutt in his poems like *The Captive Ladie*, *Rizia*, *The Empress of Inde* etc. stereotype the Muslims and present the Hindus and the Muslims as poles apart from each other be it their physical features, culture or spiritual make up. This idea of an unbridgeable chasm between the Hindus and the Muslims was later on built upon and exploited by the colonizers to consolidate their rule and the same ultimately led to the partition of India.

The introduction of the study of English literature in India had significant social and literary ramifications. This beginning was in itself ironical because the colonial masters considered their subjects as suitable 'consumers' of their literary effusions in English, while they did not find it worthy of either prescription or teaching in the major universities of England. The education policy of the British, made keeping in mind political gains had widespread social consequences. It engendered a new generation of Indians who were genetically natives but emotionally and intellectually anglicized to such an extent that some of them like Michael Madhusudan Dutt and the entire family of Toru Dutt got converted to the religion of the masters for various reasons. Literary writers of the period, caught as they were between native and alien traditions, longed for the alien culture. The situation led to hesitation, dilemma and contradictions as are manifested in the careers and works of the poets of the period.

All the motives of the colonial masters notwithstanding, one of the ironical byproducts of the introduction of English literature in India was that it gave rise to nationalist feeling, as is discernible in Derozio's poems 'The Harp of India' and 'To India-My Native Land' Madhusudan Dutt's 'King Porus' and Toru Dutt's 'Our Casurina Tree', among others. These poems recall to memory the idea postulated by the Orientalists of a glorious Indian past being replaced by a decadent present with most of the poems professing a need to bring back the glories of the past. These were the first signs of an emerging nationalistic fervor that was to mark Indian literature in general and Indian writing in English in particular.

These inherent contradictions, led to a fracture in the creative psyche of the nation, which in turn is reflected in the ambivalence with which the Indian laymen and creative writers approached the alien culture and language as a medium of expression. An offshoot of this ambivalence was their rebellion against the established institutions and the choices they exercised by abjuring their religion, rituals, dress code, language and culture. The Christianity, the religion of the master, was considered an alternative to the orthodoxy and decadent ritualism that had crept into the Hinduism.

However, this revolt did not mean that these poets were drowned in the flood of English cultural and literary onslaught. Every now and then they had to come up and breathe in an air that was exclusively Indian. This is reflected in their penchant for taking recourse to Indian myths, ballads, images and symbols in their literary writings. They longed for the Albion shores but so enormous was the pull of culture and its tradition that they could not either shrug them off or forsake their cultural moorings and tradition.

Poets like Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudansudhan Dutt and Toru Dutt among the nineteenth century poets made use of myths from texts of the collective cultural past like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. They do not just imitate the myths but also rework it to present the contemporary experiences and realities. By using myths, ballads and tales that are reservoirs of culture, these poets strove to reapproximate their present-day experience and thereby

they provoked intellectual curiosity in the Indian experience and this led to the reawakening of the Indian cultural consciousness. Another example of such tendency is Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghanad Badha* where, unlike the *Ramayana*, Meghanad is presented as the protagonist. Moreover, Toru Dutt, even after her conversion to Christianity falls back on the Hindu myths like Savitri to propose virtuosity of an Indian woman. As is evident from her poems and letters, Toru was disturbed by the suffering of women of her times. Tortures meted out to young Hindu widows in the nineteenth century under the garb of penance and sacrifice are captured with intensity and is presented as the condition of the widows of the times of the *Mahabharata* in 'Savitri'. Such rendition contributed to fueling the flame of a social renaissance. Therefore, Henry Derozio, Madhusudan Dutt and Toru Dutt through their poems reflect their ardent love for humanism and their belief that all human beings are born free and all have every right to defend their freedom.

As citizens of a colonized country, poems of Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Toru Dutt on liberty and human dignity assume much significance, for they point out to the fact that their composers were consciously agitated by the servility of their countrymen and the fallen state of their nation. In many a poem they either overtly or covertly point out that it is better to lay down one's life than to accept a life in which one's dignity is compromised. For instance, Derozio's 'Freedom to the Slave' is a lyric that extols the glory of freedom. The one line epigraph to the poem ("And as the slave departs, the man returns") from Thomas Campbell succinctly sums up the central thesis of the poem and also points to the influence of this English Romantic poet and his humanistic concerns on Derozio. Like Derozio's poem, Madhusudan's 'The Slave' also extols the joy of being free after a long spell of slavery and the pride in his own self at the awareness of his freedom and the way freedom revived the noblest feeling of the soul is very well brought out by the poet.

Indian writing in English in general and poetry in particular, in the nineteenth century is, therefore, an experiment initiated and continued by peculiarities of the historical situation and as is the wont of any experiment, it

too had its limitations. But the fact cannot be denied that these humble beginnings laid the foundation for Indians to write in English in the subsequent centuries as if it were their native tongue. The subsequent recognition of literary output and its merit owes much to these ancestors of Indian English Poetry. Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Toru Dutt are, if not unsung but at least, 'undersung' protagonists, claimants from the nineteenth century of unfulfilled renown, who set stage for the beginning and development of Indian English poetry. Their lives and literary careers reveal them as microcosmic representatives of the young generation of the period. Unique historical context and the historical process and forces shaped them as individuals and they responded by articulating their angst, anxieties and aspirations in their poetry using English as the new medium of expression in India. Various reasons kept them from realizing their potentialities as poets, but it is an undeniable fact that contemporary English poetry is a descendent of Indian English poetry of the nineteenth century, and hence their corpus of writing, however scanty it is, as integral and essential part of not just Indian writing in English but Indian literature as a whole.

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Ambaaa/Shikhandi as the New Woman

Sheryl Puthur and Sneha Maria Martin

Literature is seen as a representation of life, and also reinforces existing social orders and belief systems. The epic, *Mahabharata* is a classic example of a master text that has influenced and shaped Indian society. The epic celebrates patriarchy at the expense of the Woman. The women in the Mahabharata are shadowy figures who have never been seen as women of identity and women of agency. In this context, our text of resistance is Mangai's *Frozen Fire* (2005). It is a play drawing on the Theatre of the Oppressed and performed in the Tamil Koothu style. Interestingly though, Mangai's own production of it has a female performer which is unlike the traditional format of a Koothu. Thus, even in its staging, there is a critique of the social order.

The *Mahabharata* is a celebration of valour, honour and duty under the aegis of Dharma. The principal characters of the great epic are Krishna, Bhishma, the Pandavas and the villains, Duryodhana and Shakuni. The women are on the periphery; their roles defined by their relationship to men. The master text typecasts the women in it as nurturing mothers, virtuous wives and coy maidens – stereotypes that society still perpetuates. To quote from *The Second Sex*,

For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other. (Beauvoir, Introduction)

The idea of the new woman has often been limited to western thought and literature. The new woman was one who chose to resist norms set by a patriarchal society. She was educated, self sufficient and independent. She

also resisted clichés that typecast women as simpering, conniving, hysterical, irrational and flighty. She tried to understand herself outside of the limitations imposed by society and thus reaching an understanding of what constitutes the female self. To be specific, the new woman chose to live life on her terms. She entered the world of men and expected to be treated on par with them.

In this light Mangai's Ambaa /Shikhandi emerges as the new woman who is abandoned by her father and beholden to neither husband nor son. She has to empower herself to fulfil her desire, which is to bring down the patriarch Bhishma. In the play *Frozen Fire* by Mangai chooses to bring one such woman into the foreground, a woman who spoke - who used her voice to question the patriarchal power structure. Mangai through Ambaa /Shikhandi gives us a perspective that has never been seen in this master text.

Bhishma has always been projected as a man of great virtue and honour. His secession of the throne in favour of Satyawati's progeny was considered a magnanimous and an honourable gesture. His terrible vow of celibacy to ensure his loyalty to the throne of Hastinapura superseded his other actions.

In *Frozen Fire*, the character of Bhishma or 'The great Devavrata' is deconstructed through the voice of Ambaa. Bhishma is then revealed to the readers as a man ridden with flaws which demystifies the myth of the great patriarch.

Mangai's play has questioned Bhishma's actions at the *swayamvara* for Ambaa, Ambikaa and Ambaalikaa. He changed the entire principle of 'choosing your own husband' into a *veera sulka* – a reward for bravery (Mangai 440), thus obliterating the voice of the woman. This act of bravery by Bhishma is more about showing the power that Hastinapura wields over the other kingdoms. The King of Kashi insulted Hastinapura by not inviting them for the *swayamvara*; so Bhishma's abduction of the three princesses was about shifting the baton of power into his hands.

There are many debates about why Ambaa never spoke up earlier, such as, when she was being dragged into the chariot by Bhishma. However, is a

woman's perspective really being considered when she is being abducted? Her screams would not have been seen as resistance but an indication of a woman's fragility. Ambaa, however, does speak up at Hastinapura : "*I shuddered and told them all / Of how I already loved another.*" Ambaa spoke of her desire; her longing for Salva and in keeping with the Kshatriya code she was sent back, for it was against the code of honour amongst Kshatriyas to take a woman who loved another.

We can't have you then, it is not done

To accept a woman who loves another,

No, not amongst kshatriyas....

Bhishma ordered me out with these words.

Yet, her lover spurns her using the same Kshatriya code. "*I can't accept a woman carried away by another, Kept a while and then sent away from him*"

She is reviled by Bhishma and Salva for voicing her resistance. She had decided that she wanted Salva as her husband and for Bhishma this was unacceptable. There is a certain malevolence in the very act of sending her back knowing very well that the same Kshatriya code would be used by Salva to reject her.

Ambaa has been relegated to the margin because of her queerness. The very act of questioning the dominant male power of the time was considered queer. A woman who chooses to speak against male hegemony (represented by Bhishma, a perceived paragon of virtue) was considered deviant or unnatural. The price for speaking up is paid for only by Ambaa and not her sisters, Ambikaa and Ambaalikaa. They became queens, Ambaa became a pariah.

Mangai's Ambaa is the voice of resistance, battling against a system which uses and disposes women arbitrarily. Ambaa has always been a marginal figure in the *Mahabharata*, a character who rebelled against the system of the day only to get her due in another life. Ambaa's tragic flaw was her decision to voice her discontent with what was allotted to her. Her pleas and cries for

justice in the system were drowned only to be taken over by a fire of fury which abated on the death of Bhishma, the cause of her misery.

Draupadi's *vastraharan* is another pivotal moment when a woman chose to speak out against the system. Draupadi voices her ire and contempt for a patriarchal system which endorsed women as pawns. Ironically, as the character of Ambaa points out in the play, the great Bhishma was present at court, a silent spectator, during the disrobing of Draupadi.

And the great Bhishma, unable to amend the wrong,

Fallen low, proclaimed:

'Woman! Your Yudhishthira gambled and lost you.

By your speaking you damn his actions!

Princess!

What you speak makes no sense!

The tragic flaw of the women (women like Draupadi and Ambaa) in the Mahabharata is that they questioned. The flaw of the men in the Mahabharata is that they stayed silent.

The canon has never given much weight to Ambaa other than her strange metamorphosis into a man called Shikhandi. Yet Shikhandi too faced discrimination in the fact that he is not acknowledged in the canon. Shikhandi is relegated to the status of a decoy which is how women have been traditionally viewed. If women ever played a role in politics it was only in terms of a diversion for men to do the real work.

Shikhandi was acknowledged as a man by the society of those times but when Bhishma refuses to acknowledge Shikhandi's role in his fall and sees Shikhandi only as a masked version of Ambaa, the reader is forced to see Shikhandi as a non-entity.

Hence, Mangai has Shikhandi speaking out in the battlefield: "*I have killed today the Bhishma ...*" (442). The reiteration of the pronoun 'I' through the soliloquy is about Shikhandi reclaiming his place in the canon by stating

that Bhishma died at his hands. This statement requires a paradigm shift in how Shikhandi is perceived.

When we speak of voice, we need to attempt a thought experiment as to what may have been Ambaa's fate, had she not spoken. She would have been expected by Satyawati to sleep with Vyasa. In which case, just like how Ambikaa shut her eyes in disgust and fear and had a blind son, Ambaalikaa blanched with fear and had an impotent son, Ambaa would have had a mute son.

Identity in a patriarchal world is determined by the power structure of that society. In Mahabharata, Bhishma is synonymous with patriarchy and is the mouthpiece of Dharma (let's not forget that he taught the Pandavas all that there is to know about Dharma). This meant that whoever did not adhere to the norms laid out by society would always find themselves marginalised to the point of being ostracised.

However, a woman who chooses to work the system to her advantage is the only one who would succeed. Such as Kunti, Satyawati, Subhadra, who chose to play the roles men handed out to them and hence they enjoyed a certain amount of power. It may have been power through proxy, because of their sons or husbands, yet they exerted influence over these men by sticking to their stereotypical roles.

Thus the identity and power women enjoy stem from the men they are related to. For instance, Gandhari is known as a blind woman because she blindfolded herself for her husband. She then *sees* the world as her husband does.

Draupadi has been blamed for the Great War for centuries. She has been cast as the woman who bayed for the blood of valorous men. This exonerates the men actually responsible for the war – Shakuni, Yudhishtira, Bhishma, Duryodhana, Karna... the reason why Draupadi has been blamed harks back to her questioning the men at the sabha where her *vastraharan* took place. In fact as Karve points out in *Yuganta*, "Draupadi was standing there arguing about legal technicalities like a lady pundit when what was

happening to her was so hideous that she should only have cried out for decency and pity in the name of the Kshatriya code”(99-100). This means that if she begged, clemency would have been shown to her and her honour would remain intact.

The idea of female desire is unacceptable to the order, which is why Ambaa’s proclamation of her love for Salva becomes a transgression. Women are supposed to receive the man’s desire and not possess any. Even Ambikaa and Ambaalikaa were raised to the status of queens because they did not oppose Bhishma; yet they had to flagellate the self in accepting Satyavati’s decision to sleep with Vyasa. It is almost as if the woman has to feel guilty for being a woman. For a woman to speak out is the twin act of justification and guilt for she has been told through the ages to accept and never react.

Society exerts power over its members by feeding it a certain ideology. It ensures that the stories which are passed on are the stories that ensure obedience:

Here lies and tales reign supreme

And truth – even if acknowledged

Is seldom spoken.

This is how it works.

A norm.

Set by men.

This is why instead of being told that Bhishma was defeated by Shikhandi, we are told that he was honourable in that he did not raise his hand against a woman or someone who once was a woman. This is why we are told that it is Arjuna who finally shot the arrow because no woman was allowed on the battlefield. However, Ambaa questions that by making a pertinent statement – “*Can an arrow be male or female?*”

Every individual has to undergo a painful process to fit into society’s set moulds of what each gender is supposed to be. Society shames anyone who

does not fit into that mould – “*Shameful and surprising that you refuse to be the lad you are*” (446). So the man has to kill the feminine in him to succeed and similarly for the woman – “*simper behind the scenes deploy another to my task*” (444). Thus Ambaa’s metamorphosis into Shikhandini and then into Shikhandi was a mortification process. “ ‘Being men, those who have made and compiled the laws have favoured their own sex, and jurists have elevated these laws into principles’, to quote Poulain de la Barre” (Beauvoir, Introduction)

Dharma then becomes the hegemony controlled and practised by men. They modify it to suit their needs and then enforce obedience. Thus when Bhishma refuses to acknowledge Shikhandi, he ensures Shikhandi’s erasure from the canon. Readers through the ages have accepted this viewpoint unquestioningly.

From this standpoint, even the swayamvar of Ambaa, Ambikaa and Ambaalikaa is reduced to just another incident in the great epic. The stage was set; the ceremony was under way and along came Bhishma, the anti-thesis of the Knight in shining armour. He came, he saw, he took. His intentions were far from noble. The protector of the throne of Hastinapura would do anything for his country and his king, even if it meant abducting brides for his brother Vichitraveerya. In this context, one has to examine and critique the social system of the day.

To quote Bhishma’s lines from the play: *Woman, you’ve been captured by force - This is a time-honoured way- this rakhshasa method of wooing and wedding.*

You must know this, Princess!

That there are eight modes of wedded love!

Brahman, Daivatham, Aarsham, Prajapathiyam,

Asuram, Gandharvam, Paisasam, Rakshasam.

And for us kings, this is an honourable thing!

By saying this, Bhishma dismissed the idea of the swayamvara – a woman's autonomy over who becomes her spouse. He changed the laws and no one questions him. Not even their father who had organised the swayamvara.

An examination of the patriarchal system of the time shows an arbitrary rule of might and force. The women of the time did not have autonomy over their body or mind. An examination of the very act of a *rakshasa* marriage is one which screams of complete marginalization of the woman. Her view, wishes, desires and opinions are not accounted for. She was viewed and treated as a commodity to be seized and taken. There is no defence against this show of brute force which was considered a time honoured tradition.

It is not enough to hold Bhishma and the other men of the epic responsible for the subjugation of women. Women who perpetuate patriarchy have also ensured that no dissent will be tolerated. Draupadi's marriage to the Pandavas was put forth by Kunti to make sure that Draupadi does not split her sons.

Even Satyawati, by making Ambikaa and Ambaalikaa sleep with Vyasa so that there would be heirs did not really consider how they felt about this act. Duty is clear and since female desire and autonomy are myths there was no reason to ask them.

Ambaa as the new woman is seen through her avatar as Shikhandi. Shikhandi has always had the stigma of being Arjuna's decoy to bring down Bhishma. Shikhandi has been considered just a means to an end. Even Bhishma never admits to being felled by Shikhandi's arrow. It is this rage and anger of Ambaa/Shikhandi which Mangai brings out by juxtaposing these two characters.

It is not that Ambaa had not accepted society's views of how a woman is supposed to be and how a man is supposed to be. When she confronts Salva she uses society's words :

My heart is pure – it hides nothing

He took me prisoner – he had a right to,

It says so in our law books.

It is not my fault – was I asked?

Against my will, he abducted me

He is at fault, not I”

It is when she is at the receiving end of the law that she begins to question it. This process is complete when she becomes Shikhandi. There is an awareness in both that they have another side to them which they can draw on.

Shikhandi has been referred to as he and Ambaa as she but the need of the hour is to use a gender neutral pronoun. To claim masculinity is to lose your feminine self – “*A man now. Lost to my own womanhood*”

The text makes a case for androgyny because male and female belong to nature. It is exclusionary to say that the female is nature because the male is also nature -

As I tumble down –

A wild river

I, Ambaa”

“...my now forgotten ancient tongue

I plunge down headlong

A wild river –

I, Shikhandi!

Society has created an either/or situation but as Cixous points out, “phallogocratic ideology has claimed more than one victim” (*The Laugh of the Medusa*). The cry of the new woman is then that the union of the two sides within one individual or androgyny will be the way forward. It is about making a world that is “held in common” (461).

Mangai expands this idea in the benediction when the petition for a “*nest without lock and key*” is made and a hope expressed about,

The differences that are yet equal”

There is then a need to reiterate Ambaa’s question,

“Can an arrow be male or female?”

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Voices of the Third World Feminine: A Riveting Journey through Nawal El- Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

Kavitha N

The post colonial third world writing of the oppressed has its own way of self expression. To figure out the voices in the third world women's writing is complex. The reflection of women as oppressed, women as the other, women as body and women as marginalized is reflected in these writings. The novel, *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), by Nawal El- Saadawi, one of the founder figures of Egyptian feminism, stands as a text of women's multiple experiences that expose the problems faced by women of the Middle East which represents the heterogeneity of third world women's experience. The lower class woman's voice intentionally dominates or manages to find space through the text. Saadawi's writings were banned for eleven years under Egyptian President Anwar Sadat; her books were censored in Jordan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, and eventually she was imprisoned by Sadat for speaking against male domination in Egypt.

This article examines the different subjugating conditions that women confronted in the Middle East. These include domestic violence, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, child-marriage, bride-burning, discrimination in religious institutions and work place and other harmful cultural practices that inhibit the personal development of women in the society. Nawal El Saadawi's portraiture of this grim reality in *Woman at Point Zero* brings forth the various phases of injustices and abuse that women grapple with in phallogentric societies. Saadawi's research of women political prisoners, published as *Women and Neurosis* in Egypt in 1976, aptly describes the nervous conditions of Egyptian women's lives. Her writing of *Woman at Point Zero*, on the other

hand, recounts a woman's individual story, described by Saadawi herself as half way between fiction and fact.

Woman at Point Zero opens with the author, a woman psychologist trying to extract the story behind her patient Firdaus, a prisoner who awaits death sentence at Qanatir prison. She is a mysterious ex-prostitute who refuses to speak with anyone in or out of the prison. After a long persuasion Firdaus agrees to speak to the psychologist, and the novel is in the form of a life narrative.

Let me speak. Do not interrupt me. I have no time to listen to you. They are coming to take me at six o'clock this evening. I shall no longer be here. Nor will I be in any place known to man. This journey to a place unknown to everybody on this earth fills me with pride. All my life I have been searching for something that would fill me with pride, make me feel superior to everyone else, including kings, princes and rulers.
(9)

The text is a feminine reading of social, economic, and political factors that define women's oppression within Egyptian society, prostitution and the challenges in understanding the conditions of women's lives in the third world. These conditions subvert her position of privilege within the existing relations of power and gender politics. The protagonist was subjected to abuse, oppression and abandonment, being taken advantage of on all levels, and of consistent rejection, all through her life, by nearly every human she encountered from child to adulthood. The figure of the female prostitute signifies the other, the nation prostituted to the colonizer for superficial gains, bands of gold, and the false beauties of Western modernization.

In giving voice to Firdaus who is imprisoned for murdering a pimp, *Woman at Point Zero* may be viewed as a response to a tradition of Arab literature that has failed to give women a voice other than that which is dislocated in patriarchal discourse. The protagonist Firdaus evolves herself from being a daughter, to a wife, to a prostitute, to an office employee, and finally back to a prostitute. As a child, she is sexually abused by her uncle; as a married woman, she is beaten by her husband. As an office worker, she does

not make enough money to maintain the privileged standard of living she had as a prostitute. During her initial months as a prostitute, her pimp takes advantage of her; it is not until Firdaus strikes out on her own that she finds any degree of freedom, agency, and self-worth. When Firdaus was a child, she was denied food while her father ate a full dinner; when she was married, her miserly husband complained if he thought she ate too much. When she was a prostitute, she had the money to buy and eat what she wanted. By the end of the text, Firdaus comes to the conclusion that Egyptian women are oppressed no matter what they do. She asserts that “All women are prostitutes of one kind or another” (91). They sell themselves to husbands for food and shelter; unmarried women often sell themselves sexually for promotions or raises at their jobs. In a system where she felt she had no freedom and was subservient to men, active prostitution gave her the most liberty and agency possible.

Even though Firdaus says that prostitution gave her freedom, she hated the circumstances which forced her to be a prostitute. But she concluded that, in a culture where women were being taken advantage of at every turn, prostitution gave her some of that power back. She says:

A woman’s life is always miserable. A prostitute, however, is a little better off . . . The fact that I rejected [men’s] noble attempts to save me, my insistence on remaining a prostitute, proved to me this was my choice and I had some freedom, at least the freedom to live in a situation better than that of other women (97)

Firdaus uses prostitution as a method of finding freedom rather than enslaving herself. To say that sex work rendered her subservient to men does not truly hold up when she had already endured a clitoridectomy, sexual abuse, and a forced marriage. Prostitution does not render her more enslaved in fact, it gives her the freedom she craved. Clitoridectomy, also known as Female Genital Mutilation, is a common practice in many traditional African societies. It is a traditional practice in which a person, sometimes unskilled or a health worker, cuts off parts or whole organs of the female genitalia usually using the knife or razor blade, which for the most part is unsterilized. . . . It is considered,

variously, a cleansing ritual from evil spirits, a female rite of passage, a guarantor of a woman's chastity and her marriageability, and a boost to fertility or to a man's sexual pleasure (Salami 37). It is terrible to know that this practice is carried out by elderly women who have gone through the same painful exercise that is enforced by traditional customs and they know the devastating effect of this mutilation. The woman is mutilated both physically and psychologically.

The notion that the girl-child is culturally invisible informs the decision of parents to deny them education. At the tender age of eighteen, Firdaus is forcefully married off to Sheik Mahmoud, a sixty-year old rich widower, by her uncle. He is sixty and has a facial deformity. At first Firdaus runs away, but while she is on the streets, she is terrified by the strange men who approach her, so she returns home. Thus she was married off to Sheikh Mahmoud. Simone de Beauvoir writes: "a woman's "sex condemns her to a mutilated and fixed existence" as a mother and wife. Women in the novel are treated similarly to de Beauvoir's description of the second sex (326). The men in Firdaus's society sets themselves up as the 'Subject, he is the Absolute', while the women as 'the other'. Mahmoud was selfish and stingy and beats Firdaus. His facial deformity is a large swelling on his chin with a hole in the middle that leaks pus. He treated her very badly; after going through a long suffering and oppression, Firdaus runs away. She chooses this route and becomes a prostitute herself, following a series of depressing episodes with the men in her life. She ends up in a coffee shop where she meets Bayoumi, the coffee shop owner, who in turn leads her to prostitution. Firdaus escapes with the help of a neighbour and flees Bayoumi's apartment for the city.

All women are victims of deception. Men impose deception on women and punish them for being deceived, force them down to the lowest level and punish them for falling so low, bind them in marriage and then chastise them with menial service for life, or insults, or blows. (94)

Resting by the Nile, Firdaus feels hopeless until a wealthy-looking prostitute, Sharifa approaches her. She takes Firdaus in and teaches her to become a high-class prostitute. As a prostitute, Firdaus describes her body in

correspondence to the eyes of the people in her life, with more detachment of feeling than she did prior to becoming a prostitute. Sharifa makes money from Firdaus's body until her friend Fawzy comes over. Firdaus overhears Sharifa and Fawzy fighting over who will get to keep her; so she runs away again. The body of woman depicts many metaphorical meanings in the novel, especially the eyes. Firdaus's eyes depict the lack of control that she has over her life, which are heightened by the descriptions of the moments when she is prostituting herself. Firdaus also uses her eyes as a way to form social bonds with other people.

Still a prostitute, Firdaus becomes her own boss and eventually has a beautiful home and expensive things. One night, a client named Di'aa tells her that she is not a respectable woman, and Firdaus is devastated. She gives up her nice apartment and beautiful things, moves into a shack, and begins working as an office assistant. There, she realizes that the life of an assistant is in many ways worse than the life of a prostitute. Saadawi says in an interview given to *'Race and Class' Journal*:

There are two conflicts. Under the feudal system a woman's labour is under the control of the man and under capitalism she is under the control of the factory owner. Third World women are caught between these two oppressions and the contradictions which are thrown up. In the view of these double oppressions and contradictions, we cannot take a middle class position when we begin to discuss the position of Third World women. Because the nature of the oppression of every Third World woman, she carries within her the seeds of a working-class consciousness (181)

Later Firdaus meets a man named Ibrahim, and falls in love with him. They have a relationship, and Firdaus begins to feel that the world is not so horrible, until she discovers that Ibrahim has become engaged to the boss's daughter. Firdaus leaves the company and becomes a prostitute again. She became very expensive and very popular then. Many powerful men come to

her, and she turns some of them away to prove that she has power over her own body, and because she despises them.

Yet not for a single moment did I have any doubts about my own integrity and honour as a woman. I knew that my profession had been invented by men, and that men were in control of both our worlds, the one on earth, and the one in heaven. (99)

Ibrahim comes to her again, and she realizes he never loved her; rather, he just wanted free sex. A pimp tries to take over Firdaus's life, and for a little while, she lets him. Then they fight and she kills him. Shortly after that, Firdaus meets an Arab prince who takes her home and offers her \$3,000. She sleeps with him, rips up the money, and slaps him. Terrified, the man calls the police. They come and arrest Firdaus. Firdaus is tried and sentenced to death. She is, she tells Nawal, just waiting to die, because she is excited to go somewhere new. She knows that the men who sentenced her want to kill her because they're afraid of the truth she has to tell, and not because they're afraid she'll kill again. Physically and verbally battered, Firdaus retains nonetheless her capacity for agency, which manifests itself in a rage that culminates in the scene of the murder. This is a cathartic moment that helps her realize that anger sets her free to re appropriate language, to face "the savage, primitive truths" (51) and to be beyond fear and death. Firdaus finally names herself: she refuses to be a victim, and is willing to be a criminal because she prefers, as she puts it "to die for a crime I have committed rather than to die for one of the crimes you have committed" (52).

Once she finishes her story, police come to her cell and take her away to be executed. The author leaves the cell and is ashamed of the world. Everywhere she looks, she sees lies and unhappiness. As the author drives away from the prison, she thinks about running people over with her car, but she doesn't. She realizes that Firdaus is braver than she is. When Saadawi braids her identity with that of Firdaus because of their shared experience of pain and betrayal, she gives us a powerful example of a kind of feminine textuality I have called *metissage*, a dialogical hybrid that fuses together heterogeneous

elements. (55) We are here in the presence of a mutual and reciprocal “naming” which effaces differences in order to point to an essential truth: that beyond their social differences, the two women share a nominal essence qua excised women. (56) Since this sexual mutilation is the most important cultural signifier of femininity, “biological” feminity becomes a culturally determined fact, linked to specific local practices.

The subjugation of women is a plague that cuts across African societies. This social evil of marginalization that cuts across an entire continent calls for a concerted effort from women around the world to join hands together and fight for their liberation. Since suffering is a common denominator that they share together, they need to unite and see to its stoppage. Firdaus eventually succeeds in protesting against society and making her voice heard of all of the injustices that are present within it. She faces the ultimate consequence for it, but nevertheless demonstrates the ability of women to deracinate conventional social order. The descriptions Firdaus gives of the many deceiving or controlling eyes in the novel prove that she was not able to affiliate with these other characters. In contrast, the affiliation that is formed with the psychiatrist in the end of the novel allows Firdaus to battle for freedom from the oppressive forces that plague her society.

Woman at Point Zero exemplifies the possibility of resistance to hegemonic pressures and to the cultural master narrative. It is emblematic of the issues raised by Gayatri Spivak in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” that discusses the problem of the voiceless other, the question of objective truth, and the name of the other ‘woman’. Saadawi’s work can be used as an example of the self-reflexive questioning that can make feminist criticism sensitive to the way scholarly discourse names “the other woman” and appropriates her voice, while at the same time insisting on the need for a universalist perspective on the global condition of oppression of women. The association between the educated researcher and the “uncommon criminal” changes the terms of the equation between “self” and “other” or “subjective” and “objective,” enacting a transfer of values and feelings, locating the practice

of writing at the intersection of multiple forms of knowledge. Saadawi's text contrasts and collapses the language of patriarchy and the language of the body, bringing into focus those aspects of the narrative that allow for its re-definition as a self-portrait. By appropriating Firdaus's voice and allowing inter subjective communication to occur between them, Saadawi raises the hope that it is possible to come to an acceptable compromise regarding interpretation and intervention in the local practices of African Islamic societies. If autobiography or life narrative is the means by which African women represent themselves, then to understand their subjective experience of excision, and its affective and cultural ramifications, we need to look for traces of these preoccupations in their texts, and to listen to their silence. In her Author's Preface, Saadawi states:

Firdaus is the story of a woman driven by despair to the darkest of ends. This woman, despite her misery and despair, evoked in all those who, like me, witnessed the final moments of life, a need to challenge and to overcome those forces that deprive human beings of their right to live, to love and to real freedom. (5)

Although Saadawi is emphasizing women issues, especially basic rights of women to survive, these could hardly be taken for granted in Sadat's Egypt. What makes the story compelling is the highly personal tone, the erosion of distance between the authorial self and the first person narration of Firdaus. Indeed, if Saadawi is first drawn to Firdaus because of her exceptional nature, the focus soon shifts to their shared experience of oppression as women in a patriarchal culture. What the text puts in motion is a strategy of displacement and identification between two women who are "objectively" very different from the point of view of their respective social classes, their education and profession, but whose intimate experiences as women are uncannily similar. The narrative suggests that the universal can only be known through the particular or the personal, that it is the concrete subjective experience of this 'other woman' that allows the narrator to relate to her as woman and sister, to give her voice and to make her eternal through her writing.

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Feasting on the Subaltern: A Study of Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*.

Ashok A R

Among myriads of possible readings and re-readings of texts or contexts, the articulation of subalternity in different cultural texts is one of the most disturbing aspects. Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* foregrounds subaltern subjectivity in the geographical terrains of the Orient and the Occident. J.P. Tripathi opines that "The theme of equality of Fasting, Feasting, equanimity between pleasure, pain, happiness and unhappiness, as indicated by the title, pervades the whole novel" (19). But the actual theme of the novel is not "the equality", but the disparity between "fasting and feasting". The "fasting and feasting" binary plays at different levels in the novel. In the first part of the novel set in India, MamaPapa, Arun and Aruna are on the "feasting" side and Uma and Anamika are on the "fasting" side. In the second part of the novel, Mr. Patton and his son Rod go on "feasting" in their unique way and even Mrs. Patton who freely indulges in her whims and fancies by purchasing cartloads of items from the mall, by basking and bathing almost naked and by driving her car almost recklessly stand on the side of "feasting". Melanie and Arun along with the marginalized in America are on the "fasting" side. They happen to be on the "fasting" side because of their incompatibility with the American ways of a consumeristic life. The larger frame of the novel is in the Indian background and the smaller frame is set in America. Arun, the character common in both the halves is the main link between the two different frames of the novel. The first half tells the rather day-to-day life of Arun's family in India. The second half tells the uneventful life of a family in America with whom Arun stays during his summer vacation. In fact Arun finds it impossible to escape from the web of familial ties either in the East or in the West. Pamela Oliver writes: "Fasting, Feasting, as the editors' blurb points out, 'cuts right to

the heart of family life in two different cultures’ – an apparently close-knit family living in a provincial town on the Gangetic plains and a plastic representation of it in the suburbs of Massachusetts” (247). A plastic representation of life is felt in America because the narration is primarily the reflection of Arun who looks at life in the USA with unusual self-consciousness which underlines the difference between the two cultures. In fact the novel apparently is a simple but charming description of domestic chores both in India and in America. The third person narrative is in a very composed style and the story ends at a point of time which is yet another ordinary moment.

The patriarchal society “feasting” on the Indian womanhood is the most disturbing theme in the Indian scenario. In the family of Arun, his Papa always commands a superior position. The ceremony of giving Papa peeled and carefully segmented orange globules is given in the novel in detail. Mama takes care to feed him in a ritualistic manner. The fingerbowl and napkin which he alone possesses are symbols of his status. Papa is very careful even after his retirement to get his clerk twice a week and to keep his office open because absence of these vestiges of his authority and power would affect his status in his family as well as in their town. Anything which questions him was either suppressed or left unnoticed. He even pretends not having heard Uma’s comment that their old Rover car is going to stop for once and all.

Uma’s Mama becomes once again pregnant when Uma and Arun reach the age of puberty. She feels ashamed and wants to terminate it, but her Papa doesn’t like the idea because he doesn’t want to miss the chance of getting a male child. When at last he really begets a boy, he is so excited that he goes to declare it to everyone at home by “leaping over three chairs in the hall, one after the other, like a boy playing leapfrog” (17) and “Uma never overcame her awe of that extraordinary event, really far more memorable than the birth itself” (17).

Deepsheekha Kotwal and Priyanka Gandotra consider that Fasting Feasting “relates the disastrous attempts of an Indian daughter to leave her parents’ home and achieve independence without marriage. Her parents, referred

to as the indivisible unit MamaPapa, barely notice their daughter's aspirations as they lavish all of their attention on their only son" (92). The importance given to a male successor in the Indian society is evident and Papa's elation is beyond words when the third child happens to be a son. Arun's mother also often behaves herself as if inflated with pride that she has delivered the ultimate and achieved triumph in life. Arun, the son is given all priorities at home. He always gets special attention and care in matters of food, education and all other needs. It is notable that meat, the English language and cricket are considered by Arun's Papa as the vestiges of colonial discourse structure. Arun is fed, much against his will, with all nutrients like milk, boiled egg and meat broth.

This clearly shows how male children enjoy a privileged position than the female children in the Indian society. Angelia Poon observes that, "Uma is the one on whom Arun is made to 'feast' in a macabre act of consumption that is echoed on different levels in various incidents throughout the novel" (39). Actually it is for the sake of Arun that Uma stops her school education. Arun, the boy, was to be given the very best of education. The girls are after all raised for marriage:

If one word could sum up Arun's childhood or at least Uma's abiding impression of it that word was 'education'. Although this was not what loomed large in the lives of his sisters – who were, after all, being raised for marriage, by Mama, competently enough, or at least as well as she could manage considering the material at hand - if there was one thing papa insisted on in the realm of home and family, then it was education for his son: the best, the most, the highest. (118) Further Arun was to get "Proper attention" (30) unlike the girls. His Mama often tells that in her days girls in the family were not given special delicacies which were reserved for the boys (6). Uma's mother tells her: We are not sending you back to school, Uma. You are staying at home to help with Arun" (18). Uma serves her father with peeled orange segments and serves her brother with various nutrients, but she does not and must not partake of such delicacies solely due to her gendered existence.

It is also notable that Arun's Papa believes that meat, cricket and the English language were "inextricably linked" with progress (32) and it is a fine example of the Eurocentric knowledge that the western education imparts. The contemptible practice of dowry system in India, among all gender discriminations, is prominently projected in the novel. MamaPapa, for the sake of Uma, responds to a marriage advertisement in which the Goyals a merchant family sought proposal for their only son. They demand a big dowry so as to complete their upcoming palatial building. Uma's parents give the dowry in advance. But later the boy's father informs them that the boy changes his mind. He wants to pursue his higher studies and the marriage is indefinitely postponed. The dowry is already spent on the building and they are not responsible for the boy's change of mind. Later they come to know that the Goyals had played such tricks with others also. Then they give Uma in marriage to a man, much older to Uma. He was married earlier but without issues. He is not even interested in the marriage ceremony and dumps her in his joint 5 family. In fact his second marriage is solely for an additional dowry which would help his ailing business.

Uma's cousin Anamika's case is much more shocking. Anamika is extremely beautiful, very studious and wins a lot of awards in her academic pursuits. She gets a rare scholarship to Oxford which she is forced to reject in favour of a marriage. In fact studying abroad was generally considered as a matter "...where only the most favoured and privileged sons could ever hope to go!" (68) as the novel reveals.

Anamika's scholarship brings to her, a groom who has been searching for an equal match for him. He too has won many awards in studies, but he is too preoccupied in his own academic achievements to take care of any other things in this world. He is also much older than Anamika. After the marriage, Anamika is completely entrenched in the kitchen and is regularly beaten up by her mother in law. Anamika's case clearly shows how gender discrimination denies mobility to the less privileged gender and how they end up as damaged pieces. After twenty-five years of tormenting marriage, the news comes that Anamika died of burns. According to her mother-in-Law's version she heard

some whimpering sound in the kitchen at five in the morning and she found Anamika set ablaze and charred to death. But some of the neighbour's version is that probably her husband and the mother-in-law in collusion "tied her up in a nylon sari, poured the kerosene over her and set her on fire" (151). The description of marriages in India in the novel, gives a gruesome picture of the burden of dowry and ill-treatment of the weaker sex.

Uma and Anamika are better understood in the context of their families and their fate very well reflects the larger cultural malaise in the patriarchal Indian society. Usually girls are sent away from their natal families and they struggle to be a member of their conjugal family. But even that is denied in the cases of Uma and Anamika. Both the characters are struggling under the imposing male authority. In fact both discursive and material spaces are denied to both of them. Even Uma's uncalled for queries and comments about Anamika's letter of scholarship are her ways of resistance to the patriarchal structure around her. Anamika is married to such a plight not because her parents are financially poor. It is a case in which all the people follow the custom of neglecting the brilliance of the female, wherever it is possible, to maintain the male dominance intact. It is mainly because of the traditional role of the male as the earning member in the family and the female as the house-keeper and assigned person to deliver and nurture the progeny to keep the lineage of the male continue. J.G. Masilamani in "Feminism in Anita Desai", in *Indian Fiction in English*, says: The Indian husband's total preoccupation with himself, his image as a "provider", around whom the wife orbits effacing herself completely as she ministers to his needs is the one that has divine blessing and society's sanction. Its corner stone for the edifice of patriarchal society and within this structure any disagreement seems blasphemous. (169) Enduring continuous physical torture, Anamika becomes unable to deliver the progeny and she becomes a damaged object which is to be disposed off and later she is immolated. Thus Uma and Anamika share the lot of the weaker sex who are denied mobility in life. Mira-masi attains a certain degree of mobility in her spiritual realm, but she, like Uma, has a stasis in the material realm and and that make them "partners in mischief" (44). The narrative of the widowed

women, Uma and Mira-masi together with the cases of Anamika give a strong feminist paradigm for the first frame of the novel.

Both Uma and Anamika are denied mobility by virtue of their gender. Uma remains static when she is not allowed to pursue her education, when she is not allowed to accept an offer of employment, when she is not allowed to go to Bombay for her eye check-up and when she is not allowed even to meet her well-wishers like the nuns of the convent. Similarly, Anamika is not allowed to go to Oxford even after getting a prestigious scholarship for the same. Both are entrenched in their respective families in a cruel patriarchal society. Angelia Poon stresses on the “dearth of opportunity” “...Uma faces in terms of formal education, travel, and economic independence.” (34) and opines that “The novel underscores the fact that questions about access to mobility and consumption (of food, culture, knowledge and so forth), and how such access varies for gendered subjects in a globalized world,...” (34-35).

The novel shows a patriarchal society in the West also, but definitely gender discrimination is shown as less detestable than that in India. In fact there is a slight difference in the second frame set in America, in the sense that the “feasting” there is mainly at the cost of the alterity and the marginalised rather than specifically on the women.

Arun in the Massachusetts University campus shows the other side of the globe. But it is to be noted that his gaze is an “appalled gaze of increased self-consciousness and a heightened sense of difference” (Angelia Poon, 43), rather than “... the curious, delighted, or all-consuming gaze of the consummate cosmopolitan traveler; the urbane polish of a global citizen of the world, who glides in and out of different societies...” (Angelia Poon 43). There, Arun meets with the callousness of the other university students. His own room-mate smokes endlessly in the room to cause fresh outbreaks of asthma for Arun. The corridor of the hostel is fully covered in graffiti.

The campus is almost reverberated with blaring music and garbage bags are filled up with beer cans and the lot. Mr. Patton is shown as a typical American who refuses to accept alterity. He is a missionary whose only interest is eating

barbecued meat. His son Rod is concerned only with body building and selects a course in football. Mr. Patton's daughter, Melanie, eats only chocolate bars, biscuits, peanuts and cookies. She is always sick and sullen in the midst of all "feasting". Many a times Arun finds Melanie nauseating, thrusting her fingers down her throat and vomiting and perspiring badly. Mrs. Patton is a lady who has a bit of interest in everything including vegetarianism. She is after such fancies rather than running her family and the lack of parental care makes Melanie on the "fasting" side. When Arun and Miss West remind Mr. Patton that Arun is a vegetarian, he still doubts how anyone would refuse a good piece of meat. Mrs. Patton reminds him of the Hindu religion which considers cow as a sacred animal. Mr. Patton is disappointed on such moral feebleness and considers a cow as a good red meat. Arun is fed up with Mrs. Patton who offers raw vegetables to Arun, thinking that raw vegetables are the natural food of a vegetarian. Arun finds it difficult to say that this is not the food that figured in his culture. Mr. Patton continues to broil, grill, fry and roast his steaks, ribs and chops. He simply pretends not to see and hear the vegetarian ways of Arun and Mrs. Patton which he could not approve. Arun remembers, how back home, his father also uses the same patriarchal tactics when he sees any challenge to his authority.

Uma, Melanie and Mrs. Patton are almost neurotic characters who could very well be included in the list of Anita Desai's characters of psychic maladies. S.P. Swain in his "Tradition and Deviation – A Study of Anita Desai's Novels" writes:

In dealing with psychic maladies, Anita Desai strikes a new note. Her characters suffer from various complexes and mental diseases, which impede the healthy growth of their personality. A particular trait in a character, a tragic flaw develops into a psychic malady making the character neurotic and hysterical which in turn breeds a morbid and contrite temperament. (115)

But in the case of Melanie and Mrs. Patton, it is the lack of care and love that make them neurotic, rather than any of the tragic flaw in their

characters. Mrs. Patton and Melanie also give an insight about the consumeristic craze and the aftermath of over indulgence. Anita Myles opines that “both Mrs. Pattons and Melanie find the western environment to be stifling and phlegmatic. The excessive freedom in the west had induced the overdosage, and then the ultimate repulsion led to another kind of suffocating environment” (31). Melanie’s eating habit is a sort of escapism from her frustrations especially out of a lack of real care and munching these things is part of her rebellion. Mrs. Patton stuffs her cupboards with all sorts of things but Melanie bursts out: “Why can’t you make what I want? What do you think we all are – garbage bags you keep stuffing and stuffing?” (207). T-shirts declaring “Shop till you drop” (184) and “Born to shop” (183) are symptomatic of the consumeristic craze. Abundance leading to wastage is the key-word regarding food and eating habits of the main-stream Americans and such feasting may be associated with other material pleasures as well.

The difference is alluded by Desai already in the title of her book: the words “fasting” and “feasting” can stand for the two parts of the novel respectively: the first is situated in India (the country of “fasting”, which refers not only to the religious aspect, but also to an unwilling “fasting” of the many poor of the country) and the second in the United States (the country of “feasting”, abundance). In India, right from declining red meat or even ordinary meals to rejection of material pleasures amount to a sort of fasting. Both the West’s consideration of the cow as merely good red meat and the East’s consideration of the cow as a sacred animal seem to be extreme stances rooted in quite different cultures. Here “homes” still remain distinctly divided. Arun finds it extremely difficult to consider the US as his second home. In Aun’s case it is more an insider/outsider syndrome. Mr. Patton and Melanie evidently remind him that he is an outsider. The words “fasting” and “feasting” evidently show the bicultural pulls which are evident in the novel. : Further, pedestrians who generally belong to the middle class or lower middle class category do not seem to have a chance in the country: “A car drives up suddenly behind him, very close, as if with intention. He [Arun] climbs hastily onto a grass

verge. It passes. Why had it done that? Are pedestrians against the law in this land of the four-wheeled?" (161). Among myriads of curious stickers, number plates, warnings on the cars, Arun observes a sticker pasted on a car which reads: "Guns, Guts and God / Make America Great" (182) / and that seems to define the country.

Consumerism and its craze for commodities are marked in Mrs. Patton who always makes her shopping big feats by reading out "the labels on the cans and cartons with the high seriousness...for their relative food value and calorific content" (183). Arun gets perplexed "to find these stores and the attendant parking lots, bank 11 out-lets, gas-station, Burger Kings, Belly Delis and Darkin 'Donuts..." (18). The attitudes of Arun and Mrs. Patton are juxtaposed: When they enter the Food mart, she relaxes: it is as if she has come home. She tosses packets and cartons into the shopping cart light heartedly. It is Arun who grows tense, finds his throat muscles contracting, tight with anxiety over spending so much, having so much. Wondering if this is how Melanie feels and if it is what makes her sick. (208)

Once when Mrs. Patton invites Arun for shopping, he pleads with her to let the food in the fridge be finished first and she was astonished at the idea and reminded him of a probable case of emergency some felt at home. Mrs. Patton's daughter Mealnie always stuffs her mouth with chocolates, pea-nuts and cookies and yet she is very anemic. She very often runs to the toilet and vomits by pushing her fingers down her throat to escape from her illness and that is almost symptomatic of the West's habit of avarice and over-indulgence. Chandra Chaterjee opines that the novel shows that "the Americans are bound by the illusion of freedom and the pioneer's dream of an eternally golden west" (219) and he adds that "Desai's sardonic comment is that they [Americans] live in a lonely vaccum of luxuriance" (219). It is this "vaccum of luxuriance" that makes Melanie retches into the toilet. Racial discrimination by the white people towards the people of "other" races is hinted in the novel, although in an indirect manner. Mr. Patton simply refuses vegetarianism as the natural inclination of some people when he learns that Arun is a vegetarian

and he remarks: “Just can’t see how anyone would refuse a good piece of meat, that’s all. It’s not natural” (166). When Mrs. Patton explains about the Hindu religion and the way it treats cows, Mr. Patton refuses to accept such possibilities: “Mr. Patton gives his head a shake, sadly disappointed in such moral feebleness, and turns the slab of meat over and over. ‘Yeah, how they let them out on the streets because they can’t kill ’em and don’t know what to do with ’em” (166). Melanie, the teenage American girl shows her contempt towards Arun so many times. When Arun stays at Melanie’s house as a guest, she simply refuses to talk with him and Arun feels often dejected over it: “Stooping ever further – this is only the latest in his many failed attempts to involve Melanie in speech . . . (164). On another occasion, when Melanie becomes aware of Arun looking at her watching T.V., “She turns her pale face towards him and even in the darkness he can read its expression: “Get out, it says, and he does” (188). On yet another occasion Arun wakes up at night hearing some sound and finds Melanie vomiting over the toilet bowl. When a concerned Arun looks at her, “She pushes her hair back from her clammy forehead and glares at him. ‘Go’way, she hisses. ‘Get lost’ ” (189). Yet again, when Arun makes some Indian food in his first attempt at cooking, Melanie’s reaction is notable: “Eeeuuuh, you call that food?” Melanie asks furiously, as if outraged by the very idea. ‘I call that shit! ’ ” (195). These anecdotes explain the natural attitude of the white people against the “other” races and their ways. Angelia Poon in *In a Transnational World: Exploring Gendered Subjectivity, Mobility and Consumption in Anita Desai’s Fasting, Feasting*, writes:

The methods of capital accumulation and the related process of consumption in a globalized world vary significantly for different individuals and groups of people, many of them are excluded or restricted from participating in certain circuits of exchange depending on the different permutations of gender, class, race, sexuality and nationality which determine access to power and privilege. (33)

The novel very well shows how capitalism and the associated consumeristic craze permeate across the globe in myriad forms and relegates the farmers, labourers, women and children into deprivation. The occident in the novel is America and here Eurocentric and US-centric become interchangeable. The novel gives family life in the two different frames of the Orient and the Occident. Here the protagonist faces an insider/outsider syndrome as he never considers the US as his second home and the homes always remain distinctly divided. But the “feasting” on the subaltern in both the Oriental and the Occidental frames is what makes the novel really problematic.

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The Dancing Divas of Bollywood: Indian Feminine Sexuality and the New Indian Woman through Hindi Item Songs

Vibhu Vasudev

Indian cinema is unique in as much as it is the only film industry in the world that makes such elaborate song and dance of its music. No mainstream Hindi film is complete without a minimum of six songs, accompanied by the customary portrayals of romantic outings in between the green valleys and bushes of nature, the heroines drenched to the bone in rains, marriage celebrations in swirling *ghagra-cholis* and gym-toned bodies breaking into vigorous displays of color and calisthenics. Indian filmmakers do not need an excuse to have a diversion in their storylines with songs and guest appearances. During the earlier times, when cinema as a medium of mass communication had only started to flourish and became a part of the entertainment spectrum in the early 90s, there used to be some application of thought even for a musical interlude. But ever since films have started having ‘*Item Numbers*’, the good old reasoning of songs and dances serve as a bridge to link disparate scenes and taking the narrative forward has been cast away. Definitely there are exceptions to this practice, but song-less films are few and far between the commercial mainstream Indian cinema. The idea is to ostensibly provide a dramatic relief to the audience, but in truth, it is to sustain a steady stream of revenue from the music industry- verily the life-support medium of the Industrialized Indian cinema- ‘Bollywood’, ever since sound entered Indian cinema with *Alam Ara* in 1931.

The use of song and dance as an integral formal element in theatric presentation is a factor running through all traditional Indian dramatic shows.

Hindi films follow the footsteps of the ancient *âcârya*¹, *Bharata muni*², in many matters of form and spirit. The dramatic tradition of Bharata has entered deep into the culture of India and still unconsciously shapes and conditions the theatric responses of Indian audiences and even many formal elements of the so-called ‘formula’³ films of Bombay. Bharata observes that drama without songs is bound to remain ineffective and unevocative.

Dance too was an essential element in Bharata’s theater as much of the acting as stylized and more or less dance- like. Holding in comparison to Hindi cinema, dance indeed has a major role to play to increase wholesome entertainment value to the viewers. According to Bharata, dance should not be incorporated into situations where a girl is jilted by her lover or is undergoing the pangs of separation from him or wherein they’ve just quarreled. Bharata prescribes expressions of love in joyful dance that should be used to express love between man and woman.

In movies, dance is also presented as a kind of show within the show. Often the heroine is an accomplished dancer and is made to appear in a stage show or made to dance amidst an audience that is asking for more. The hero is among the viewers and then love dawns. Such scenes have their prototypes in ancient plays and the most well- known instance is Malavika’s dance before Agnimitra in the second Act of Kalidasa’s *Malavikagnimitram*. Such a show within a show was technically known as *Natyayita*. *Abhinava Gupta* explains *Natyayita* as an occasion in the play where some of the protagonists themselves become audience to some action or spectacle within the play itself, giving the analogy of a ‘dream within a dream’. The staged dances that are shown in Hindi films are essentially another form of *Natyayita*. (Mukund Lath 123)

Song sequences are used for several purposes in films. Over the years, directors have worked in different ways to incorporate songs into the narrative. Sometimes a song is diegetically part of the film. Other times it is used as a dream sequence, or as the lovers’ fantasy. Sometimes they function to allow an expression of feeling that cannot be articulated otherwise in the inevitable declaration of love (Rao 57).

The culture of *item* numbers is nothing new to the world of Bollywood. From the times of Cuckoo Moray and the Cabaret queen Helen, towards the late 1970s, when the fearless dancer or the vamp of the early Hindi cinema and the Heroine merged to one, the Bollywood item numbers have had a phenomenal role to play not just in the evolution of the musical genre of Hindi cinema but also in setting standards of feminine sexuality for the Indian women. The genre of item numbers are not just the most convenient vehicles that aid in film promotion, but the increasing popularity of the songs interspersed with Indian and Western dance genres has emerged as a uniquely powerful marketing technique, and expression of feminine sexual desires through articulation of female bodies Rao 57).

These item numbers which construct a new identity of the Indian women by showcasing the female bodies as a platform of sexual and erotic fantasies and the excessive eroticism displayed by scantily dressed women in these item songs has been facilitated by numerous factors, of which the most significant are; the liberalization of censors to make Bollywood films more accessible within the nation as well as abroad, the music- television revolution that started in the early 1990s or the MTVization of music industry according to S.Rao, the worldwide popularity of the Indian(Hindi) music videos garnered with the political- economy of making music videos in India and the Industry- status granted to Hindi cinema, with the aim of rescuing the industry from the massively corrupt underground operations of films during 1998.

Historically, Item numbers have been an essential part of Bollywood but within Indian cinema as a whole, the origin of the term remains obscure. An item song is typically an erotic dance performance, which has no direct connection with the plot of the movie and it involves a songstress dressed in revealing outfits, singing a song containing suggestive lyrics (Rao, 76). But the masses also commonly confuse between an item number and a song of desire. Considering some of the classic songs that have survived over the years such as “Pyaar kiya to Darna kya” from *Mughal-e-azam* (1960) or the song “Inhi Logon Ne” from *Pakeezah* (1972), they are quintessential songs of

desire but often referred to as item numbers, just because the performing subject of the song is a woman dancing and due to the presence of a performing space within the song sequence. This understanding started to erupt, when a love song or a song of longing can be filmed as raunchy and erotic, due to excessive raunchiness, the need for the presence of a performing space was also deliberately forgotten over the time. Songs such as “Kaate Nahi Kat te” from *Mr. India* (1987), “Dhak Dhak Karne Laga” from the movie *Beta* (1992) and “Tip Tip Barsa Pani” from the movie *Mohra* (1994) are ideal examples. But these songs are not typically items numbers, as an integral part of item numbers is the presence of a performing space within the frame of the song and a significant crowd that will be cheering and dancing around the main dancer or performer to create a heightened entertainment value.

The historical Hindi film version of an item number would be set either as a cabaret in a nightclub or a performance of Mujra with Qawalli. However, it was in the late 1980s, the tradition of item numbers transformed into a cultural product that got inserted into the narrative of a film without any specific need in the plot. The performance styles started varying and the earlier notion of item numbers being the space exclusively reserved for the ‘bad girl’ or the sex worker or the courtesan, transformed into a space of female sexuality and vigor.

The female actors, singers, and dancers have played a key role in the commercial success of Bollywood products through objectifying their bodies in item songs. The racy imagery and sexually provocative lyrics in item songs traditionally feature a nightclub dancer or a courtesan posturing for the male gaze, and serves merely as an eye candy. Accordingly, a sexy and accessible woman is commonly labeled as an ‘item’ in Hindi slang.

Item songs were popularized by Meena Kumari, Madhubala, and Vyjayanthimala, the early unstoppable juggernauts and female icons of Hindi Cinema. Songs of Meena Kumari such as, “Dhoor Koi Gaye Dhun Ye” from *Baiju Bawra* (1952), “Chalte Chalte” and “Thade Rahiyo” from *Pakeezah* (1971) are considered to be epitomes of classical Indian womanliness. “Aaiye

Meharbaan” from *Howrah Bridge* (1958), “Pyaar Kiya to Darna Kya” and “Mohe Panghat Pe” from *Mughal-e-azam* (1961) are milestones not only in the career of Madhubala but also within the Hindi film music industry. Songs of Vyjayantimala from the movies *Naya Daur* (1957), *Amrapali* (1966) and *Jewel Thief* (1971) such as “Ude Jab Jab Zulfen Teri” and “Hoton Mein Aisi Baat” are songs that are tuned into during almost all the celebrations and festivals. The Hindi movies of the 1950s and 60s were filled with the semi-classical dance performances of these leading ladies alongside the cabaret numbers of Helen which went on to sustain for the ensuing two decades. In 1970s and 1980s, Rekha, Hema Malini, Zeenat Aman, and Parveen Babi introduced new trends by borrowing Western influences into the Indian item song culture, besides commercializing Banjara or tribal music that led to slick choreography. Rekha’s songs from *Umrao Jaan* (1981) and *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar* (1978) gave her contemporary, Hema Malini, tight competition at the box office with her popular movies of the time being *Dream Girl* (1977). Songs such as “Chura Liya hai Tumne Jo Dil Ko” (*Yadon Ki Baaraat*, 1973), “Bhor Bhaye Panghat Pe” (*Sathyam Shivam Sundaram*, 1978), “Raat Baaqi Baat Baqi” (*Namak Halal*, 1982) “Hare Rama Hare Krishna” and “Dum maaro Dum” from *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (1971) are among the famous songs of Parveen Bhabhi and Zeenat Aman in the 1970s. Towards the 80s and 90s, the silver screens were literally on fire, with the enthralling numbers of the divas, Sridevi and Madhuri Dixit. It was that during these two decades of Hindi cinema wherein the queens ruled the industry by undoubtedly overshadowing their male counterparts. And if it was not for the item numbers and other songs which they had done, such an era wouldn’t have happened. Sridevi as the dazzling southern siren in most of the 80s flicks had monumental successes in movies such as *Himmatwaala*(1983), *Mr. India*(1987), *Chalbaaz*(1989), *Chandini*(1989) and *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ki Raja*(1993) whereas Madhuri Dixit was the reigning queen of the 90s with hits such as *Tezaab*(1989), *Sailaab*(1990), *Beta*(1992), *Khalnayak*(1993) and *Devdas*(2002).

Since the 21 century, the Bollywood producers always focused on the inclusion of item numbers as it was one of the major factors of promoting a

film within the nation and internationally. After Bollywood being declared as an industry in 1998, Bollywood studios were seriously concerned about the revenue generating capacity of a movie, and item numbers, being the publicity and marketing vehicle, garnered repeat value, and popularity of a movie prior to its release.

Numerous researchers in the field of feminism and film studies have focused on the objectification of female bodies, hypersexualization, male gaze, selling sexual desires, and use of female bodies to market and sell Bollywood products. Nijhawan justifies the item number trend in Bollywood by connecting it with global trade and tourism, which is an articulation of the logic of capitalistic culture. She argued that the expression of a “free” body would lead to the empowerment of women as item numbers’ connection with music television, hip-hop culture, and global fashion industry would improve the economic condition of women because multinational corporations would provide better jobs to the women inspired by the modern fashion exhibited and popularized through item songs.

Laura Mulvey, a British filmmaker and critic, whose theories are central to new developments of film theory, explains that the eroticization of women on screen comes about through the way the cinema is structured around three explicitly male looks or gazes. There is the look of the camera in the situation where events are being filmed (called the pro- filmic event). While technically neutral, this look is inherently voyeuristic and usually “male” in the sense of a man doing the filming. There is the look of the men within the narrative which is structured so as to make women objects of their gaze and finally there is the look of the male spectator that imitates or is necessarily in the same position as that of the first two looks.

But if women were simply eroticized and objectified, things might not be too bad since objectification may be an inherent component of both male and female eroticism. Men do not simply look as their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession that is lacking in the female gaze. Women receive and return gaze, but cannot act on. From a psychoanalytic point of

view, sexualization and objectification of women is not simply for the purpose of eroticism but designed to annihilate the threat that women pose, possessing a sinister genital organ.

Psychoanalysis agrees that for whatever reason- the fear of castration as propagated by Freud or the attempt to deny the existence of the sinister female genital (Horney 32) men endeavor to find the male genital in women and Feminist film critics have seen this phenomenon of fetishism operating in cinema as well, where in the camera unconsciously fetishizes the female form, rendering it phallus-like, in order to mitigate the female threat. Subsequently, men turn the “represented figure of the cinema itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring than dangerous”. (Mulvey, Visual Pleasure)

Women on the screen have always been male projections. Men either idealize them or spy on them with hostility as they watch. The medium forces women to identify with this male viewer or identify with the woman as the object of his gaze- both essentially desexualizing mental processes according to Mulvey. The dominant cinematic apparatus were constructed by men for a male spectator. Women as women would have been absent from the Indian screens and audience but the question being looked into is who own the gaze? Is the gaze necessarily male or would it be possible to structure things so that women own the gaze?

The camera always represents the male gaze of the patriarchal society thus settling its gaze on the curves. The gaze outside the silver screen always want to ogle those very parts of the female body, so often in item songs, wherein the face is given the least importance- the male gaze on the dancing bodies is purely sexual, neither is it respectful nor is it in the appreciation of the art of dancing- it's lust and the filming tries to catch that essence and present the female body in such a package, wherein the male viewer is made to believe that his lust is accessible. As the cultural practices of India provides us with two kinds of woman- the virgin and the vamp, so does Hindi cinema wherein the vamps are inviting the male lust and permits him for expressing whatever fetishist desires and the virgins are needed to restore the traditional values of

the Indian cultural systems. Thus vamps become the woman whose body Indian men could easily ogle yet not disturbing the societal balance. They go back home to the ideal *bhartiya nari*.

An item girl, in the motion picture context, could be reflected as a woman who trades sex or sexual favors for money, illegal substances or other desirable commodities. Machen (1996) argues that female erotic dancers attract a large number of audiences across the globe; however, they are deprived of employment rights and other social benefits. In the South Asian movie culture, dancing girls have traditionally been linked to the ancient Hindu and medieval Muslim traditions in Bollywood cinematic representations (Deshpande, 2009; Yaqin, 2007). She toils to gratify the male gaze and represents the desires of the oppressed women in the Indian society through her dances, body, and bodily attributes in an effort to gain power and reduce gender inequality (Ansari, 2008; Nijhawan, 2009).

The evolution of Hindi cinema has pushed its early boundaries and accelerated beyond levels, that is becoming almost in par with Hollywood. And studying women in Hindi cinema has always been a field that generated larger level of interest. By observing the evolution of feminine sexuality in Hindi cinema from the cultural and feminist perspective, the female representations on the silver screen has undergone a major transition. Not just in dichotomizing the good and bad woman or in treating the female bodies as mere objects of visual aesthetic pleasure or as a medium for invoking raunchy entertainment to fill the cinema halls, but also in creating an aura of Indian female sexuality, which is fierce and exclusive to Hindi cinema. The Indian *masala* entertainment movies, filled with song and dance sequences, punch dialogues, action scenes and twists have provided the female characters with ample space for establishing themselves, not just on the grounds of acting but also as dancers, performers and even poets in rare cases. Indian cinema is undoubtedly incomplete without its women and the different performances and songs these women have gifted over the period of time. Looking back from the movies of 1950s, “Babuji Dheere Chalna” from the movie *Aar Paar*

(1954), “Pyaar Kiya to Darna Kya” from *Mughal-E-Azam* (1960), “Kajra Mohabbat Wala” from *Kismet* (1963), “Hoton Pe Aisi Baath” from *Jewel Thief* (1967) and “Chalte Chalte Yoon Hi Koi Mil Gaya Hai” from *Pakeezah* (1971) are classic item numbers that may not essentially be raunchy according to the present day idea of a fully-charged item number but songs that primarily speaks of emotions which are expressed through the female body, which is fearless and unforgiving and performed in a space meant for performing within the frame of the song.

The post-independent India have witnessed a number of movies revolving around the lives of the Indian courtesans and the courtesan genre films enjoyed immense popularity over twenty to thirty years following India’s independence in 1947. A courtesan is a cultural figure who is thousands of years in the making, associated with elite traditions and sexual depravity, the courtesan is “richly invested with allegorical possibilities” (Leda: 2008), which makes a great film character. The most popular courtesan movies till date are *Pakeezah* (1971) starring Meena Kumari and *Umrao Jaan* (1981) starring Rekha. Both the movies are renowned for the performances of the female lead along with the phenomenal songs that they comprise, which has actually set standards for the song sequences and performances in upcoming ages of Indian cinema.

They have played a quintessential role in the evolution of an Indian feminine sexuality that is exclusive to the creation of the postmodernist Indian culture which is rebellious and is in the forefront, challenging the dominant paradigms of thought and stereotypes which were blindly being represented in the silver screens over the last decades.

To study the evolution of feminine sexuality and femininity in Bollywood is not a tedious endeavor, as there is a substantial effort undergone in placing the female subject within the genre of Indian musicals and item numbers. Item songs are especially made with the heroines or according to the Bollywood fans parlance, the ‘item’ in mind, even though it is also the major promotional means of most of the mainstream Hindi movies being released over the last

decades. But, studying the representation of Indian masculine sexuality is a challenging topic. Whether it be the elements of eroticism or hypersexualization of the male character present in the frame, the notions of masculine sexuality remain a field which is not explored. The fundamental notion about the Indian male has always been the 'macho male'. As Dr. Hoshang Merchant said, "The MTV culture has done the country's homoerotic culture a disservice. By projecting plastic women into the adolescent male imagination, they deprived them of the solaces of yaraana. The distance and outright hostility between gays and women widened. Gays and women are fighting the same oppressor, 'the macho male'". It can be admitted to a great extent that the media and its masses are able to view female freedom and expression in more liberalistic terms and are gradually accommodating changes in perceptions of the female body and the representation of femininity and sexuality. But being a male character onscreen is always associated with toughness. From the times of Raj Kapoor to Amitabh Bachhan, the portrayal of male characters within the Indian silver screens have remained mostly common, with no much experimentation in the basic elements of character, personality and gestures. They are expected to appear sober and even when actors undertake to experiment themselves with different roles such as those of the transgenders, or of belonging to the alternative sexualities and cross dressers as done by Paresh Rawal in *Tamanna* (1997) or Ravi Kisen in *Bullet Raja* (2013). Being the very few insignificant number of male performances that have tried to experiment, there is no space for the discussion of sexuality. Then the only point of reference becomes the acting standards.

Even while considering male Item Numbers, more than terming these songs with male subjects as 'Item numbers', they are commonly referred to as guest appearances or fun numbers or even 'special appearances' if the mentioned song is being performed by Shahrukh Khan or Hrithik Roshan. Songs such as "Jumma Chumma de de" from *Hum* (1991) starring Amithabh Bachhan as the central figure of a working class population in a factory or Shahrukh Khan in the title track of *Krazy 4* (2009) or the 2011 flicks, *Chillar Party* with Ranbir Kapoor attempting an item number with kids or the song "Subah Hone na de"

from *Desi Boyz*, wherein John Abraham and Akshay Kumar are male strippers of a club in London. The male sexuality that can be noticed in these songs is generally the dominant attitude of patriarchy and the elements of raunchiness and sexual innuendos are brought about in the songs with the help of the female interferences. In most of the item songs that have an included performance space within the setting and is expected to be raunchy and fun filled, the sexual elements of the song are assigned to the women. It's the women who have to exhibit their lust for the male heroes and the male heroes mostly retaliate in a comic way to create wholesome entertainment and bits of comic relief in the song or also appear to be the 'fun guy' on the sets who is not essentially serious in his gestures and behavior but essentially romantic in a manly way with cheesy expressions and postures. The truth being told, the male item numbers never sell as much as the female ones, obviously, as the growing need is always to see the slender and supple navels tightened with short skirts much more than to see the vein bursting biceps. Also, more than the pleasures of visual voyeurism from the female body, there is this audience behavior which usually yearns for more female fierceness and naughtiness than that of the male, as the entire movie itself is mostly dedicated to the male characters of a movie. The songs are spaces wherein the masses normally expect certain level of female desires. And this yearning shall gain optimum satisfaction if these songs are female item numbers, which is also in a way catering to the needs of the mostly misogynistic Indian population that need not be just men but women as well who argue against the freedom of the female body, misconceived by the Indian cultural forms that they've been following blindfolded. Why is it always the female body being objectified and perceived to possess more voyeuristic and aesthetic pleasure than those of men ?

Another aspect of Hindi Film songs is its sensual, seductive, or erotic performance. Indeed, as Kasbekar argues, the song sequences are the vehicle for the bulk of the erotic display of the female body in Hindi films (Kasbekar: 2000). Film songs can be seen as having presented female song/dance performance as mostly something erotic, whether in the explicit sense of cabarets, 'bump-and-grind' dance numbers, sexy item songs, raunchy folk

songs, or in more quietly sensual romantic numbers. In most of the Hindi film songs (excluding perhaps devotional ones), the use of costumes, camera work (revealing or magnifying angles and close ups), movement/ dance, and expression tend to emphasize a sensuous/ erotic view of the heroine that is not found in the main part of the narrative (Dwyer 114).

The Hindi Item songs and its evolution can be observed from the early 1950s. It is therefore imperative to investigate whether or not the use of '*Item girls*' bodies in Bollywood spectaculars is a marketing strategy or emergence of liberated feminine identities. There have been many attempts to theorize the role of pleasure in culture, they vary immensely, but all share the desire to divide pleasure into two ...one of which they applaud, and the other they deplore -John Fiske (114).

Exploring implications of the sexual suggestiveness of item song music videos through the commoditization of the female body is a significant heuristic issue, which has been examined in earlier studies by focusing on the political economy approach towards femininity and its relationship with the body spectacle, followed by an explanation of the recent emphasis on unconcealed expression of eroticism and sexual desires in item songs. Subsequently, the capitalistic logic to use skin videos to publicize Hindi films in the global entertainment market has been analyzed by grouping production, distribution, and consumption patterns of item songs. Most of the studies pertaining to the area of item numbers primarily conclude that female bodies are displayed as accessible sex objects in the item song music videos to reproduce or rupture myths about Indian femininity, and capture male gaze that ultimately translates into economic gains for the capitalists investing in the Indian entertainment industry. But the notion of the new independent woman, who is fearless to express her sexuality and even attempt a process of celebrating her sexuality, is not taken into account.

The general attitude of attaching the 'stigma' of being obscene and derogatory to item numbers, prevails not just within the middle aged section or the women of a film viewing audience, but also amidst the media and academic

circles. Increasing violence against women and the devaluation of Indian culture and womanliness are the commonly mentioned reasons to consider item numbers as derogatory. But it also needs to be understood on how female sexuality is celebrated and counters the popular arguments of creating an accessible female body for the male gaze is in a way contradictory while observing the narrative of these songs and the technical elements of lyrics, setting and their choreography. Indeed, the gaze through which these songs are mostly filmed need not essentially be male but also a female gaze as the trend of male item numbers have started to flourish in the industry and how certain female item numbers are also a pure manifestation of the feminine narcissistic self and sexual desires.

In every item song that keeps releasing, the lyrics become more interesting and powerful. The subtle eroticism of the 60s is nowhere to be found with *Munni* wanting to eagerly get *badnaam* (spoil reputation) for her lover and Sheila to ignite the dance floor in the hearts of Indian men. The latest in the list of Bollywood item songs are *Baby doll* and her *Pink lips*- the dance videos which became more 'westernized' leaving very little difference between the music videos of current icons of pop music, Nicki Minaj and Beyonce. The *Baby doll* video starts with the lines, *you are never too old to play with this baby doll*, the letters being super imposed on the heroine who is in a bath tub. In the video, there is nothing Indian except the language of the song. There is ample booty shaking, zooming on the lips and cleavage. The woman calls herself to be the only *golden baby doll* in this world of trash, thus she claims that she can be the sole desirable thing in this world. The heroine objectifies herself with gold and alcohol, or in the highly exceptional cases, with *tandoori chicken* which needs to be devoured with alcohol¹³. The objectification of female body continues and it goes to new levels by introducing strip dancing in mainstream movies.

The lyrics, dance, crowd within the frame of the song, the groping and stalking and the ways by which the camera focuses the performance, all together recreates a world of male sexual fantasy- wherein it can be claimed that the

woman is stripped down of all her individuality and has turned into a sex object. The term 'item' itself is enough degrading for a woman. And the early film makers, who adopted this method of making item songs with clear intentions of promoting the movie by easier means, used and still use the supposed to be vulgar language and seductive steps.

In these songs, the styling in terms of make- up and costumes and the cinematic elements of lighting and shot taking are the major ways through which the body is arranged with respect to the camera and hence the eye of the audience, the movements of the body, all add up in turning the woman into a spectacle. The gaze is invited to certain parts of the body selectively considered sexual, mainly the eyes, the lips, the breasts, the navel, the buttocks and the legs. Make- up techniques includes brightly colored glossy lips, cleavage rouged darker than the rest of the body and tattoos on the navel can be commonly observed. The costumes are often dazzling with sequins or a metallic finish, brightly colored and revealingly cut. The natural contour of the performing heroines body is frequently distorted with pushup bras, prosthetic breast and/or buttocks padding. And to emphasize these unnaturally distended body proportions, the women are frequently shot either from a low angle, or from a high angle to show the cleavage, navel and the torso. The actions of the women in the dance often mimic sexual movements with numerous shots of just body parts, like that of heaving breasts or pelvic thrusts.

According to Laura Mulvey's analysis in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, "the traditional exhibitionist role in which women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearances coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*". This fragment of Laura Mulvey's analysis is relevant in the context of many songs of desire and love song sequences such as "Tip Tip Barsa Pani", "Tu Cheez Badi Hai Mast Mast", "Kate nahi Kat te yeh din yeh raat", "Dhak Dhak Karne Laga" and so on. In all these sequences, the woman serves as an erotic object on screen for the director and the male audience in the theatre is expected to identify with the director. In "Tip Tip Barsa Pani", Raveena Tandon

is established through a long shot in the distance as the hero approaches her. Her features are indistinct as she wriggles and squirms. As soon as the shot sizes and angles are made direct and close to the performer, the camera preserves the two dimensional nature of her image by rushing in and showing the audience, parts of her body.

The popularity of item songs is definitely because of the way they portray the body of women. The body show helps to catch the deep seated fantasies of men. But it'll be really incorrect to say that any other section of the film viewing audience doesn't enjoy these item numbers. With the global economic boom, the masses have become accustomed to on-demand entertainment and the viewerships of these songs are made far more accessible to all the sections of the population. Definitely the body plays a vital role in attracting the masses to these songs, but it cannot be accepted in this digital era that these item songs still posit the same stigma of offensiveness or derogation. There is ample body show, especially when the former porn star, Sunny Leone is in the film industry, exclusively targeting on doing more songs than movies. But trends have happened to change and the desire for female item numbers exist equally within women as well. Not essentially a sexual gaze but a gaze arising out of the repressive Indian cultural system that forbids women majorly from the spaces of sexual identity, femininity and performance.

Assigning the place of the 'object', the woman is the recipient of the male desire and the passive recipient of his gaze. If the woman is to have sexual pleasure, it can only be constructed around her objectification. It is not the pleasure that comes from the desire for the other but a desire to be desired. (Kaplan: 1983). In the genre of item numbers, the female body is the sexuality providing to be the erotic object for the spectator within the narrative. But within the recent trends, the female tendency is to indulge in a performance to express her never ending narcissism and fearlessness. The entire genre of item numbers within Hindi cinema is undergoing a shift, wherein the female performer no more submits herself to the spectatorship of any male desires or passive gazes but ideally becomes expressive and articulates what she has

been yearning to say in a fierce tone. Starting with “*Munni*” and “*Sheila*” to the latest “*Baby doll*” and “*Desi Look*”, the predominant factor that can be observed is the audience within the song are mostly women than men.

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Digital Space of Indian Folklores: A Study of the Folklores of the Present

Subin Scaria

The digital age has changed the scenario of the traditional art, knowledge, literature and even myths and legends. In the new digital world, the folklore is the most successful and remunerable market because of the collective interest for folklores in the human psyche. Though the postmodern digital age feared the death of the folklores, myths and legends form the urban minds, surviving its modern hurdles with new forms. This paper focuses on how culture industry schematizes Indian folktales, myths and legends into the popular culture especially in Animation and Video game industries.

In “Enlightenment as Mass Deception” Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue that under capitalist society, culture industry works like a factory producing standardized cultural commodities. Through this standardization, culture industry sacrifices the novelty and individuality of the cultural goods. They observe that, “. . . the technology of the culture industry confines itself to standardization and mass production and sacrifices what once distinguished the logic of the work of art” (Horkheimer and Adorno 95). As a result, the consumers have to be satisfied with their only choice to remain passive. Mentioning about the radio, Horkheimer and Adorno point out, “the [radio] democratically makes everyone equally into listeners, in order to expose them in authoritarian fashion to the same program put out by different station” (95). This observation extends beyond radio and are applicable to the diverse cultural products that conquered the culture industry today.

The clutches of culture industry is far reaching. There are some cultural products for everybody and an escape from culture industry is impossible. Through the false generation of needs and urges culture industry spreads its trap for everyone. The boredom of the sameness and the clichés of repetition in these cultural products are hidden with illusionary charms. By creating false needs, culture industry prompts the consumers to be the same old consumers. In this process, the consumer is materialized and categorized on the basis of interest, money, and time.

Everyone is supposed to behave spontaneously according to a “level” determined by indices and to select the category of mass product manufactured for their type. On the charts of research organizations, indistinguishable from those of political propaganda, consumers are divided up as statistical material into red, green and blue areas according to income group. (97)

Another serious argument Horkheimer and Adorno put forward is that “culture today is infecting everything with sameness” (94). Anything that is novel is prohibited in culture industry since profit is the ultimate aim of culture industry. “While already determines consumption, it rejects anything untried as risk. In film, any manuscript which is not reassuelry based on a best-seller is viewed with mistrust” (106).

These observations on culture industry extends to the newer forms of cultural products too. The development in digital technology was a great leap in the production and marketing of cultural goods by opening more advanced and versatile ways. Along with the cultural products, the digital technology unveiled new possibilities in marketizations too. By the emergence of different mediums for the reception of cultural goods, like the internet gadgets, the culture industry expanded its empire of commodification further.

The animations and video games, though the late entrants into the culture industry, could make acknowledgeable impact on popular culture. They use the same age old method of cultural production used by the other producers in the culture industry. With the primary concern on profit, they also create

standardized cultural goods, which are most probably based on an already popular cultural product. They exploit the collective interests of the society and ensure the profitability of their cultural goods through the recreation of folktales and myths and legends. As a result, the culture industry creates fakelore, or “fake” folklores.

Fakelore or pseudo-folklore can be described as the manipulation of folklore in the popular culture. It is “commercial, cleverly packaged, uncritical, and random collections of stories presented as genuine folklore, such as those about Paul Bunyan, Joe Magarac, and Pecos Bill (“Fakelore” 179). The concept was introduced by American folklorist Richard M. Dorson. According to him, fakelore is the “presentation of spurious and synthetic writings under the claim that they are genuine folklore. These productions are not collected in the field but are rewritten from earlier literary and journalistic sources in an endless chain of regurgitation, or they may even be made out of whole cloth” (179). In the culture industry, the creation of fakelore is very common since the profit is the most basic of cultural production. To illustrate the point, three cultural products based on Indian folklores are analysed here; *Asura’s Wrath*, a Sony Playstation3 and Xbox360 video game, *Chhota Bheem*, the number one animation series in India and its spin off *Arjun the Prince of Baali*.

Asura’s Wrath is an interactive anime and is distinct from the traditional models of video games. It was developed by Cyberconnect2 and was published by Capcom in 2012. It is an amalgamation of different genres and different narrative voices.

It is an attempt at a new kind of interactive entertainment, one much closer to living, breathing anime than traditional action game. It delivers a strong that’s up there with the best gaming has to offer in terms of visual spectacle, but in doing so it stays very close to the conventions of film, and rather shies away from actually being a game. (McDonald)

Amalgamation of different folk elements are conspicuous in the game. There are names and places borrowed from Hindu, Buddhist, Greek and Latin mythology. The plot revolves around Gaea, where an internal conflict between

the seven guardian semi-gods leads to treachery, murder and kidnap. Asura, the protagonist or the animated personae of the gamer is one of the seven demi-gods of Gaea, whose wife Durga is killed and their only daughter Mithra is kidnapped. The game is his expedition to unveil the truth behind the murder and kidnap of his wife and daughter. Through eighteen episodes, the mysteries of murder and treason among the guardian semi-gods are revealed.

Gaea, the principal location of the game, has many mythological allusions. According to Greek mythology, Gaea was the personification of Earth and the greatest mother of all. Gaea was described as the giver of dreams and the nourisher of plants (“Gaea”). The word can also be connected to the famous Gaya, a significant landmark in Indian folktales and a contemporary pilgrim centre. According to Hinduism, Gaya is the dwelling place of gods and goddesses. For Buddhism, it is from here Buddha became enlightened and gave his fire sermon.

A plethora of mythical elements from Hinduism are obvious in the game. The name of the protagonist, Asura is the familiar name form Hindu mythology. In Vedic literature, Asura is a demi-god. Durga is also the name of the principal goddess in Hindu mythology. The leader of the seven deities Deus is the Latinized version of Deva in Sanskrit. Chakravartin, the mysterious ruler of Naraka or the realm between life and death is portrayed alike the deities in Hinduism. He has got many hands, among one is adorned with a spear and another with a trisul or trident. He is an androgynous figure with golden attire and halo. The concept of Naraka, a realm between life and death is also used in the game. Among other mythical elements, the use of mantras or chants are significant. The magical power of mantras are used by the demi-gods to curse others or to camouflage themselves in different forms. The chants and their powers are similar to that in Ramayana and Mahabharata. The concept of “rebirth,” conspicuous in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology is also used in the game. Deus, the leader of the demi-gods plans for a “great rebirth.” Finally, “Brahmastra,” the great weapon created by Brahma in the puranas, is a destructive weapon against earth, from which the earth is saved by Asura.

The game also uses many scientific elements. Like a science fiction it portrays the relativity of space and time. Sometimes the player goes back to a thousand years within seconds. There are space expedition and interstellar travel. Along with this, the contemporary world also comes to the game. On the whole, the game threads the sci-fi elements and mythical elements to the contemporary social structure. It creates its own mythical world where the gamer is made the centre figure. Even though, he is one among many, he is the ultimate redeemer and protector.

The game is an apocalypse in the virtual world which reflects our own anthropocentric world. It is in him the future of Gaea and the progress of “game” is poised. The player is ascribed with the ultimate duty to save the (virtual) world. So, the game as a cultural production creates an illusion that the player, the protagonist as the sole redeemer. He is the only good, the only one capable of beating up his enemies, the only perfect family man, the true representative of valour and courage. The player is also made a demi-god, an unattainable form in his real life with supernatural power and perfect physique. This false duty he is ascribed of is the ultimate lure of culture industry. The culture industry makes the consumer always content and docile. Through the game the player has gotten a chance to be the mythical hero, who saves the world (even though virtual) from ultimate destruction.

Through a blending of Greek, Latin, Hindhu and Buddhist mythical elements with sci-fi elements, the game creates a fakelore which has an eeriness of mythical fantasy and the enthusiasm of science. The excitement of hearing the myths and the fervour for folktales is transformed into the experience of gameplay. The collective interest in myths and tales is exploited and marketed into a new platform. As a result, the social value and interest in folklores is transformed through these types of fakelores into a cultural commodity.

Chhota Bheem, is the most popular animation series in India. The animation was created by Raju Chilaka, CEO of Green Gold Animations. It is the magnum opus of Green Gold Animation and started the telecast in 2008 in Pogo TV. The principal theme of the animation is the adventures of a nine year

old boy Bheem and his friends in the imaginary kingdom *Bholakpur*. Bheem, with his saffron colour dhoti and gold ornaments resembles a typical Indian lad. With his extraordinary strength and courage he saves his friends and villagers from trouble. Though not a prince of *Bholakpur*, Bheem is the ultimate problem solver in the region, even helping the king at sometimes. Bheem's friends Chutki, Jaggu, Raju, Indumati are very close to him and they are also part of all his adventures. The animation series has great impact on young minds in India. Based on the principal theme, Bheem saving the people around him from trouble, there were many new episodes and feature films.

Chhota Bheem conspicuously uses many folk elements. The robust and masculine Bheema of Mahabharata is animated into an extraordinarily powerful and adventurous boy. Like a fairy tale, the animation creates an imaginary kingdom *Dholakpur*, and a benevolent king Indravarama. Characters like Chutki, Raju, Jaggu, Bholu and Dolu are the same Indian names that are repeatedly used in many folktales and stories in India. The animals are portrayed as characters with interactive ability and they co-inhabit with the humans. Bheem's close friend Jaggu is a monkey. With traditional clothing and ornaments, the characters in the animation series provide a rural Indian background even though the animation is not about a rural city and folk life.

The animation is the blend of folk and contemporary life. There are many modern elements that are intertwined with the traditionalistic depictions. There is modern school in Dholakpur. Bheem and friends play modern games like Hockey, Football, and even Polo. In one series, the young lad Bheem is dealing with a group of alien invaders on earth ("Chhota Bheem vs Aliens"). There are other episodes like Bheem going to China to save Shaolin Kung Fu ("Chhota Bheem Master of Shaolin") and his journey to the heritage city of Petra ("Chhota Bheem Journey to Petra"). During the successful Mars mission in India there was an episode "Chhota Bheem Mission Mangalyaan". Some other interesting episodes are "Chhota Bheem vs Zombies" based on the popular Hollywood zombie series and "Chhota Bheem vs Salman's Kick" based on the blockbuster movie *Kick* by Salman Khan. From these episodes, it is obvious

that there is a conscious attempt to exploit the exchange value of the already popular cultural commodities in the animation.

Chhota Bheem violates the national and cultural boundaries, the past and the present, the traditional and modern. Here, science, myth, folk and urban come together to create a fakelore of the present. The poising of past with the present and the myth with the science in the typical Indian context is the representation of Indian modernity itself. Indian modernity is the amalgamation of both tradition and modernity. It has science, technology on the one hand, and on the other there are myths, legends and superstitions (Ramanujan). In *Chhota Bheem* the mythical and legendary come to the present. It creates a new “Bheema” of the present, a new legend that is mingled with Indian society. Through creating an Indian modernity in the animated world, the animation mirrors the Indian life and makes the consumers more homely and thus content.

Arjun the Prince of Baali is the spinoff of *Chhota Bheem*. The animation adapts the legendary Arjuna from Mahabharata. He is the prince of Baali and like the Arjuna himself, is excellent in archery. But the animation series is not a cartooned version of Mahabharata. It exploits the great exchange value of myths and legends in the cultural market.

Other than the marketing of cultural products through exchange value, the culture industry triggers other market opportunities. Through creating “new” legends and myths, the culture industry aids the material production and its marketing. Through creating modern and contemporary myths and legend, new brand value is created and this brand value is benefited in the marketing of new products. Like the culture industry itself, the same products are marketed with new brand value and higher profit. The CEO of Reliance Brand Limited, Mr. Darsan Mehta points out the significance of internet in culture Industry and its impact on material production, “internet was actually expanding the toy market and children were now demanding toys on the characters that they were seeing on the entertainment channels in TV or the Youtube (like say a *Chhota Bheem*). ‘Kids now know what to buy’ . . . market was now actually

expanding through the internet and entertainments channels (qtd in Dutta). There are already Chhota Bheem bags, cups, mugs and glasses, pencil boxes, note pads and many other products mainly aimed at children.

Recently, there is a resurgent interest in the Indian myths and folktales by the culture industry. It is mainly used by the animation and video games industry. Culture Industry schematizes these legacies into culture industry and creates new cultural products that fit for the commodity fetishism. Using the camouflage of folklores and exploiting the collective interest for them, these cultural productions market and sell the fakelores they create. Consequently, the culture industry stimulates the material production and helps to market new products. The fakelores and its “mythical heroes” become the brand ambassadors of these cultural commodities. So, it must be concluded that the culture industry today is exploiting the collective interest and folk values of Indian myths and legends. These digital productions, at any rate, are not the reproductions of Indian folktales and myths. Instead they are fakelores made up for the culture industry with the only aim of profit.

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Deciphering the Cultural Frontiers: An Analysis of Marsha Mehran's *Pomegranate Soup*

Duna Liss Tom

Food has played a consistently vital role in human history along with the other crucial rudiments of life. Feasts and food in literature, however, portray more than the mere physical hunger for food and a human triumph over nature in festivals. Each culture, with its own tradition of literature, also maintains its own distinct cuisine and distinct traditional rules that govern acts of eating. The importance of food studies began to be emphasized by various food scholars and philosophers. Each community that gives rise to a distinct literature necessarily also maintains culturally specific rules governing foods that are especially valued and foods that are especially shunned and controlling the contexts in which particular foods may or may not be eaten. Food events, in which food is served, therefore, help define the social organization and cultural identity of the very communities that give rise to distinct literary traditions.

Recent trends in food studies have opened new avenues in literary studies to examine how the use of food imagery and metaphor represents complex ideas and deeper meanings in literature. Literary food studies analyze food symbolism to reflect on cultural identity which includes various issues from social position to sexual desire to gender relations and our ideological positions too. New academic journals are appearing, and culinary history societies are mushrooming. There are lively markets for food related memoirs, essays and dozens of excellent websites devoted to the disciplined exploration of food cultures and styles. As Linda Civitello observes:

What is the meaning of food? We humans live by symbols; they help us make sense of the world, to organize and give meaning to our existence. ... we give food meaning far beyond its survival function. It has been used in rituals to guarantee fertility, prosperity, a good marriage, and an afterlife. It has been used to display the power and wealth of the state, the church, corporations, and a person. (xiii)

In literature, food may represent many different things, such as power or social status, religion, family or relationships, gender, sexuality, wealth, and group identity. In the world of fiction they are a reminder of the material world; they can also serve to remind us of the history (and presence) of exploitation.

During the postmodern times, an endless parade of new food styles, ingredients, techniques, and cuisines have buffeted cooking. Culinary progress however, has in recent years brought us to the discovery of a greater selection of ethnic cuisines. Thus, we have a ‘fusion cuisine’, a pastiche of appropriate styles that throws together ingredients, techniques and flavours. It is a cooking style of juxtaposition, collage, deconstruction, and that most delicious of postmodern terms, ‘transgression’. Regarding the postmodern cuisine Kenneth Gergen says:

Even the traditional categories of cuisine are slowly eroding. In the places of such well-defined genres as French, Italian, and Chinese cooking, one increasingly finds the borders blurred: Ingredients from one genre are combined with those from disparate traditions in new and often interesting ways. Chefs no longer so much “master a tradition” as learn to have a voice of their own. (118)

This paper tries to explore how food helps in framing the identity for individuals as well as society based on Marsha Mehran’s novel. One among the prominent Iranian novelists, Marsha Mehran in her debut novel, *Pomegranate Soup*, elucidate the story of three sisters who escape Iran at the

time of the Revolution and eventually settle in a hamlet in the west of Ireland, where they open the Babylon Cafe. Beneath the holy mountain Croagh Patrick, in damp and lovely County Mayo, sits the small, sheltered village of Ballinacroagh. To the exotic Aminpour sisters, Ireland looks like a much-needed safe heaven. It has been seven years since Marjan Aminpour fled Iran with her younger sisters, Bahar and Layla just before the revolution broke out, and she hopes that in Ballinacroagh, a land of “Mother Nature’s handiwork,” (Mehran 20) they might finally find a home. They at first made their home in London but now they have come to Ballinacroagh in County Mayo, Ireland to start all over again. They take over the lease of a long abandoned pastry shop and open a Persian restaurant in rural Ireland.

Mehran used her own family’s experiences when writing the novel, which includes a number of recipes and combines Persian cooking with Irish living. From the kitchen of an old pastry shop on Main Mall, the sisters set about creating a Persian oasis. The Aminpour sisters want to open the cafe by the first day of the spring. Marjan says:

And it’s *No Rooz*, the Iranian New Year. That’s when Persians start their calendar year, the first day of spring,’ Marjan explained. Originally a Zoroastrian holiday marked by thirteen days of feasting and merriment, No Rooz, or ‘New Day’ is now celebrate by all Iranians. (59)

Soon sensuous wafts of cardamom, cinnamon, and saffron float through the streets—an exotic aroma that announces the opening of the Babylon Café, and a shock to a town that generally subsists on boiled cabbage and Guinness served at the local tavern. “Marjan returned to the kitchen with a new spring in her step” (362). And it is an outrage to the senses of Ballinacroagh’s uncrowned king, Thomas McGuire. After trying to buy the old pastry shop for years and failing, Thomas is enraged to find it occupied—and by foreigners, no less. But the mysterious, spicy fragrances work their magic on the townsfolk, and soon, business is booming. Marjan is thrilled with the demand for her *Red Lentil Soup*, *Abgusht stew*, and *Rosewater Baklava*—and with the transformation in

her sisters. Young Layla finds first love, and even tense, haunted Bahar seems to be less nervous.

Marjan, Bahar and Layla Aminpour escaped from Iran to arrive in England the day the Shah was deposed, seven years before the story begins. Marjan Aminpour is determined to find a safe haven, a home where her youngest sister, Layla, can go to school like any other normal teenager, and Bahar, the middle sister, can stop looking fearfully over her shoulder. A knock on the back door, the shrill of a telephone has the power to throw them back into nightmarish memories. Even the traditional pomegranate soup simmering on the stove is eyed with unease by one of the sisters. In the stand-up-comedian-turned-priest Father Fergal Mahoney, the gentle, lonely widow Estelle Delmonico, and the headstrong hairdresser Fiona Athey, the sisters find a merry band of supporters against the close-minded opposition of less welcoming villagers stuck in their ways. But the idyll is soon broken when the past rushes back to threaten the Aminpours once more, and the lives they left behind in revolution-era Iran bleed into the present. The food transforms the lives of these characters that frequent it.

Infused with the textures and scents, trials and triumphs of two distinct cultures, *Pomegranate Soup* is a richly detailed story highlighted with delicious recipes and is a delectable journey into the heart of Persian cooking and Irish living. We witness “A whole town full of people who could come to taste her fares with questioning eyes and curious tongues” (34).

To the joy of foodies, one thing about which the novel never wavers, however, is the central significance of food. To begin with, Marjan’s cooking practices are based on the Zoroastrian principle that foods have either a cold or a warm quality and can be used to balance the temperament of the eater.

If Layla inspired lust in younger men and youthful dreams in their older counterparts, then Marjan worked her magic over both men and women in a more practical, yet equally intriguing manner. Through her recipes, Marjan was able to encourage people towards accomplishments that they have previously

thought impossible; one taste of her food and most would not only start dreaming, but actually contemplate doing.(245)

This interesting feature would have been integrated more fruitfully with the overarching plot instead of being left simply as an attribute of Marjan's caring nature. However, each chapter also begins with a recipe, and these are not simply pasted there to act as a draw card. Each dish plays an integral part in the developments in that chapter, revealing something about personalities and relationships, evoking memories, inciting action, comforting, strengthening, challenging. They are for *Dolmeh*, *Red Lentil Soup*, *Baklava*, *Dugh*, *Abgusht*, *Gush-e Fil* (elephant ears), *Lavash Bread*, *Torshi*, *Chelow*, *Fesenjoon*, a headache remedy, Lavender-mint Tea, and, of course, Pomegranate Soup, which runs like a red thread through the story.

Each chapter opens with one of Marjan's recipes, then intertwines the recipe into the events that follow. She starts with *Dolmeh* and provide an entry for the readers to the Irish village and her cooking. Despite being born in a land of ancient deserts, she had a great talent for growing plants. Marjan relates her pain to planting herbs. She says: "Perhaps if she planted something here in Ballinacroagh, she could have avoided the anxieties that were now creeping up her spine" (33). The villagers are typical Irish stereotypes: bullying pub owner, narrow-minded gossip, goodhearted priest, lonely widow, disgraced actress turned hairdresser and unwed mother. While the locals resist at first, the magic of Marjan's cooking soon wins them over. But the pub owner, Thomas McGuire, has eyes on the space the Aminpours have leased for their restaurant and vows to sink them. Meanwhile, his dreamy and handsome son falls in love with Layla. As the leisurely soap opera of village life plays out—the priest puts on a play, the lonely widow mothers the sisters, the villain's plot is foiled—readers also learn the heartbreaking story of the Aminpours' flight from Iran. Raising her sisters after their parents' deaths, Marjan was drawn into revolutionary activities by her childhood sweetheart and briefly imprisoned, while Bahar fell under the thumb of a fundamentalist neighbour and married the woman's sadistic son. After a particularly vicious encounter with Bahar's

husband, the sisters fled. Now they have come to Ballinacroagh to hide from Bahar's husband, who had tracked them to London. That stark story sits uneasily alongside the predictable comedy-drama of Ballinacroagh.

Marjan used different foods to narrate the character's behaviour. She combines all her emotions with the recipes. She does not prefer a life outside her recipe book.

In the recipe book filed away in her head, Marjan always made sure to place a particular emphasis on the soup's spices. Cumin added the aroma of afternoon love-making to the mixture, but it was another spice that had the greatest tantric effect on the innocent soup drinker: *siah daneh* – 'love in the midst' – or nigella seed. This modest little pod, when crushed open by pestle and mortar, or when steamed in such dishes as this lentil soup, excites a spicy energy that hibernates in the human spleen. Unleashed, it burns for ever with the unbound desire of an unrequited lover. So powerful is nigella in its heat that the spice should not be taken in by pregnant women, for fear of early labour. (94-95)

Each of the sisters has a well-defined personality, and their strong relations with each other form a warm core for the novel. Compassionate, gifted cook Marjan has taken on mothering responsibilities, seconded by the fearful, brooding Bahar who is plagued by debilitating headaches. Marjan even compares the behaviour of her sisters to the act of rolling *Dolmeh*, the dish she introduced first to the Irish people.

No matter how many times Marjan was reminded of the differences in her younger sisters' personalities, there was nothing like the simple act of rolling *Dolmeh* to show her how poles apart Bahar and Layla really were. Bahar, guided by a stern inner compass, smartly slapped each vine leaf (vein side up) on the chopping board. It was consistent, methodical march that started with a no-nonsense scoop of stuffing with her left hand, followed by a skilled right-handed tuck of the vine leaf....Despite her rather gruff manner, Bahar's method for rolling *dolmeh* was always successful;...Rolling was always where Layla

faltered, for her method was more carefree and altogether too trusting.(42-43)

Marjan analysed Bahar's unpredictable temperament according to the "ancient and treasures Zoroastrian practice of gastronomic balancing, which pitted light against dark, good against evil, hot against cold" (186). Regarding Bahar, she "always looked intense when she worked in the kitchen—as if her life depended on whichever vegetable or herb was being sacrificed on the chopping board before her"(35). Fifteen-year old Layla both resents and understands their over-protectiveness, but her eyes want to fix on the future, not the past: specifically, towards a certain sapphire-eyed boy at school who, her new friends warn her, is the son of town tyrant Thomas McGuire. Still, the losses and the secret that haunt the older Aminpours have cast a shadow over Layla, too. Marsha Mehran doles out their past little by little, increasing one's curiosity about what exactly happened to the sisters in Iran and why they are still anxious.

It is not only the hidden wounds and secret dreams of the Aminpours that are revealed in *Pomegranate Soup*. Through their reactions to the Babylon Café, its food, and the sisters, the townspeople join the story, and the reader is shown the individual changes these encounters trigger. Beneficiaries include the jolly parish priest, a character with a minor role but one that is refreshingly positive and indicative of the sense of inclusiveness that makes *Pomegranate Soup* a feel-good experience.

At the same time it is here, in the balancing act between pain and humour, between intensity and light-heartedness, that the novel's tone wobbles. The few sections in the book that contains any violence are in the flashbacks to the sisters' lives in Tehran on the eve of the Islamic Revolution. There is a grimness to these scenes that contrasts with the rest of the story, but the author does not seem to know how to use this conflict to the narrative's benefit. Since neither high nor low moments are fully utilised the tone sets an even medium that defuses tension and reduces depth of emotion.

Layla connects her love with Malachy to the food:

So this was how love was supposed to feel, Layla thought; like the ecstatic cries of a pomegranate as it realises the knife's thrust, the caesarean labour of juicy seeds cut from her inner womb. Like the gleeful laugh of oil as it corrupts the watery flour, the hot grease bending the batter to its will and creating a greater sweetness from the process—*zulia*, the surgery fried fritters she loved so. Falling in love was amazing. Why hadn't anyone ever told her so? (201)

When Malachy reached Layla's home for the first time, he was seated at the round kitchen table where the young man was alternately discouraged by Bahar's "unresponsive eyes" and heartened by "Marjan's warm food" (314). Mehran again proves how powerful her food metaphors are.

Like Marjan, almost all the characters relate their life to food and its attendant etiquettes.

The combination of cumin, turmeric and nigella seed produced a healthy blush in Estelle Delmonico's face. Transporting her back nearly fifty years, the smell conjured up her first night of wedded bliss in Morocco, where, under a magical crescent moon, and with the smells of the spices rising from the bazaar below their open hotel window, the tumbling, bronzed bodies of twenty-year –old honeymooners Luigi and Estelle made love with all the vigour of their Latin blood. (193)

Father Mahoney was stunned by the erotic mixture of cardamom and toasted almonds, when he reached the cafe. He did not know what had happened to him exactly, but he identified himself "as a very different man from a half-hour ago"(246) due to Marjan's food. He says that:

...this very aroma had once induced a lusty Achaemenian king to declare sixty-nine nights of love-making in his kingdom of honeysuckle fortresses. Concubines were ordered to comb their dark locks with powdered cardamom, as harem slaves drizzled their white belly buttons with a mixture of warm honey and almonds. (155)

The Iranian, Irish, and Italian cultures are depicted only through language and food. Mehran created strong, distinct voices through realistic vernacular from Estelle and the Irish citizens. Mehran explores the sisters' "otherness" further through their experiences with prejudice from the town gossip, close-minded society women, and the town bully. Although the sisters are never questioned about running a business without a man, the town (and author) focuses on their ethnicity. Among earlier instances of direct prejudice, Bahar encounters hatred when she is angrily shunned by the butcher's wife and men in a bar while trying to find Layla one evening.

The commonness of that insult connects with the characters, which mostly represent tropes. Bahar is fully developed and the overall story arc seems to centre on her. Her abusive past resulted in mistrust of men, in addition to severe migraines triggered by fear and any conflict. Because of this, readers will find common ground with Marjan. The narration follows her reliance on general kindness, food, and drinks as attempts to provide comfort. They also counteract her ineptitude of protecting and guiding her sisters. And to ensure that they are accepted in their new place, she uses her peculiar gift of making inspirational meals.

There are several features which revolve around characters that can inject power and emotions into food. Marjan seems to possess a similar sort of quality and she applies cultural inspiration and tradition into her dishes, using certain ingredients and spices for mood. As the oldest sister, she is practical and level-headed. "For Marjan Aminpour, the fragrance of cardamom and rosewater, alongside basmati, tarragon and summer savory, were everyday kinds of smells; as common, she imagined, as the aromas of instant coffees and dripping roasts were to conventional Western kitchen corners" (28). She also relates the scent of food to the memories.

Like their home in Iran, their flat in Lewisham was always filled with these and other sumptuous grindings of barks and plant seeds. Though they had only left Lewisham a week ago, it seems to be much longer. And no matter how intoxicating the smells were, this reawakening of

the senses came with the price of memories none of them wanted to think about. (70)

Ireland is a predominantly Catholic country and Mayo is on the west coast, far removed from Dublin. It's probably likely that there wasn't a lot of diversity that had made it this way to the tiny villages in that particular area. Persian cuisine probably would have been a very alien idea and time was probably required for people to decide to try it.

Pomegranate Soup isn't just a novel about family and finding a safe home; it is also, surprisingly, a cookbook. Each chapter is prefaced by recipes, and the rich descriptions of ingredients will make readers salivate. Overall, the novel provides enough intrigue and simplicity to keep readers turning pages without much thought. It will succeed when readers wonder if they, too, live in a provincial town that needs a bit of spice. Marjan's cooking changes lives and Layla's signature scent of cinnamon and rosewater inspires lust in younger men and remembrances in older ones. Thus *Pomegranate Soup* reveals the life and identity of the Aminpour sisters and "They don't remember faces like they do recipes" (152).

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Caught between Stereotypes: A Gender Reading of Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*

Suja Mathew

The concept of “gender” is typically placed in opposition to the concept of sex. Sex is a matter of biology, of being male or female; gender, on the other hand – what is feminine or masculine – is a matter of culture. Gender may therefore be taken to refer to learned patterns of behavior and action, as opposed to sex which is biologically determined. paradoxically, biology need not be assumed to determine gender. This suggests that if what makes a person male or female is universal, the precise ways in which men and women express their masculinity and femininity will vary from culture to culture. Qualities that are how can quality be gender ? It can be gender oriented stereotypically attributed to women and men in contemporary culture are seen as gender, oriented and hence likely to be changed. The reduction of gender to sex which considers gender differences as biologically determined can be understood as a key move in the ideological justification of patriarchy.

Feminists have pointed out that the concept of gender largely reflects the thinking and bias of patriarchy. Patriarchy defines the masculine as active, rational and brave and the feminine as passive and quite and emotional. In other words, it constructs stereotypes. One branch of feminist criticism, referred to as gender studies, explores the different meanings attached to masculinity and femininity in literature, history and culture. An extension of this awareness of how central to patriarchy is the establishing of firm gender roles has been the rise of gay and lesbian criticism. Gender came to be seen as a construct of the society, designed to facilitate the smooth running of society to the advantage of men.

Judith Butler in her most influential book *Gender Trouble* (1990) argued that feminism had made a mistake by trying to assert that ‘women’ were a group with common characteristics and interests. That approach, Butler said, performed ‘an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations’ — reinforcing a binary view of gender relations in which human beings are divided into two clear-cut groups, women and men. Butler says: ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (Butler 25). In other words, gender is a performance; it’s what you do at particular times, rather than a universal who you are. This performance of gender is entirely a social matter with identity manifested in performativity.

Mahesh Dattani, a versatile theatre personality, drama teacher, stage-director, script writer, actor and film maker, is the first Indian English playwright to win the Central Sahitya Akademi Award. Born in 1958 in Bangalore to Gujarati parents, he had his education in English and grew up watching Gujarati plays occasionally with his father. Having founded Playpen in 1984, he realized the scarcity of Indian plays in English and decided to solve the problem by writing his own scripts. Daring and innovative, he has made Indian drama in English a major genre of social critique today. The preoccupation with marginal and invisible issues forms an important aspect of Dattani’s plays. Pramod K. Nayar comments, “Dattani blends conventional themes with some startlingly new ones in his work.” A committed artist preoccupied with social and political realities in India today, he comments on a wide variety of unexplored contemporary issues such as the expression and repression of human sexuality, alternate sexual preferences, plight of woman in Indian society, gender roles, morality and identity. The Sahitya Akademi has remarked in the Award citation that his work “probes tangled attitudes in contemporary India, towards communal differences, consumerism and gender . . . a brilliant contribution to Indian drama in English.”

His major plays include *Where there is a Will*, *Dance Like a Man*, *Tara*, *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Final Solutions*, *Do the Needful*, *On a Muggy Night*

in Mumbai, Two solos and Dear Diary, Brief Candle, Where Did I Leave My Purda? and *The Big Fat City*.

Dance Like a Man (1989), his second play, tells in two acts the inner struggles of a dancing couple in the context of one of his favourite concerns, the gender issues prevailing in the hypocritical Indian society. Dattani's own passion for dance has prompted him to write this play and he confesses that his years of learning dance have provided the spark for this work. In this play he sets about pursuing his primary objective of portraying the contemporary urban life in India with all its conflicts of tradition and modernity and the changing social values, often focusing on family as a representative unit.

The play looks into the life of Ratna and Jairaj, a dancing couple in their sixties, past their prime, who have realized that they "haven't gone very far," reflecting on the past and the way past affects their present. They are living with their only daughter Lata in an old-fashioned big house situated in the heart of the city. Lata is a blooming and promising young dancer, on whom they have thrust all their frustrated ambitions. She is about to marry Vishwas, a mithaiwalla's son, who does not know anything about dance at all and helps his father in running the family business, but has no objection to her dancing after marriage. Jairaj, in his youth, had to fight with his father Amritlal Parekh, a social reformer and freedom fighter, who always detested his son's decision to take up dancing because he considered it an arena devoted to women and also the craft of the prostitutes. Even though his restriction prompted the couple to leave his house, they had to return to him within two days, defeated. Though the 'generous, kind-hearted' Amritlal Parekh accepted them without any grunt, he ensured the cooperation of Ratna as an accomplice in his scheming to dissuade Jairaj from his passion gradually. Amritlal Parekh succeeded in accomplishing his intention, but it did too much harm to the lives of all the people involved.

Dance Like a Man, it seeks to portray how Dattani juxtaposes a few uncomfortable questions about man as a sexual construct and the concept of masculinity against the passion of an artist searching for artistic fulfillment

within the constraints of his world. It also analyses the role of the conniving, scheming patriarchy in shattering the lives of innocent human beings by insisting on them to play the predetermined gender roles.

The title *Dance Like a Man* is very symbolic and embodies in it the two major issues of the drama, viz. dance and man. “*Dance Like a Man* is a play that deals with one of Dattani’s pet concerns –gender- through one of his principal passions, dance” (Chaudhuri (67)). The title posits the main concern of the play – about men dancing. Dance becomes a discourse in the play; Jairaj and Ratna want to pursue it but Amritlal is deadly against it, Lata, even though a promising dancer, is not as passionate as her parents for she is ready to adjust to Vishwas’s demands. Vishwas, though ignorant about dance as an art, has no objection to Lata’s dancing after marriage.

Man and manliness are also discursively treated throughout the play. It is Amritlal’s biased notion regarding manliness that brings about the disaster in everybody’s life. In the work *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective* Linda L. Lindsey details masculinity’s norms. Along with many others, antifeminine norm and toughness norm are the two major criteria for society to determine manliness. Anything that has faint resemblance to a stereotypical feminine behaviour is ridiculed in a man. He is not supposed to be emotional. He has to be tough and strong; and compliance and submissiveness are considered negative qualities disdained by society.

In the play Amritlal resorts to all measures to get Jairaj’s *guru* out of the house because he does not fit into the so-called stereotypical figure of a ‘manly’ man.

Amritlal : I’m expecting some people and I want those musicians out before they arrive.

Jairaj : They will leave when your guests come, I assure you.

Amritlal : I want them out now.

Amritlal asks Ratna many times to help him make Jairaj “a real man.” A real man in his concept is not one who practices dance as a profession. “Why must you dance? It doesn’t give you any income.” Lindsey further says:

[Antifeminine norm] stigmatizes all stereotyped feminine characteristics and the qualities associated with them, including openness in expressing emotions related to vulnerability. . . Males are socialized to adamantly reject all that is considered as feminine. Women and anything perceived as feminine are less valued than men and anything perceived as masculine. (102)

The toughness expected by society in general from men is expressed by Amritlal when he tries to discourage his son from pursuing his passion which will be considered as feminine and will be despised in turn. We see Ratna also once accusing Jairaj of not being a man, “just a spineless boy.”

Acceptance of the antifemininity norm and the traditional scripts it includes comes with huge costs, in Lindsay’s opinion. Likewise in the play, the cost that they had to pay was very huge. The lives of all the people involved were caught in a storm; the worst sufferer being his innocent grandson Shankar, who died because of a double dose of opium inadvertently administered to him by Ratna and ayah.

As Judith Butler in the essay “Performative Arts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” says, gender identity is a constant switching among a range of different roles and positions, drawn from a kind of limitless data bank of potentialities. But society divides it into stable bipolar realities whereas it actually is not. Jairaj is a victim of this notion of pre-fixed gender roles for man and woman. According to these standards, dance as a profession is certainly not a ‘manly’ act. Amritlal is ready to permit Ratna dance, but apprehensive about Jairaj following it as a profession. He is a typical patriarch who cannot think above the stereotypical roles constructed by the society for the male and the female. He says, “I would have made a cricket pitch for you in our lawn if you were interested in cricket.” When Jairaj reminds him about his obsession of fighting for freedom, he is shocked and asks, “How

can you compare the two?” He considers fighting for freedom as a masculine act whereas dance as feminine. The underlying fear is that dance would make his son ‘womanly’.

The homophobia of the traditional society is what underlies the behaviour of Amritlal Parekh. A taken-for-granted hetero sexist view fuels homophobia, the fear and intolerance of homosexuals and homosexuality. The suggestion of homosexuality hovers near in the play, but is not explicitly mentioned. Amritlal has this in his mind when he objects to “the people you are associating with,” especially, his guru.

Amritlal : I have never seen a man with long hair.

Jairaj : All sadhus have long hair.

Amritlal : I don’t mean them. I meant normal men.

Jairaj : What are you trying to say?

Amritlal : All I’m saying is that normal men don’t keep their hair so long.

Jairaj : Are you saying that he is not. . . (Realizes the implication) Are you saying . . . ?

Amritlal : I’ve also noticed the way he walks.

As Judith Butler says, “the body appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. In either case, the body is figured as a mere instrument or medium for which a set of cultural meanings is only externally related.” The long hair and the effeminate walk of the guru construct certain stereotypical cultural notions in Amritlal Parekh. The body of the guru becomes a cultural site inscribed with meanings for him.

To Amritlal, all these are deviant behaviours which should be corrected properly. He makes clear his stance regarding gender roles when he comments: “A woman in man’s world may be considered as being progressive. But a man

in a woman's is pathetic." The news that Jairaj is going to grow his hair long to enhance his abhinaya and also plans to learn Kuchipudi where men dress like women, is appalling to Amritlal Parekh's conventional notion of gender roles.

Butler talks about "the punitive measures that society takes to regulate gender performances." Amritlal resorts to punitive measures to retrieve the stray lamb – Jairaj – such as disrupting the dance practice, not permitting his guru to visit the house, threatening not to provide for them and so on. When everything proves futile, he proceeds to seek the assistance of Ratna in making him "a real man." This punishment seems to be the most severe in the case of Jairaj, using his own wife to take away "his self esteem."

The double standard of society regarding the gender roles and its reversals is explained by Butler further with the example of the transvestite in theatre and in the bus. She says, "one can maintain one's sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements . . . strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life." Likewise, Amritlal was ready to extend support to Jairaj until he considered dance as a hobby. He says, "I thought it was a fancy of yours."

The conniving, scheming patriarchy that even makes women its accomplice in the effort to consolidate its structure and autocratic attitudes is perfectly reflected in the character Amritlal Parekh. An attempt to subvert thus occurs from the part of Jairaj, but he falls prey to the cunningness of the hard-hearted patriarch who cannot accept what contradicts his convictions. Exercising his authority as the head of a joint family, Amritlal ensures Ratna's assistance in working out his plan to make Jairaj "an adult" and "help him grow up." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book *Between Men* proposes that a patriarchal society is basically homosocial: it is organized by men for men, and uses women" (Peck & Coyle: 188). Here, Ratna is used by Amritlal to make Jairaj "a man." It comes that patriarchy wants every social being to move through the assigned paths; without the slightest effort to subvert its authority and heteronormative standards.

“The feminine self is not a victim in my plays. It subsumes, yes, it’s marginalized, but it fights back,” says Dattani. His women who can be categorized into good or bad are not stereotypical; instead they are really complex and adopt direct or indirect methods of survival in a patriarchal society. Ratna is haunted by the ghosts of her past and is a woman of frustrations; She tries to project her unfulfilled dreams on her promising daughter Lata, who, on the other hand, is different from her mother. Dattani himself calls Ratna “a woman confronting the demons created by her past and present actions” (Dattani 2000: xiv). She can be considered a victim and accomplice together in these events.

The preoccupation with marginal and invisible issues forms an important aspect of Dattani’s plays. The twist that the playwright gives to our stereotypical notions about gender issues regarding women always being at receiving end is really commendable. Here, the victim is a man, Jairaj, and the general inhibition of a man taking up dance which is traditionally performed by women is portrayed wonderfully. Dattani’s women try to come out of the conventional fictional image attached to them and men are shown to be victims suffering from a conniving woman’s machinations as seen in the play. By maintaining the stance of a non-judgmental observer, he criticizes our stereotypical notions regarding gender which allows no room for choice, difference or resistance and does not open up possibilities for a person to form and choose his own individual identity. The role of patriarchy in maintaining the heteronormative standards is staunchly criticized in the play by portraying the tragedy that such tenacity usually leads to.

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Magical Realism: Locating its Contours in Postmodern Literature

Nevil Stephen S.

The year 2015 and incidentally the month of April is of great significance in the postmodern/postcolonial literary history as this time period recorded the demise of the German Nobel laureate Gunter Grass and also the first death anniversary of yet another Nobel Prize winner, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. These two men of letters have something in common as they both identified and capitalized, in their literary works the fictional device and artistic mode: magical realism.

The rise of this literary sensibility (magical realism) and the considerable popularity enjoyed by it in the postmodern literary world implicitly signals yet another milestone that is the globalization of literature. In a vanquished and subsumed traditional world, magical realism entered as a discursive become become heterogeneity to from one among the top rungs in the ladder towards modernism. It demarcates a fluid boundary between postmodernism and postcolonialism. Aligning with the other emergent modernist art traditions, magical realism rejected the nineteenth century positivism and the predicament of art on science and empiricism. Conversely, it ushered the readers to a magical world of folklore, mysticism and mythology.

Conceptualization of magical realism from a theoretical stand point is intriguing and complex as many writers have adopted the style and adapted them to their varying literary-political needs across borders. From a true postmodern standpoint, it is hardly totalizing or absolutist. Not in simple terms could it be reduced as a genre that simply mixes the supernatural and the natural, the magical and the real, the determinate and the ambiguous. Instead the style

provides the space for multiplicity, hybridity and heterogeneity. While at one level it could be seen as a modernized extension of the veteran literary genre: the romance, on the other level it could be seen as a decolonized space that visibilizes dehierarchization and plurality in postcolonial discourse.

In this context it is fundamental to read through some of the perspectives conjured up and practiced by literary theorists. While Maggie Ann Bowers sees magical realism as a narrative mode that provides “a way to discuss alternative approaches to reality to that of Western philosophy, expressed in many postcolonial and non-Western works of contemporary fiction,” (1) Stephen Slemon views it as “a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems” (410).

Locating magical realism from a literary view point reveals two discourses at work, the magical and the real. However, these two are never asymmetrical, but sustainably extend tension as well as resistance between them. Magic never becomes improbable in the magical realist text, instead emerges normative and normalizing within the realistic matrix. The real and the magic are synthesized in such a manner that the element of magic organically springs out of the reality portrayed.

Magical realism when positioned within the literary history reveals it as a literary genre that modified the artistic traditions of the 19th century realism of Flaubert and George Eliot. While realism premises itself on empirically verifiable evidences, magical realism integrates conflicting perceptions and realistic elements in a magical atmosphere. It in fact provides the writers latitude to disclose ideas that would remain undisclosed in realistic fiction as the indeterminate and indefinable events are empirically unverifiable in magical realism. Putting it differently, it is an alternate mode of openly yet subtly presenting more than what could be directly recorded, through syncretizing mythology, reality, fantasy and history.

Magical realism easily grabs the attention of the readers as it operates in a real world with stories that remain familiar and credible to readers. The critic Angel Flores writes:

The practitioners of magical realism cling to reality as if to prevent literature from getting in their way, as if to prevent their myth from flying off, as in fairy tales, to super natural realms. The narrative proceeds in well-prepared increasingly intense steps, which ultimately may lead to one great ambiguity or confusion” (104)

Magical realism, if seen from a different plane, is also potentially connected with the postcolonial thought. While the post colonialists consider realism as a hegemonic representation of the colonizer, magical realism provides scope for a powerful decolonizing project to imagine alternate histories. It offers voice to the marginalized and visibility to the non-canonical texts. Eurocentric cultural norms privilege formal realism that is characterized by rational thought and logical rendering rather than mysterious and fantastic. Magical realism then emerges as a regional alternative and subversion to the Western construction of the world. It potentially subverts the assumptions and conventionalities of the European realism and privileges the juxtaposition of objective and subjective realities.

Stephen Slemon while relating magical realism with postcolonialism sees it as a weapon of the “silenced, marginalised, disposed voices” in their fight against “inherited notions of imperial history” (342). Slemon sees it as a powerful device to address the socio-political issues using a non-imperial narrative tradition and thereby establish a sense of identity.

In a similar perspective, Wendy B. Faris, another critic observes magical realist texts as those written in reaction to the totalitarian regimes. She writes:

In magical realism, the focalization - the perspective from which events are presented- is indeterminate; the kinds of perceptions it presents are indefinable and the origins of those perceptions are unlocatable. That indeterminacy results from the fact that magical realism includes two conflicting kinds of perception that perceive two different kinds of event: magical events and images not normally reported to the reader of realistic fiction because they are not empirically verifiable, and verifiable (if not always ordinary) ones that are realism’s characteristic domain. Thus

magical realism modifies the conventions of realism based in empirical evidence, incorporating other kinds of perception. In other words, the narrative is “defocalized” because it seems to come from two radically different perspectives at once. (43)

In the magical realist text, the binaries between the foreign and the native, cosmopolitan and local, Western and non-Western are blurred. Paradoxically, most of the magical realist writers intentionally picture a come up against the imbalanced West and East necessitating an interbreeding of modern literary tradition with one or plurality of pre-modern, pre-scientific and pre-literate narrative traditions. This further implicitly brings forth a fusion of Western and non-Western cultures, modern and pre-modern manner of living in a carnivalesque narrative setting.

Magical realism as a mode, style and politics profit much in a world characterized by alteration, enduring change and uncertainty. Fredric Jameson and Perry Anderson connect the development of capitalism with the rise of magical realism. Jameson suggests that “magic realism depends on a content which betrays the overlap or the coexistence of the pre-capitalists with the nascent capitalist or technological features” (as quoted in Cooper 16). Most of the magical realist writers paint, in their texts, societies that are heterogeneous, cultures that are under transition and populations that are hybrid and fluid. Postcolonial writers draw special effects from magical realists in their efforts to express a fissured and fragmented world, distorted and culturally displaced.

Now to add a historical glimpse of the evolution of the term *Magical Realism*, it was coined in the early 20th century to describe a neo-realist, post expressionist style of painting in Germany that later turned to be one of the popular artistic trends in international fiction especially in the postcolonial societies. The term was first introduced by the German art historian Franz Roh through a German phrase *Magischer Realismus* (meaning ‘a counter-movement’) and he applied the term to the paintings which he studied to show how everyday familiar objects could be perceived unfamiliar and fantastic. It received acceptance in the Italian art circles through Massimo Bontempelli. A

few artists who associated themselves early in this defamiliarizing art movement include Carl Franz Radziwill, Otto Dix and George Grosz. Notably, this art-literary expression 'magical realism' spread world across with the translation of Roh's book *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europaischen Malerei* ("Post-Expressionisms, Magical Realisms: Problem of the Newest European Painting") in 1925. However, a significant role played in disseminating the term in the academia is by Angel Flores with the publication of his 1955 essay titled "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction."

Since the 1960s the style gained currency in both Europe and America and frequently the term came to be largely associated with the works of South American authors such as Borges, Carpentier, Asturias, Cortazar, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and others. Due to diverse cultural and political issues that crowded Latin American countries between 1930 and 1945, magic realism found a fertile ground there and developed in equally different ways. So from a different paradigm, magical realism was a strong reaction against the cultural and political commotion of the age that illustrated over signification of European Expressionism, ramifications of the First World War, the political turmoil and the widespread revolutionary fervor that were worthy of attention during the period. However, it is inappropriate to refer to magical realism as a particularly Latin American phenomenon as the same frame has influenced many writers across geographic boundaries. Writers like Salman Rushdie used this "technique to open up new opportunities, varieties and wonders as metaphors from the issues they focus on" which includes the celebration of issues such as plurality, identity crisis, multiculturalism and hope for a new nation. (342)

Wendy B. Faris while locating the factors that typify the rubric of magical realist texts observes five primary factors such as (i) "irreducible element" of magic, (ii) detailing of a strong presence of the phenomenal world, (iii) reader's unsettling doubts in reconciling to contradictory understanding of events, (iv) merging of different realms in the narrative and (v) disturbance of the received ideas about time, space and identity (7). Tomo Virk supplements these

characteristics with a few more factors based on the works of Kafka, Grass and Nabokov which include (i) critique of Eurocentric discourse, (ii) incorporation of mythology, (iii) diverse time lines and (iv) alternative perspectives on history. (as quoted in Mrak 2-3)

Two decades prior to the publication of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), sophisticated readers viewed magical realism from the framework of a Latin American affair following Alejo Carpentier. But with Marquez's text, many writers North American, Anglophone and Francophone were persuaded to experiment with this fictional practice. Some of the popular texts under this genre include: Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). At this point it would be an injustice to ignore some of the important Latin American developers and practitioners of the magical realist tradition such as the Guatemalan novelist and poet Miguel Angel Asturias, Argentine short-story writer and essayist Jorge Luis Borges, Argentine novelist and short storywriter Julio Cortazar, Mexican author Elena Garro, Cuban novelist and essayist Alejo Carpentier, Chilean novelist Isabel Allende and indeed the Columbian novelist Garcia Marquez.

To round up, magical realism being a discursive heterogeneity succeeded in capturing reality in alternate ways and from multiple perspectives; the known and unknown, visible and invisible, rational through focal shifts, word plays, repetition, organic mingling of the real and the fantastic thereby aiming to privilege the marginalized narrative traditions. With an imaginative efflorescence, relying on orality and with an authorial reticence and ironic distance, it voiced the silenced 'other', visibilised the invisible, offered alternate representations of history and transgressed the ontological asymmetrical boundaries thereby opening up a decolonized space.

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Unsexing and Suspending Gender: Heterosexuality, Lesbianism and the Politics of Indeterminacy in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the only Fruit* (1985)

Noble A Paliath

The period since World War II has seen a paradigm shift in attitudes to gender and sexuality. The sexual revolution of the late 1950s and 60s and the work of the feminist movement has profoundly changed the way in which men and women relate to each other socially, culturally and economically. A cultural revolution has taken place in terms of social attitudes to the make-up of the family, same-sex relationships and our understanding of sexual identity. One of the central theses of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was summed up by the line, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (Beauvoir 102). This position recognized that although individuals are born as male or female, the development of masculinity and femininity is not determined at birth, but is learned through the process of socialization.

Femininity and masculinity, therefore, are a series of artificial constructs or codes of behaviour that are maintained and reproduced by the dominant ideas and practices in society. It was also shown that the prevailing constructs of gender change historically. Identifying these codes as constructed and historically contingent, and not natural or essentialist, made it possible to argue for a resistance to the way in which society had conventionally demarcated roles for men and women. The cultural understanding of femininity and masculinity has changed significantly over the forty years or so since the 1960s and contemporary British novelists have explored the implication of these changes. Similarly, changed attitudes to sexuality have occasioned many late twentieth century writers to examine and express new ways of approaching

sexual identity. Erotic fables intended to undercut and challenge conventional notions of history, gender and fixed nature of reality were produced.

Jeanette Winterson, Britain's oft-talked about mainstream writer deals powerfully in her novels with the implications of the changed attitudes to gender and sexuality. She is often described as one of the most controversial yet innovative novelists in contemporary English literature. An inventive lesbian feminist author whose fiction explores the nature and varieties of erotic love, Winterson is widely regarded as one of the most talented and provocative contemporary writers. She is the kind of writer who dared to disclose her open support towards the issues of gender and sexuality in general and lesbianism in particular. Winterson is commonly read and understood as a postmodern, post feminist and lesbian feminist author. The present study has chosen Winterson's *Oranges are not the only Fruit (Oranges)* and aims to focus on gender and sexuality to see how they are effectively portrayed.

Jeanette Winterson burst on the literary scene with her first novel, *Oranges*, a bildungsroman which examines the meaning of love and lesbian sexual identity and stands out as Winterson's most structurally conventional and overtly autobiographical story. The narrator Jeanette relates the story of her cloistered childhood and adolescence as the adopted daughter of working class Pentecostal Evangelists, who raise her to become a preacher and missionary. Most often first novels are thinly disguised autobiographies. *Oranges* clearly draws very heavily on Winterson's own experiences. The novel is divided into eight chapters and each chapter is given the name of a book of the Old Testament, from Genesis (the story of Jeanette's early life), through Exodus (her occasionally traumatic experiences when she ventures out into the world outside home and the church) onto Ruth (Jeanette's own love for other women reflected in the Bible which most movingly portrays the emotional commitment of one woman to another.)

Oranges clearly tapped the increasing popular interest in the way in which gender and sexual identities are constructed in mainstream British culture. The novel broke down and challenged prescribed attitudes (especially religious

ones) to sexuality and to the role of the nuclear family in maintaining established gender roles. *Oranges* presents gender as irresolution. A close analysis of the text clearly reveals how gender is here done and undone. In *Oranges*, a masculine quality in a female character and a feminine quality in a male character are seen as a sign of strength and change. In the novel, male characters are represented in a variety of different ways. Jeanette's father is a weak figure and does not play a great part in family decisions or in the narrative as a whole. As Jeanette says of him: "Poor Dad, he was never quite good enough" (*Oranges* 11).

Jeanette's mother is the dominant figure in the relationship and controls her father either through ignoring him completely or making sure he adheres to the codes of behaviour set down within her religion. Her mother also takes on the household roles conventionally attached to the male; she is, for example, building a bathroom for the family. Their marriage appears to be one of convenience. It is explained that, Jeanette's mother "had a mysterious attitude towards the begetting of children; it wasn't that she couldn't do it, more that she didn't want to do it. She was very bitter about the Virgin Mary getting there first. So did the next best thing and arranged for a foundling" (3-4). And that is Jeanette.

Although Jeanette's family is not conventional, one of the alternative social units in the novel is the church group to which Jeanette and her mother belong. Women predominantly people this group and it is, in one sense, a kind of matriarchy, a contingent and localized form of female power. The social relationships Jeanette experiences in both her family and the church serve to disrupt conventional roles of masculinity and femininity and this extends to Jeanette's perceptions of gender codes around her. From an early age, she resists the prevailing codes of femininity that society tries to impose on her. Jeanette's sexuality offers another challenge to the traditional codes of masculinity and femininity. When Pastor Finch tries to account for the relationship Jeanette has with Melanie he argues that it is due to Jeanette subverting the established roles between men and women. Finch defines

lesbianism in terms of Jeanette unnaturally taking the role of the man in her relationship with Melanie. Jeanette feels particularly betrayed by the fact that her mother agrees with the pastor reimposing a patriarchal narrative onto Jeanette's behaviour. The character of the Pastor is shown to be typical of men who stand for authoritarian and tyrannical values.

Winterson outlines the sexist history of the church in the pastor's assertion that Jeanette's assertion arose because she acted beyond her gender's limitations. The pastor's position arises from a strongly sexist belief that women are biologically inferior to men. In *Oranges*, sexist notions seem ridiculous because Jeanette appears to be one of the most rational members of her church who is able to manage conflicts during their crusade while also preaching the gospel. With the exposure, Winterson condemns such sexist and homophobic rhetoric. In addition to challenging the idea that women are biologically inferior, Winterson raises her voice against the idea that men and women have set biological roles, or that they exist in a biological binary. For Jeanette, a woman is a woman and a man is a man. She sees the idea of gender as one that is socially constructed. In other words, Winterson feels that there is not a clear biological role for men and women, but that they act instead as society decrees that they should. The bias of compulsory heterosexuality, through which lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent, or simply rendered invisible, could be illustrated in a text like *Oranges*.

Oranges is an out and out lesbian text. It tells the story of an adopted girl called Jeanette, growing up a lesbian inside a strict religious community. It is the story of Jeanette's quest for subjectivity and (homo)sexuality. Through her struggle for autonomy and sexual identity, she sketches a counter-narrative of conventional masculine bondage that highlights female specificity and gender difference. Being an adopted child, Jeanette herself reports that from a very young age she always knew that she was special. Ironically, this specialness most obviously relates to her future as a lesbian, a group often categorized as special and different since as a lesbian she will not fit into the normal dualistic, heterosexual world. As Jeanette grows into her teenage years, she falls in love

with a girl called Melanie, her first lover. When Jeanette admits her passion for Melanie, all of the community's resources are mobilized to exorcise these deviant impulses. She is threatened with permanent exclusion from the community of the saved. The conflict between lesbianism and religion represents religion as a cruel and violent oppressor and lesbianism as its pitiful victim.

“Compulsory heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that being lesbian is always a kind of miming, a vain effort to participate in the phantasmatic plenitude of naturalized heterosexuality which will always and only fail” (Butler 722). Winterson argues that the cultural and social violence exercised against homosexual originates in part from the instability of heterosexuality, a fear that such identity may be a contingent construct that serves as a defensive bulwark against a potentially overwhelming reality of diverse, ethically neutral sexual choices and identity possibilities that exist simultaneously in the self and in society. It is against this reign of heterosexuality that Winterson raises her voice.

She comes up with the idea that sexuality and gender are variable and indeterminate; they do not align with simple multiple polarities and can take multiple, highly differentiated forms. She is more inclined to lesbianism which society stigmatized as a kind of deviant behaviour. She opines that the world is not made up of binary oppositions. She perceives lesbianism as an alternative way of existing within an apparently dominant heterosexual culture. According to her, lesbianism is an ordinary, a normal way for people to relate to each other. She stresses on the fluid nature of identity, that is, on its free-floating nature. She offers a world of multiple genders and sexualities and not a world without gender or heterosexuality.

Her aim is to disrupt and denaturalize sexual and gender categories in ways that recognize the fluidity, instability, indeterminacy and fragmentation of identities. The novel goes on to suggest that the reader's own identity may well be implicated in the uncertainty fostered in the text, and that in order to

fill the ensuing void, an active, interrogative and creative reading is thus generated. Winterson moves on to suggest: “I don’t believe in happy endings. All of my books end on an ambiguous note because nothing ever is that neatly tied-up, there is always the blank page after the one that has writing on it, and that is the page I want to leave the reader. I too am leaving this page to the reader with the intent of inviting all possible explorations.

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Outsourced: A Reflection on Cross- Cultural Sensitivity

Sonia Thomas

E.T.Hall defines 'culture' as a "man's mediathoum: there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved. . . , as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function" (16). Transmission of cultural ideas, meanings and values around the world is made possible to a great extent by globalization, which has a great impact on all aspects of our life. The world has become a platform for the meeting of different peoples and cultures. It makes interconnectedness beyond national and regional boundaries possible and much easier compared to the pre-globalization era. When two cultures come into contact with each other, they exchange and share their cultural beliefs and values. This process requires an effective system of inter-cultural communication which could be established only through a clear understanding of the cultural diversity. This paper is an attempt to study the nature of this cultural exchange established by globalization of business processes, with special attention on global outsourcing.

According to Justin Paul, "Globalization is leading all business operations to cut across conventional transnational borders towards evolving a global business culture. This new culture could be described as the outcome of a new revolution in business processes taking all over the world" (7). Outsourcing is product of this new revolution in the field of business. Oxford English Dictionary defines "outsource" as a verb which means "to arrange for work to be done outside one's own company" (720). Global outsourcing takes the business from a homegrown atmosphere to other countries, so that the company will get the work done at very low costs. This phenomenon helps the management to concentrate only on the core functions of the business and cut

down costs, without compromising on quality. In recent years, India has grown to be the focus of many foreign companies, owing to her large English speaking, computer-literate, and well-educated population, ready to do work at very low costs. Outsourcing a job outside one's own country inevitably necessitates the strengthening of international ties and promotion of positive cultural exchanges.

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the depiction of international relationships in films. Such films play a vital role in the teaching of effective intercultural communication. The 2006 Social Comedy film, "Outsourced" directed by John Jeffcoat can be considered as an exemplary tool to teach a sense of cross-cultural respect for promoting international business through outsourcing. The film is about the positive effects of a broad-minded approach towards accepting cultural differences. The transformation of an ethnocentric American into an accultured individual with a newfound realization to see deeper into the beauty and richness of diversity, forms the storyline of "Outsourced". Todd, an American Call Center manager is baffled at the beginning to know that his job is about to be outsourced to India. He is sent to Mumbai to train his new replacement Puro and other low-paid employees of the Indian Call Center. He has his fears and problems of adjustment as a stranger in a place, the societal realities of which, is many times removed from the realities of his own land. He is filled with impatience and intolerance and visibly displays it while interacting with his Indian trainees.

A proficiency in the language of the employer becomes a challenge and a means of survival for the Indian Call Center Employees. This is evident from a situation in the film where Todd tries to describe the nature of his job to Puro. He tells him that he sells "kitsch to redneck schmucks", and Puro is left clueless as he is completely unaware of the meanings of these culture specific idioms. As a trainer, Todd finds the teaching of language to his Indian trainees, a hard nut to crack as he couldn't even make them pronounce his own name the way he expected them to pronounce it. They keep on addressing him, "Mr. Toad" instead of "Mr. Todd". Todd attempts them learn American accent and small talk to bring down the average length of a business call from twelve

minutes to six. He insists, “Say you are in Chicago. Pronounce it sha-caw-ga.” His employees repeat, “shy-call-go.” He adds, “If anyone asks how the weather is, say ‘windy’.

He is indirectly trying to force his language and culture on them, insisting on its business need, without considering the unique patterns of Indian English. Indians have their own ways of pronouncing English, which according to Todd, is not suitable for their work environment. Todd is initially insensitive towards the need of the Indian trainees and his only concern was to improve his trainees’ minutes-per-call rating. He wanted them to learn about America to convince Americans that they are speaking to someone in their own country. The second language speakers of English feel the stress of learning and using the language in the culturally accepted manner of the Americans. This pressure begins to create a barrier to proper inter-cultural communication.

Chances of miscommunication are very high in a multicultural environment in which the interpretation of the message depends heavily on the unique peculiarities of the each culture. The height of this miscommunication is humorously expressed in a scene where an Indian Call Center Employee suggests an American customer to get some rubbers for his grandchild as a birthday present. A “rubber” in Indian English is an “eraser” in America and “rubber” in American English means “condom”. In another instance, Puro is aghast when Todd wishes him to ‘break a leg’. The situation is as follows:

Todd: Don’t worry about running the centre.

You’ll be great.

‘Break a leg.’

Puro: Break my legs!?

Todd: Expression. It means good luck.

Puro: Thank you, Todd.

I hope that both your legs get broken.

Gudykunst and Kim maintain that “culture influences our communication and that our communication influences culture” (13). Asha, one of Todd’s Call Center employees, is highly opinionated and has a special role in opening Todd’s eyes to the meaninglessness of forcing Americanism upon Indians, especially the American accent. During a pronunciation training session, she tries to make Todd realize that Indian English is just another accepted variety of English. Defending her Indian English, she tells him, “You got it from the British, and so did we. We just speak it differently.”

The film depicts a real challenge faced by an American trainer in India and shows that there are other factors too, the knowledge of which is inevitable for Todd’s acceptance of Indian culture. His transformation began with a conversation with another American Customer Care manager in India, who said, “I was resisting India. Once I gave in to India, I did much better.” This realization of the need for assimilation into Indian ways brings about many changes in Todd’s affairs, both private and public. It was further strengthened when Asha suggested him to “learn about India.” According to Prahalad Sooknanan, this scenario proves that “since communication is an interaction between two or more people, it cannot be the responsibility of only one of the individuals involved in the interaction to know the language and culture of the other. Otherwise, there would seem to be some degree of discrimination and unequal status” (98). In fact, it was not Todd’s rigidity and patterns of training, but Asha’s ability to understand and adopt right measures to instruct her fellow employees that improved their minutes- per-call-rating. Moreover, inspired by the positive changes in the work environment, Todd motivates his employees by rewarding efficiency gains with products from his company’s catalog.

Like language, there are many other features of culture, the acceptance of which becomes pathways to Todd’s transformation. These features can be broadly divided into ‘surface culture’ and ‘deep culture’. Mingsheng Li and Fay Patel hold the view that:

We use ‘surface culture’, also called ‘objective culture’, to describe the tangible aspects of culture, such as people, buildings, artefacts,

art, dances, music, songs, food, dress, language, behavior, actions and gestures . . . The 'deep culture', also called 'subjective culture', refers to the intangible aspects of culture, such as feelings, emotions, values and attitudes. The 'deep culture' is hidden and difficult to see at the surface level and yet it is what primarily determines how the people behave and communicate with each other, and how we interpret our experiences (28).

'Outsourced' throws light on the fact that there is a huge difference between the ways in which India and America treat these aspects of culture. Indian culture is essentially collectivist in nature. Indians prefer to be active members of the society, which has profound influence on their lives. The society, the community and the family are placed above the individual. Such cultures promote a sense of belonging and selflessness. There are many instances in the film where Todd finds himself surprised and speechless while facing culture specific personal questions from his Indian acquaintances. During an informal conversation with Todd, his trainee, Puro, himself a family man, who firmly believes that if he loses his job, he cannot get married, unable to stop himself from expressing his dislike for the American approach towards human relationships, asks Todd, "You don't live with your parents? You hate your boss!?" Similar strokes of embarrassing questions were asked by Todd's house owner lady. During their very first meeting, she asks him, "What does your father do?" She continues, "Are you married?", "You should get married... You are old enough to be a grandfather. What are you waiting for?" These unexpected questions initially leave Todd defenseless and surprised; whose American culture promotes individualism. Americans give primary importance to individuals. They normally do their things on their own, without much dependence on others. They are goal oriented and nothing matters to them more than the ways and means for individual gratification. In their world, according to Todd, "It just makes sense to work your ass off...and go into a credit debt, so you can have the 15 inch plasma."

Everything about India was strange and shocking to Todd. He was not accustomed with the strangers' interference into his personal life. His house

owner takes up even the responsibility of preparing him Indian food, pressing his clothes and even teaching him about the basic dos and don'ts of food culture and eating habits of Indians. She asks him not to place the hand that has been in his mouth, back in the food and not to eat with the left hand because in India, left hand is considered unclean.

The two nations differ widely in their practice and understanding of religion as well. Adapting to a culture deeply rooted in religion becomes a challenge and conflict to Todd. He was frightened by the picture of Goddess Kali that was hung up on the wall of his bedroom. He wasn't able to accept the fearful appearance of the Goddess in all her power, with four arms and red eyes, wearing a string of skulls, and a tongue stuck out. He used to even shut his eyes tight to avoid an accidental glance at the deity's photo, as he was so disturbed and frightened by the image of 'the Goddess of Destruction'. It was during Holi, the festival of colours, that Todd completely sheds his prejudices and disagreement towards India. He gets immersed in colour and then takes a symbolic baptismal dip of change in the river and that experience brings him closer to the magnificence called India. His resistance to India gradually fades and a sense of inquisitiveness and interest develops in its place.

Here begins the second phase of Todd's life in India. He begins to see everything in a new light. He started showing great interest in the stories and symbols related to religion in India, especially Hinduism. Asha's role in triggering this sense of wonder and empathy in Todd is commendable. Todd's newfound interest is not limited to Indian religion. He tries to create personal relationships with many people, especially with the under privileged families residing on the other side of the high compound wall of his residence. The wall is symbolic of the wide gap between the rich and the poor in India, which was seldom bridged. Todd's decision to bridge this gap in his own simple ways fills him with new insights. It shows his transformation into a better human being with a wide mental horizon which can now accommodate India. He learns a lot about this nation, and about himself. He even falls in love with his Indian employee, Asha. The transformation in him brought about positive

changes in his personal, as well as his professional affairs. It improved his efficiency as a trainer. He learns from his mistakes and tells his employees, “Our first mistake, is trying to run this, like an American office. So I wanna ask you... How can do we do things differently? What would make your work day a more positive experience?” He listens to and accepts the good suggestions put forth by his trainees and that approach brings about a lot of positive changes in the Call Center atmosphere. His trainees began to feel connected to their trainer and more committed to the work they do.

The end of the movie can be considered as a lesson on the constantly changing atmosphere of outsourcing. Todd’s boss travels to India to inform him that they are outsourcing the Indian jobs to China. He tells him, “China is the new India”, where labour and materials are even cheaper compared to India. The ethics of such a decision is often a topic of many debates on outsourcing. It affects certain characters emotionally and financially, especially Puro, whose marriage depended solely on his promotion and salary. Todd chooses not go to China, in spite of all the benefits and a ‘fat raise’ in his salary that he might enjoy. Instead, he “saves” Puro’s life by allowing him to take up that position to train the employees in Shanghai.

In an era dominated by Information Technology and business beyond borders, ‘outsourcing’ is a very powerful tool for maximizing the profit of any organization. The film ‘Outsourced’ highlights the challenges and controversy related to the topic of outsourcing. However, the present study is an attempt to bring out the connection between this current trend in business and the resultant intercultural communication. ‘Ethnocentrism’ which perceives the values of one cultural group as being superior to all others, is a real barrier to intercultural communication. Todd, in the beginning, is a representative of this viewpoint. However, his gradual, but visible positive transformation towards adapting to a new culture can be considered as a clarion call to shed our prejudices and phobias that may rise in a multicultural atmosphere. Gudykunst opines that, “openness, not intimacy, is the key to developing community” (374). Accommodating and respecting the cultural differences is beneficial in the

universal sharing of goodness and values. Integration and interdependence lead us to become global citizen. A global citizen, according to Mingsheng Li, “is a person who views the world from a global perspective, perceives oneself as an integral part of the world, transcends the national borders, belongs to a global community, seeks to explore and find solutions to global issues and problems, and takes humanity rather than individuals into consideration” (88). The film ‘Outsourced’ could be a lesson to be taught for adapting and surviving in an ever growing globalized world.

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New Media and Democracy: Theory and Praxis beyond Post modernity

Pradeepkumar K

Any debate on the interrelationship of new media and democracy is sure to incite very contrastive reactions: some hail it as harbinger of democracy to the very dark continents where democracy had been unknown for a long time. It has been given the credit for transparency and immediacy regarding the affairs of the 'global village.' There is a strong tendency to believe that these social media are indeed making political processes more democratic, and ushering in yet another version of democracy which is called digital democracy and also as participatory democracy. On the other hand there is a strong sense of scepticism pertaining to the role of new media in the present day world. It is widely despised as an agent of oppression and exploitation of all kinds. Media in general and new media in particular have been termed as a tool in the hands of the emerging neo imperialist regimes. Indeed much discourse in this field seems to be constructed by rigorous academic enquiry and remain an integral part of cultural studies.

These avenues of discussion, any way, serve to delimit and conceptualize the interconnection between media and culture. The new and emerging media forms have been observed either as reinforcing and legitimizing or subverting and counteracting the powerful cultural discourses. In short, any kind of rhetoric about new media and its role in promoting democracy may raise many questions regarding the nature and perpetrators of the intended 'democracy', for whom it is being promoted, how and on whose interests the new media are involved in the process. In this context the concept of new media is rather significant

for its form, structure and reach in the milieu of economic liberalization and postmodernism.

We live in a specific historic era, the cultural condition of which is understood as post modern. Jean-Francois Lyotard declared that with postmodernism, the heydays of the grand narrative are over. Belief in universal criteria, the sense of beauty in uniformity and the comfort of certainty have been replaced by the postmodern relativism and pluralism. It is incorporation or assimilation of plural perspectives or accommodating a number of different perspectives. The conventional media has, very remarkably proven that it is a misfit in such a territory of postmodern sway. Lyotard claimed that a monolithic culture has been replaced by a cultural mosaic full of many small stories, many different criteria – ‘a polyphony of voices.’ In this sense it may seem that new media is the media apposite to the postmodern culture and society. But in the course of this paper I intend to show how the new media is transgressing the limits or borders of post modernity to signal a new cultural order that transcends postmodern cultural premises.

Before proceeding in that direction, it is necessary to problematise the existing notions of new media. It is very hard to attempt a definition of new media, because all media were new media once. But the term is increasingly used, as we know, not to denote the ‘newness’ but the emerging media of today’s historical context. New media mostly include websites such as online newspapers, blogs, or wikis, video games, and social media. The defining characteristics of new media include interactive user feedback and creative participation. The Cambridge Dictionary defines new media as “products and services that provide information or entertainment using computers or the internet, and not by traditional methods such as television and newspapers” (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>). Thus new media can be termed as the forms of communicating in the digital world, which includes publishing on CDs, DVDs and over the Internet. It implies that the user obtains the material via desktop and laptop computers, smart phones and tablets. It also incorporates a concept that new methods of communicating in

the digital world allow smaller groups of people to congregate online and share, sell and swap goods and information. It allows more people to have a voice in their community and in the world in general (PC MAG Encyclopedia, 167). The technology-given ability of this new scion of media family to share pictures, videos, likes and dislikes, along with personal thoughts, hopes, and fears with the click of the mouse has thrown open many levels of meanings. In short new media can be understood as interactive digital media enabled through a computational platform.

The digital encoding of sound, text and image, the introduction of fibre optic that can contain numerable channels of data passage, the ability to transmit digitally encoded images and to compress this information, the vast expansion of the frequency range for wireless transmission, innovations in switching technology, and a number of other advances have so enlarged the quantity and types of information that may soon be able to be transmitted. No wonder these have impacted heavily in our social life. The big brothers in the world of social media are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in 2004, which has since grown to approximately 900 million active users worldwide. If Facebook were a country it would be the third largest behind China and India. Twitter is the online social networking and micro-blogging service that has burgeoned with over 300 million users as of 2011. YouTube provides a forum for sharing video content since 2005.

Apart from interactivity, accessibility and interconnectivity are some of the defining features of the new media. In our knowledge society, almost everyone with little or no advanced computer skills can create content and access more content even with a mobile phone. It ensures a universal interchangeability of the media roles of sender and receiver. Interconnectivity is ensured when links to videos posted on YouTube can be embedded in blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. A Twitter post can appear on a Facebook page. In other words, large numbers of people can be easily and inexpensively contacted via a variety of services. As I mentioned at the start of this paper, discussions all

over the world on the impact of new media in human cultural practices vary from enthusiasm to caution to scepticism.

If we try to analyze media from a purely cultural point of view to any extent, it is possible to evaluate its potential for social change or to determine its role in fostering democracy. This may be a debatable stance. But again we should be sure of the fact that democracy is not inherent to new media or any media for that matter. We had already seen that new media is more closely related to the basic tenets of postmodernism than the traditional media and by virtue of this closeness, to democracy also. It is easy and reassuring to substantiate this stand point with the recent evidence of the social media's active part in accelerating the people's upheavals almost all over the world. Terming this 'social media revolutions' may not be an accurate way of assessing the phenomena central to the issue. One must be guided by caution as one requires more proofs for the potential of social media for furthering social or political change. Ramesh Srinivasan, associate professor of Information Studies at University of California LA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies and an expert on the influence of social media on major political and social upheavals, terms "social media revolutions" as a misnomer and points out that "while the Egyptian revolution has been characterized as based on social media, the majority of the people affected do not actually have internet access; in 2011, only five percent of the population, who were mostly young and upper middle class, were online, as opposed to the older, working class population most affected by the Morsi regime." (<http://ampersand.gseis.ucla.edu>). He puts the labour movements and other forms of activism that connected both old and new media platforms as some of the real causes. But there is no ignoring of the statistics: During the climax of the political activities preceding the change of guard in Egypt, the total rate of tweets about political change in that country burgeoned from 2,300 a day to 230,000 a day. In Tunisia there were about 2,200 tweets a day during the hefty periods. Millions viewed videos uploaded in YouTube. There are some very compelling facts unveiled here.

Denis McQuail assigns a 'democratic participatory' role for the media highlighting its tendencies towards diversity, plurality and change, emphasising the links between cultural identity, democratisation and participation at all levels of society (95). Probing the potentialities of new media in no way predicts the obliteration or the insignificance of the existing or 'old media' as a reductive trope common in papers like this. In the twentieth century electronic media (telephone, radio, film, television and the computer) enabled an equally profound transformation of cultural identity. But as for now, a very massive and extensive platform was constructed where people were engaged in political action while tweeting, poking, posting, uploading, blogging and texting thus creating a virtual rendezvous of theory and practice regarding democracy. Thus if new media did not cause revolutions, it critically altered the ability of the civil society to make one. Here we reach at a conclusion in best put in Karl Popper's words: "[...] the closed society breaks down when the supernatural awe with which the social order is considered gives way to active interference and to the conscious pursuit of personal or group interests" (329). We can see the same optimism and enthusiasm in Giroux too when he says: "state power becomes more porous and there is less control. Text messaging, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the Internet have given rise to a reservoir of political energy that posits a new relationship between the new media technologies, politics, and public life" (qtd in Safranek, 2).

To shorten this discussion on new media's role in nurturing democracy, let us turn to the defining features of media contribution to democracy as listed by Peter Dahlgren:

- a) Providing an inclusive, pluralistic public sphere for imparting relevant knowledge and competencies to citizens about their own role in the processes of good governance and sustainable development.
- b) Inculcating loyalty to democratic values and procedures and thus cultivating civic virtue (participation, solidarity, tolerance, courage, etc.)
- c) Personifying the practices, routines, traditions associated with democratic citizenship and sustainable developmental paths

d) Fostering the construction of the kinds of plural identities associated with democratic citizenship (Dahlgren, 312).

At the outset we feel very much relieved to think that new media readily conform to these features. But as we have seen already, there is a fair amount of ambivalence regarding the role of new media in promoting democracy. Firstly there is the fundamental question regarding the 'ownership.' Despite the enthusiasm over the growth in number of the users of new media, there are the stark realities before us. For instance the ITU Report 2011 shows that the divide between the rich and the poor regarding access to digital technologies has grown wider. Thus the participation of the unprivileged in the political process may remain an utopian target. Any form of democracy may remain a distant dream with a huge section of humanity still remaining strangers to the new media. Second factor is the question of actual control. Many critics believe that the new media as an agent of democratization may suffer backlash in the form of suppression and surveillance from regimes that make the better use of the same tool. Effective corporate manipulation of the new media is a related problem, where the corporations, as stakeholders as they are in issues related to geopolitics, may resort to intimidation, coercion, suppression and misrepresentation of information. There is no point in ignoring the fact that the market forces related to late capitalism and global liberalization are already doing this much effectively. In many instances the new media interventions failed miserably like the case in Iran and Thailand where the governments were not averse to the idea of using the force. This is a fundamental weakness of this kind of induced revolutions where the motivation and courage to take high risks are absent.

Now we shall have to come to the last tenet of this discussion, namely the exact nature of the new media's engagement with culture. Even though new media is a by and large a product of post modernity, it distances itself from this cultural period when it comes to the basic nature and method of cultural production. This invariably reflects on the issues discussed previously. The fundamental modes of cultural production are reformulated violently by

the advent of the new media. This has resulted in a clear departure from the well established codes of postmodernism. New media rejects the tenets of social mediation and public realm by taking side with the coalition of two former rivals: technological automation and human autonomy. The cultural binary of man and machine is negated in the new cultural period. Robert Samuels calls this post-postmodern era “Auto Modernity” (219). The common enigma of the twenty-first century is that a maximum sense of autonomy is felt by the use of most automated technologies. The sense of gratification and satisfaction one derives from the use of personal computers, smart mobile phones, tablets, iPods and computer games bear testimony to this. The interconnectivity of different forms of new media also provides a sense of automation and fluidity in information transfer.

Prof. Samuels rejects the theoretical position that the new media are the embodiment of the postmodern concerns of social interaction and multiculturalism. The e mail, e-commerce and many other facets of new media actually forbid the users from any actual social interaction and thus anticipate the privatization of the public sphere. It also presages the vanishing of the central authorities like welfare states and coming of unbridled privatization. The new media users experience a state of autonomy in which they consume information regarding any culture or any person at any time and from any place. Thus they do not feel either the constraints of time and space or the necessity of social mediation for cross cultural relations. The autonomy provided by the new media is not autonomous at all as it is actually not controlled by the individual but by the economic interests of the market. On the other hand the individual is lured into believing that he is the “monarch of all he surveys.” The mode of autonomy often stands for privatization of public places and controlled social mediation. This is what happens when we carry a laptop everywhere with us, work with it, watch films or read news papers or send messages using it. The loss of sense regarding cultural differences and distinction between the public and private realms on the part of the new media user carry fatal implications as far the society is concerned.

When we accept that the new media is just a tool of the social and political forces for change without any inherent positive or negative potential attached to it, we will be able to fully grasp its acumen for cultural transformation. Then the question arises: what kind of people is being constructed by the digital era? We tend to believe that notion of the new age digital youth who intervene and fight for democracy and human rights is basically flawed.

If modernity celebrated the death of author just figuratively, the cultural period represented by the new media render it a concrete fact with the receiver acting on the text. The receiver is not passive but someone whose action is central to cultural production. No form of new media can exist or survive without some aspects of reciprocity from the receivers of the text. One who manages the new media gets the unmistakable sense of mastery over the text as she/he controls, goes through, manages and produces meaning from the cultural product. The electronic media mimic the new media when T.V.channels host interactive programmes to which the spectator makes phone calls to answer the questions, ask questions or to evaluate programmes or participants. The viewer, once a passive recipient of electronic media is now given the central position, like in the reality shows where the 'author' is dead or forsaken.

The use of minimum memory has created an atmosphere of ephemerality around the new media. The text is conceived by the receiver and hence highly temporal. There is no next moment, no procrastination. This shedding of the burden of past is of paramount importance in the cultural history of our time. If postmodernism predicted the end of Grand Narratives, the present day sees the omniscient and omnipotent neo imperialistic power structure canonised to the level of the sole and over-powering regulator of all social activity – monopolistic, all-engulfing, all-explaining, and all-structuring. The consumerism and greed of the ideology of market economy has gnawed into the society deeply instilling a sense of immense failure of development and imminent danger. The wedding of sophisticated technology and heightened sense of barbarism has earmarked a new and definite historical juncture. Posts

of hate campaigns and video footage of beheading of the captives flood the gates of new media eclipsing its possibilities. The powerless and the marginalised are pitted against all kinds of odds with anxiety and fear being spread like cancer to every single cell of the social life.

Thus far we have examined both the theory and praxis of new media in this cultural era somewhat elaborately. New media might have helped democratization somewhere at some time. But its very structure renders it incapable of fostering any form of democracy including participatory and digital democracies. The basic tenets of postmodernism are under threat from a very formidable cultural movement that is assisted not only by the new media, but by the ideology and rationale of the neo imperialism of the contemporary world. Slavoj Zizek hopes that after the postmodern, a new type of Symbolic Order will come into being through a process of political actions (Myers 61). By way of concluding the arguments I would like to posit that a radical restructuring of the new media should be evolved through a true democratic exercise, which then will foster democracies.

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The Black Dot: Memes in Cyber Protest as Performance

Preethu P

Not long ago, the world was a big place with vast oceans separating land masses and cultures dividing people. Then came the Digital Revolution, one of the most important epochs in the history of humanity, and the internet, like Indra's net, hung over the globe, connecting every nook and corner. The world became a small illuminated screen where almost every action of daily life got a parallel. The concept of 'parallel universe' grew beyond the purview of science-fiction as social networking brought with it a kind of simulated reality which influences the concept of 'self' so much that the 'online persona' becomes almost as important as the real. The second decade of the millennia now witnesses a boom in the use of mobile internet which has doubled the number of people who uses social networking. The internet can, now, thus be considered to be a culture. The cyberspace has become the 'ideosphere' where ideas originate and gets spread. Though it began as a mode of communication, social media has become a medium of self-expression too. It has almost becomes an alter- collective conscious or egregore in which an idea is shared by many. This paper focuses on this aspect of memes, that is, the scope of memes as performatives.

The word *meme* has its roots in the Greek word *mimeme* which means 'imitated thing'. Coined by British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (1976), it denotes cultural entities which can be considered as replicators. Dawkins defined it as "a unit of cultural transmission...propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation". A meme is thus an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture. Like

the biological gene, it acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas, symbols, or practices from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other imitable phenomena. When it comes to the internet, a meme can be an image, hyperlink, video, picture, website, or hashtag, or even just a word or phrase, including an intentional misspelling. For Susan Blackmore, best known for her book *The Meme Machine*, these memes which live in technological artifacts are ‘temes’.

Just like genes, memes group themselves in so-called meme complexes or memeplexes and work together and influence each other. Religion is considered to be a memeplex, and so can the internet be. Such memeplexes do not only find shelter in the mind of a new host, but they will change the perceptions and life of their new host. Susan Blackmore considers the human consciousness to be an illusion constructed by memes and self to be a complex of memes.

Memetics is a field which is in its infancy. A lot of research takes place in it to find out its true potential. There was a split in the researchers and two groups- the internalists and externalists- emerged. The first group were those who wanted to stick to Dawkins’ definition of a meme as “a unit of cultural transmission”. The externalists, who wanted to redefine memes as observable cultural artifacts and behaviours, believed that memes would be impossible to be observed if they were internal. Newer concepts emerged in the field of Memetics and one of it is memetic engineering.

A term developed and coined by Leveious Rolando, John Sokol, and Gibran Burchett, memetic engineering studies the development of memes with the intent of altering the behaviour by modifying human beliefs, thought patterns, etc. In the 1998 Symposium on Memetics, organised as part of the 15th International Conference on Cybernetics, a motion was passed calling for an end to definitional debates and in 2011, it was demonstrated that functional connectivity profiling using neuro-imaging tools enables the observation of the processing of internal memes (i-memes) in response to external e-memes. As memes themselves are neither good nor bad, it begin to

take on their own process of evolution based on the person who adopts the ideology, internalizes it, and reintroduces it into society causing it to spread like a virus. The internet is an extremely powerful memeplex which, if it can be engineered, can produce far reaching results.

‘The Black Dot’ was a meme that went viral online in the protests that followed the Delhi gang rape case. In 2012, the gang rape and fatal assault of a student who later succumbed to injuries sparked an unprecedented uproar of protests and demonstrations against sexual violence in India. The incident acquired wide coverage in national, international and social media thereby increasing public discourse on crimes against women. It gained unprecedented coverage which was reflected in social networking too. The internet became the ‘ideosphere’ where the meme replicated and netizens across the nation tried to become a part of the protest by changing their Facebook profile pictures to a black dot. For some it was a way to express their sorrow, or the protest against the societal conditions that accounted for this episode, while some trivialized the meme as ‘arm chair activism’ resorted to by people who didn’t really care about actually doing something. Cyber protest is always looked down on as the way of the lazy man who thinks he can change the world with his fingertips. A memetic study of this instance of cyber protest enquires whether one can rip off the pejorative term ‘slacktivism’ associated with it and accommodate it to the wider area of performance studies.

What does the black dot signify? Conceived as a way of protest against the brutal gang rape, it can be analysed in many ways. As a dot, it symbolizes the end of something, like a full stop ending a sentence. The dot can be considered to be a protest against the violence rampant against women. It can be an appeal for stronger laws to put an end to it. If we go by colour symbolism, the dot can be analysed in multiple ways. Black has always been associated with mourning and bereavement. If read along these lines, the dot signifies the individuals shock and sorrow at the brutal murder of the victim. By the act of mourning, the individual tries to become close to the victim.

Black is the colour symbolising darkness. Here, darkness can be the societal conditions which permit such violence against women. The dot thus becomes a blot on the conscience of the nation. If we go by the definition of black as the epitome of evil, the dot can symbolize the ones behind the tragedy and thus can be read as a plea to put an end to it. The black dot can also be considered to be symbolic of shame where by the individual tries to accept responsibility of the event.

What makes cyber protest more appealing? First and foremost, the fact that information spreads easily, freely and quickly makes the cyberspace an apt vehicle for protests. It also creates an urgency that triggers immediate response. Finally, it is about the feeling of 'being there' that counts. There is no spatial restriction when it comes to the cyberspace. Thus, the potency of activism in the social media should be given attention that it is where the future is.

Performative turn, the postmodernist concept which assumes all human actions to be performance, explains how reality can be constructed through performance. J.L Austin, a linguistic philosopher, coined the term 'performative' in 1955. As Austin put it, 'to say something is to do something'. When a person changes his/her profile picture to the black dot, he transcends the stage of 'being' to 'doing' and thus the action becomes an instance of performance. Dubbed 'as-performance' by Richard Schechner, founder of the discipline of performance studies, it refers to the informal scenarios of daily life, suggesting that every day practices are 'performed'. According to him,

You need to understand the difference and relationship between "is" and "as" performance. Up till now, I have been talking about "is" performance, recognizably marked behaviors, no matter how varied and different genre to genre, culture to culture. This bundle of performance genres and instances is very different than "as" performance. "As" performance is a way of studying the world. (122)

Thus, everything and anything can be studied "as" performance. What are the reasons for which individuals perform such an action?

According to the empathy-altruism hypothesis by American social psychologist C. Daniel Batson, if you feel empathy towards another person you will help them, regardless of what you can gain from it. It states that “feeling empathy for [a] person in need evokes motivation to help [that person] in which these benefits to self are not the ultimate goal of helping; they are unintended consequences. Memes does not provide “help” in any way, but the intentions behind the individual who resort to spreading it can be good. The urge to do something for the victim takes the form of protesting against the social system that let the tragedy happen. The internet, which has become the site for the alter-ego of many users, becomes a place where they can express their emotions which cannot be done in the real life. Thus a human mind is itself becomes “an artifact created when memes restructure a human brain in order to make it a better habitat for memes” (Dennett). But the other side of the coin is that it creates arm chair activists who sit in the comfort of their homes and try to change the world with their fingertips.

Does participating in the propagation of the meme create any ripple of empathy in the minds of the individual? If so, it becomes the exact opposite of what is known as bystander apathy in social psychology. Bystander apathy is the phenomenon where individuals do not offer any means of help to a victim when other people are present. If the internet can boost the altruistic tendencies thus, it is not just ‘slacktivism’ anymore. Participating in performative memes makes the individual a part of the community and constitutes a social imaginary that gives meaning and context to the actions of subsequent and existing participants Richard Dawkins, in his book, writes:

Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish. Let us understand what our own selfish genes are up to, because we may then at least have the chance to upset their designs, something that no other species has ever aspired to do.” (170)

Ideasthesia, a concept introduced by neuroscientist Danko Nikolaiæ, studies how activations of concepts (inducers) evoke perception-like experiences (concurrents). In Memetics, the meme becomes the inducer which

produce a concurrent. In the case of the black dot, the meme can induce experiences of protest and the individual sharing it would perceive that he/she is a part of it and thus may experience a sense of content. Though the practicality of the results can be questioned on materialistic basis, it may promote a sense of well-being which may pave way for further similar actions in the future. Thus it is possible that the person who performs via the meme may feel better and his/her behaviour can be altered to be more altruistic. Dawkins writes:

We have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth and, if necessary, the selfish memes of our indoctrination. We can even discuss ways of deliberately cultivating and nurturing pure, disinterested altruism - something that has no place in nature, something that has never existed before in the whole history of the world. We are built as gene machines and cultured as meme machines, but we have the power to turn against our creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators. (125)

In part III of his 1995 book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, titled "Mind, Meaning, Mathematics and Morality", Daniel Dennett asserts that the meme has a role to play in our understanding of culture by helping us transcend the selfish gene. He is optimistic about the ability of human beings to design and redesign our approach to moral problems.

To conclude, memes on the internet can produce results which bring positive changes to the human life. Like genes are to biological evolution, memes are important in cultural evolution, and if judiciously employed, it can be put to good use. Memes are not just effluvia of human experience but it has control over the human culture. Memetic engineering, like genetic engineering, can alter meme types thereby altering the cultural phenotype. The emerging culture of the cyberspace calls for a control mechanism which can produce good results as it reaches more people.

When a person is using a meme, it transcends the stage of passive observation and he/ she feels a sense of 'action'. Though looked down on as 'arm chair activism', it may produce a sense of well-being in the individual which can in turn produce more altruistic actions. The question of psychological egoism may arise, that is individuals may be altruistic for selfish reasons, but it is better than inaction. Whether it is altruism triggered by selfish motives, or be it a "monkey see, monkey do" situation, what matters is that there has been an action which has the potential to bring about betterment.

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Videogames as a Postmodern Interactive Visual Space

Priyanka M.C

The Print Revolution during the Renaissance gave rise to a new era of knowledge dissemination and creativity with its technical ability to reproduce texts accurately and swiftly. Rather than just a knowledge revolution, this marked a decisive movement in the history of literary culture which till then was mostly oral in nature. This led to a shift from the earlier polyphonic, multiple narratives to homogeneity and repeatability in literature which in turn led to the emergence of a belief in a single 'signifier' produced by the Author- God.

In fact this evolution of a belief in a transcendental signifier later led to the emergence of the concept of a tyrannical authoritative author who suppressed the free play of signification which led Derrida and many other post modern philosophers to equate the culture of the Book with logocentrism. In fact Derrida even prophesized that the epoch of the Book and its logocentric suppression of the free play of signification "seems to be approaching what is really its exhaustion" (Derrida 6).

Before long the Barthesian act of murder of the sacred notion of authorship led to another major twist in the literary circle. He viewed the author as a modern figure, a product of our society emerging from the middle Ages with English empiricism and proclaimed that text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning but a multi-dimensional space, a tissue of quotations whose unity lies not in its origin but in its destination or the reader (Barthes 143). From then on the literary artists and critics became more and more preoccupied in taking care of the new-born 'Reader' insisting on an active role for him. Though the artists plunged themselves into novelistic experiments,

the problem of how to involve the reader in an art work limited by the linearity of the medium remained unresolved.

It is in this scenario that the electronic and computer technology with its promise of a heterogeneous, mutable, interactive and open ended space of hypertextuality emerged. Emergence of electronic hypertext signaled to some extent the demise of book industry and relief from the dangers of the linearity of the printed pages. For in a hypertext, neither the signs nor the signifiers were tied to a conceptual authoritative figure of an author nor was it limited by the linear yarns of printed paper, but was inscribed between nodes where the reader could easily interact. The best example for such a network is the World Wide Web, wherein one link would take the reader to another page, and control is given up by the author and shifted to the reader.

Infact hypertext is a term which is often defined and re-defined in various contexts according to its varied electronic features. Coined by Theodor Nelson in 1963, he explains it to be "... non-sequential writing — text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways". (43)

Thus hypertext in many ways is an attempt to overcome the old linear constraints of the written text which in turn inspired an experimental mode of non-linear story telling or narrative. And as a result as predicted by Allen Renear a new literate culture that is thoroughly electronic began to emerge with the advent of hypertext fiction or interactive fiction as a major genre of electronic literature (Renear 389). Hypertext fiction to a major extent provides a new context for non-linearity in "literature" and reader interaction. Here the reader typically chooses links to move from one node of text to the next, and in this fashion arranges a story from a deeper pool of potential stories as represented in the figure below.

At its best these interactive fictions actualizes what Roland Barthes called the writerly text where the reader participates in the production of meaning . Thus the player with a certain freedom can choose events and each

chosen event tend to have a particular consequence as such thereby providing the player the postmodern goals of interactivity and immersion. “Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation ... The truest respect which you can pay to the reader’s understanding, is to have this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.” -(Sterne , 844)

Hypertext as mentioned earlier is an interactive, user controlled text and though often considered to be a postmodern genre of electronic literature, its history can be traced back as early as the 18th century in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* where Sterne provides a context of non-linearity in literature, by going beyond the traditional textual concepts. The book is thoroughly performative and its narrative logic advocates an endless freeplay resisting any form of closure. In fact here in this text one can experience a power transfer taking place from the author to the reader where the reader is even given the liberty to take alternative routes through the text.

Later, works like Nabakov’s *Pale Fire*, Cortzar’s *Hopscotch* and Calvino’s *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* also carried this tradition of Sterne in the text by free play and non-linearity in narrative. Thus it should be inferred that many texts produced even as printed books had anticipated the non-sequential narratives of electronic hypertext fictions. And with the emergence of new technologies, the whole preconceived notion of how to read a text changed. Thus, we have the first electronic hypertext fiction Michael Joyce’s *Afternoon, a story*, first presented in 1987 and published by Eastgate Systems in 1991. It was soon followed by a series of hypertext fictions like Stuart Moulthrop’s *Victory Garden*, Judy Malloy’s *Its Name was Penelope*, Carolyn Guyer’s *Quibbling*, Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* and Deena Larsen’s *Marble Springs*.

Yet, even when the concept of hypertext fictions or digital narratives has been fascinating the postmodern cultural discourses, a very new hyperfiction, computer games or more sophisticatedly referred as Interactive Entertainment, in which graphics, audio, video, plain texts and hyperlinks

intertwine to create a generally non-linear medium of information failed to produce even a minor wave in the literary circles. In fact the development of *Spacewar*, the first computer game, a reminiscent of many science fiction movies at the MIT basement by Steve Russell and his companions was not even actually acknowledged by the then academic circle, less to be hailed to have any literary significance.

In fact Landow in his *Hypertext 3.0* points out five cases of similarity between hypertexts and computer games.

First, the players actions- clicking a mouse or manipulating a similar device, such as a joystick- determines what the player encounters next. Second, like hypertext, games rely on branching structure and decision points. Since the places in the video game where the player acts produces different results, they appear structurally identical to hypertext's branching links... Third, games, like hypertext fictions (but unlike print narratives), are meant to be performed, and fourth they are meant be performed multiple times. Fifth (and this may only be a trivial point of convergence), the record of a game player's actions, like the experience of reading a hypertext, appear linear since both the players of games and readers of texts make their way through a series of choices in linear time; of course, the range of possible actions, of road not taken, themselves constitute a branching or multilinear structure but one that is not immediately available to players and readers (Landow 250)

Yet the problem which still pertained was whether computer games could emerge as a medium of storytelling and narration and pave way towards a multimedia hypertext narrative. It is true that the first computer game, *Space Invaders* does not offer any real narrative elements, it was nothing more than a rudimentary story-world where a lone ship fights its battle to survive an alien invasion. It represents shapes, movements and sounds, but these do not bear any resemblance to objects and actions in the real world for us to recognize and play with them. Yet the speed with which computer games have developed aesthetically, formally and functionally cannot be easily left unexplored. The

level of audio-visual, narrative and interactional sophistication of today's games seems light years away from the 1970's *Pac-Man* and *Asteroids* or even the well applauded *Super Mario Bros* of the mid 1990's.

Thus when we move across the historical timeline we can see a lot more sophisticated narratives hosted in fictional environments as in *Myst*, *MaxPayne* or *GTA*. In fact it is this artistic evolution of the medium which had led Henry Jenkins to claim video games as an 'art form for the digital age'(117).

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City(2002) is an open world action video game developed by games developer Rockstar North where the player/reader takes on the role of Mafia assailant Tommy Vercetti who was recently released from imprisonment. But fearing his arrival to heighten tensions and bring unwanted attention to his organization's criminal activities in the Liberty City, Tommy's old boss, Sonny Forelli, ostensibly promotes Tommy and sends him to a glamorous, hedonistic metropolis, Vice City under the guardianship of Mafia lawyer Ken Rosenberg to expand the Forelli Crime Empire. This is signaled to the audience through a non-interactive cutscene where the conversation goes so:

"Sonny: We treat him [Tommy] like an old friend and keep him busy out of town. OK? We been talking about expanding down South, right? Vice City is twenty-four carat gold these days[...]

Mobster: But it's all drugs, Sonny. None of the families will touch that shit!

Sonny: Times are changing[...]So, we send someone down to do the dirty work for us and cut ourselves a nice quiet slice. OK?" (*Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, Rockstar North, 2002.)

He arrives in Vice City and is targeted for a setup that leads to the loss of Forelli's drug money, and Forelli demands his money back, but the biker gangs, Cuban gangsters, corrupt politicians and a bitter population controlled by murderous gangs and mafia lords stand in his way. Most of Vice City seems to want Tommy dead and his only chance for survival is to fight back and take

over the city himself. Thus armed with an attorney and a group of allies, Tommy or rather the player/reader himself sets out to defeat Vice City through real estate, gang wars, and anti-mafia mayhem to finally discover that it is none other than Forelli who had cheated him not only in the drug deal, but was even responsible for his earlier imprisonment.

As many of the nascent interactive fictional world, here the reader is led to create a story-world by the simple means of solving puzzles or accomplishing missions. Thus there are around 20 storyline missions that you should accept as a hit man from Ken Rosenberg, Colonel Cortez, Ricardo Diaz, Kent Paul and Lance Vance which includes taking your boss's daughter to the club to terrorizing of the juries or saving your friend's life to capturing a piece of military hardware in order to move along the narrative story world. In fact these missions are thread together to produce a narrative visual space which acts as the main plot for this digital fiction.

Also there are a lot of asset missions and secondary missions inserted as 'subplots' parallel to the main plot. Asset missions are basically missions by which you can buy assets which can in turn produce revenue. Thus to own the Cherry Popper Ice Cream Factory in Little Havana one should complete the Ice Cream mission which includes getting into a Mr. Woopie van and selling 50 ice creams, which are actually drugs. While secondary missions are those which has no clear relation to the story line, but those which could make the player/reader experience a sort of fictional aura. This includes Pay Phone Missions and missions from Avery Carrington, Love Fist / Kent Paul, Mitch Baker / Biker Gang, Phil Cassidy, Umberto Robino/ Cubans and Auntie Poulet/ Haitians.

Although storyline missions must be completed to complete the narrative and unlock new areas of the city, the gameplay is very open-ended where the player is able to drive around and visit different parts of the city at his leisure and do whatever they wish if not currently in the middle of a mission. The player/reader can even indulge in activities like pizza deliveries, rushing victims

to hospitals in the ambulances, gunning down criminals in vigilante missions, and zigzagging across the city delivering people to their destinations in cabs.

GTA:Vice City(2002) features a large, open world where self-directed exploration leads player/reader to encounter non-linear story elements in a unique order that they themselves are partly responsible for creating. Thus it can be inferred that the Digital entertainment in near future could emerge as an interactive literary medium based on the basic gaming technique of completing missions or solving puzzles. As viewed very response and decisions the player/reader makes by a mouse click or in the keyboard from in the fictional story world of *GTA* provokes a reaction from the virtual world, which in turn provokes a new reaction from the player and so on thereby creating the narrative universe. Here the player is placed inside a non-linear fictional universe where he is given the freedom where in to choose certain missions and leave the others, though it mandatory that he should complete all the ‘storyline’ missions that are part of the storyworld.

With this insistence on the completion of ‘storyline’ missions it could be assumed that there is a ‘readerly’ text or an Author even inside this interactive ‘writerly’ text. These readerly features are well evident in the cutscenes where in the narrative takes life of its own and is simply left to unfold without an interruption from the player/reader. Infact a player/reader has no control over the narrative at this point, he is stripped off his influences while the narrative moves along. This should be seen as a manifestation of the author’s voice in the creation of the fictional world; something that proclaim that the ‘dead’ Author is still alive.

But this does not mean that the player/ reader are not involved in creating this world. In fact it is the player/reader who arranges the events in ‘script’ of the Author by arranging and exploring the rules. For instance after completing the Riot mission from Rosenberg, the player/ reader can choose to work either for Cortez, Carrington or move independently by taking up the pay phone mission. He can even decide to take some time off by working as a pizza boy, ambulance driver, cabman or simply wander around exploring the city and

visiting new place. Thus the actual construction of the narrative is always done by the player by taking the signs on the interface and interpreting them further. At one point the immersion is so high that the computer comes to feel like an organic extension of your consciousness, and you may feel like an extension of the computer itself (Haraway 144).

Games and literature have more in common than it might seem at first. Yet even the hypertext theories found today do not adequately deal with the basic literary elements of the computer games. This problem should in fact be paid attention as computer games are the form in which most people are exposed to hyperfiction. And as Robert Coover opines as long as hyperfiction is taken seriously, one cannot ignore the hyperfictions that are selling. In its current stature, the digital entertainment with all its weaknesses may not be entirely literary to the core. Yet the seed for an entirely dialogic text has been sown. Without the active encroachment of literary studies or 'theoretical imperialism' as Espen Aarseth calls it, this field with all of its postmodern literary potentials and possibilities are bound to fail.

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Spatial Pathos and Post-apocalyptic Landscape: the Case of *WALL-E*

Jeena Grace J.N

Land and sensibility towards it is a fundamental element of human nature. This primordial drive is expressed passionately in the most common (and much debated) version of a letter attributed to Suquamish/Duwamish Indian chief Chief Seattle:

The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you sell them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people. (qtd. in Michaels)

This basic and profound human spatial preoccupation is visible across time and space. The Hebrew Bible tells of the Promised Land of Canaan which is still entwined with typical Jewish ethos. Land and loss of it become central stage experiences in the Hebrew history. Many of the apocalyptic prophecies narrated in the Old Testament of the Bible deals with deportation from land. Psalmist captures the specifically spatial longings of the deported people:

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

(New Revised Standard Version, Psalm 137.5-6)

Apocalypse and Diaspora form the two poles around which Jewish history evolved. In the Old Testament, it is essentially the cautionary words of the prophets that formulated the course of life. Apocalyptic prophecies by the prophets were subsequently fulfilled in the formation of Jewish Diaspora as in the case of Babylonian captivity and deportations. The biblical prophets are seen as channels for revealing God's will and many of them appear to be apocalyptic in their warnings to the people who disobey God and indulge in sin. They predicted an impending doom/apocalypse both synchronically in the form of political defeat, captivity and exile and diachronically in the form of a universal and definite end of the whole world. The predictions were most significantly apocalyptic as this:

Terror, and the pit, and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth! Whoever flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit; and whoever climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunkard, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again. (Isaiah 24. 17-20)

What chronologically followed these prophecies of Isaiah as signs of impending doom of the earth, was the Assyrian invasion of Israel. This is only an example of many such instances where generalized prophecies and warnings on the future of the world finds immediate fulfillment on Judah or Israel. That is, the immediate effect was not the final termination of the earth but diaspora formation and scattering of Jews. A cyclical sequence seems to evolve from this: sin/violation- prophecy/warning- apocalypse- diasporas- repentance-obedience. The diachronic significance of these prophecies is perceived as evolving down the centuries to our times as seen in the apocalyptic media narratives.

The diaspora experience prevalent in human psyche today is very subtle and needs to be redefined and expanded, since the concept of land and the space occupied by man, went through a thorough transition. Geographical and

material space has held hegemony in dominating the spatial realm for many centuries. This “space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile” (Foucault 70). However, the current postmodern sensibility refuses to identify space merely with geographical space. Philosophers like Henri Lefebvre, redefined the parameters of space by presenting it as a complex social product and argued that “new social relations demand a new space, and vice-versa”(59). Greatly indebted to this idea of social space, the concept of space now mean much more than an objective and perceivable outside fact. This expansion of meaning is also due to the much varied spatial experiences offered by technology and communication revolution.

Human spatial experience has grown in magnificent proportions to a metaphysical realm of virtual space with the advent of virtual media and virtual reality. The present social space is thus increasingly becoming a virtual space where an individual’s geographical space seems to dissolve into oblivion on the face of the onslaught of virtual space. In today’s context, from political strategists to retail sellers, to acquire supremacy over others would mean influencing different levels of space. Multi-levels of spatial encounters in the geosphere of concrete earthly experience and the infosphere of media are available for modern man and hence diaspora experience of modern times too is multifaceted.

Pixar production’s Oscar winning animated movie *WALL-E* offers a kaleidoscopic view of spatial flux and the fulfilment of apocalypse in diaspora manifested at multi-levels. The movie opens with an earth reduced to a wasteland due to the accumulation of toxic waste and garbage. Just like the Jewish population’s deportation to Babylon in three sequences in the years 598, 587, and 582 B.C, the people of the earth are completely evacuated from the earth aboard a fleet of spaceships in the projected year 2105 AD. By 2805 AD, the protagonist and title character, WALL-E (Waste Allocation Load Lifter-Earth-Class) is the only one surviving robot among many robots set up by the mega corporation- Buy ‘n’ Large/ BnL to clean the planet. Mankind is established in a spaceship named Axiom by the same mega corporation whose

strategies of mass consumerism relegated the earth to a garbage land. In the highly modernized automated atmosphere of Axiom, human beings degenerate into over grown baby-like beings. They are provided everything they need in their automated chair cars and are glued to their screens which serve as the primary mode of communication. Through the efforts of WALL –E and his love interest EVE, a robot probe sent to the earth by BnL, mankind finally returns to the earth.

WALL-E is strikingly relevant as a case of post apocalyptic landscape, where disaster has come and gone with far reaching consequences. Set in 2805 A.D, this movie presents three spatial realms: the devastated earth, space onboard the Axiom, and the virtual space enjoyed by the inhabitants of the Axiom. There is thus a triple layer of diaspora experience, an experience of being thrice alienated from home space. The movie opens with the popular song ‘Put on your Sunday clothes,’ which invites focus on spatiality:

There’s a world outside of Yonkers
Way out there beyond this hick town, Barnaby
.....
Close your eyes and see it glisten, Barnaby
Listen, Barnaby.
Put on your Sunday clothes,
There’s lots of world out there. (Herman)

This ‘world outside’ is simultaneously the earth, the outer space as well as the simulated space human beings perceive. The earth is presented as a dystopia, a dreary landscape as monotonous and lifeless as the life of mankind onboard Axiom. The predominant tone is that of decay and desolation. Once green and flourishing, the earth is now reduced to a desolate no man’s land suggestive of the biblical wasteland prophesied by Isaiah, “the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants for they have transgressed laws (24.4-6).” In addition to economical and social monopoly, the Buy’ n Large apparently had spatial

monopoly and dominion over the earth prior to evacuation, without which such a mass evacuation would have been impossible.

For man, to physically leave the earth, the earth should first move out of man. Man's love for the earth as his dominating space should drastically decrease. Such a detachment from the earth should enable him to be isolated from everything related to the physical life on the earth's surface. This disconnectedness is the primary diaspora experience in *WALL-E* and it develops while mankind is still on the earth's surface. This becomes a metaphysical diaspora experience because the physical location which roots one to a physical space has become irrelevant. Mankind is alienated and uprooted from the earth, to which their history and advancement is closely associated. This was the consequence of the increasing influence of alternative spaces which gained prominence over the earth in man's social space. The movie here offers a slice of twenty first century man's real life with his increasing disability to relate with his immediate physical surroundings and his ever growing serfdom to media. Communication revolution and globalization brought down the significance of any particular locale so much so that having lost the unique experience which any particular place on the earth can offer, the world became 'reduced to' a global village. In *WALL-E*, this homogenization is but one step away from totally disrupting the whole collective earth experience. Had there been diversity and variety there would have been alternate possibilities to revamp the earth. This option is permanently deleted by homogenization. The final outcome of such a unified spatial experience is the picture of the earth as a bleak garbage land as seen in the movie.

The apocalypse presented in the movie is not a sudden drastic event. It is, rather, a gradual accumulation of e-waste and other toxic materials which rendered the earth unsuitable for life. The diaspora experience that comes out of this apocalypse is however, drastic, multifaceted and profound. The earth is seemingly unfit to support any form of life caused by man's indiscriminate and ill use of the resources it offered. This environmental hostility is human induced causing the victimizers themselves to be the victims. There might

have been apocalyptic prophetic voices which were drowned in the mass consumerism and shallow pleasures it offered. What human beings pay for their unsustainable modes of advancement and inefficient ways of toxic waste management is the diaspora experience of being physically uprooted and placed in a Babylonian- like captivity experience.

The major experience of spatial dislocation in *WALL-E* is the decisive deportation of the entire human race from the earth. Life aboard the spaceship is conceived with a hope of returning to earth in future after all the garbage is successfully cleared/ consolidated by WALL-E type robots. This hope for returning to homeland is a characteristic feature of diaspora communities which “regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return” (Safran). However, after spending centuries on Axiom, the hope to return to earth and even the knowledge about the earth declines. This is a feature of some diaspora societies which have re-rooted to the new land. Onboard Axiom, measures are taken to prevent human beings from reconnecting with their spatial past on the earth and consequently they do not perceive any deprivation or alienation. They are so thoroughly subjugated by BnL that they scarcely realize that they are in a state of passivity that permeates physical, mental and social aspects of life.

During the span of seven hundred years onboard, even the physical appearance of mankind changes considerably due to atrophy caused by non exertion, over dependence on robots and automation, and bone loss caused by microgravity. The series of photos of the captains reveal the physical transition of human beings on Axiom. Their present shorter and stouter physique bears testimony to the comforts they enjoyed which proved detrimental to their own well being. Their ear auricles are smaller since the successors of the original Axiom dwellers lost their need for listening anything far off. They are connected to announcements as well as speech of their fellow Axiom dwellers through the speakers attached to their respective hover chairs. The life of ease provided by the fully automatized facilities within Axiom prevented them from walking or standing and gradually even from the use of limbs, resulting in atrophy due

to loss of nerve supply. Their teeth degenerated into milk teeth due to the constant consumption of liquid “lunch in a cup” provided by BnL to ease them from even the difficulty of chewing food. In short, physical activity and wellness has come to a standstill as men lost connectedness to the physical space.

This physical deterioration of human beings is but an indication of their greater intellectual slavery. They are devoid of exercising choices in matters of food, clothing, entertainment, and knowledge. This dominion over their choices reveals the extent of their deprivation and is established in a subtle way that they are unaware of their subjugated state. This is especially evident in fashion choices when the ship’s computer announces “Attention, Axiom shoppers. Try blue! It’s the new red! And by the press of their chair buttons everyone’s jumpsuits change from red to blue. A peek at the children’s All Day care centre displays the intellectual conditioning received by the upcoming generations: “A”! “A” is for “Axiom”, your home sweet home. “B”! “B” is for “Buy N Large”, your very best friend.” This subjugation of social space is very subtle and may not fit into the nostalgic mindsets usually attached to victim diaspora communities, since here the victims are unaware of their shackled situation. Nevertheless their utter deprivation and loss of identity is real and obvious.

The third level of diaspora experience they face is their moving out of the ‘real’ reality and into virtual reality and from real spatiality into virtual spatiality. In Edward Soja’s words “spatiality is socially produced and, like society itself, exists in both substantial forms (concrete spatialities) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups, an ‘embodiment’ and medium of social life itself” (120). For Axiom dwellers, concrete space is reduced to the hover chairs to which they are confined to, just as social space became limited to the virtual space. Indifferent to the geographical and actual space, they relate neither to substantial concrete spatialities nor to any real significant interpersonal social space. This is because the space they actually relate to, is only a mediated one. They maintain a passive reticence to the simulated sun and the sky on Axiom’s ceiling. John and Mary do not begin to appreciate each other and begin a relationship till their communicative medium of virtual

screen is lost. Only when John is distracted from his screen by WALL-E, does he perceive the spatial realities around him. Likewise, Mary notices the pool for the first time in her life, only when her virtual screen is accidentally broken by WALL-E. The disruption of the entire system so carefully laid out by BnL Corporation by the hustle caused by the chase for EVE and WALL-E, wakes up human beings from their imbibed passivity. It is only then that they begin to reconnect with the earth they left behind. The avalanche of hover chairs is a symbol of mankind's deliverance from the only concrete space to which their bodies were glued to, and which stood as a fetter that kept them spatially captive for centuries.

WALL-E winds up with a massive homecoming reminding the viewers of many such homecomings of diaspora populations. It has the undertones of a miraculous 'Red sea crossing' of the Israelites with Axiom spaceship covering light years of distance between the outside of the Milkyway Galaxy and the earth's atmosphere in a 'hyper jump' that lasts only ten seconds. For Jews, it is Canaan, which was once the home of their ancestors, to which they return and rebuild their society. The seven hundred year long lodging abroad Axiom sets in focus the seventy year long Babylonian exile too. However, unlike in the movie were the returning people came home wholly and completely; the return of the exiles after the Babylonion captivity was sporadic and never total. In the movie, human beings return to the earth to take up the formidable task of making it suitable to re-establish life. As Cohen states, "Space deserves membership in the set of productive forces.... Even when a piece of space is contentless, its control may generate economic power, because it can be filled with something productive or because it may need to be traversed by producers" (51). In *WALL-E*, this raw piece of space called the earth belongs to the human beings now. Growth, production, regeneration and better future await them as a new morning is ushered in. The movie began in the land of captivity and now moves into the Promised Land that the earth stands for, as the 'sin-apocalypse - diaspora - repentance - return to homeland' sequence comes to a conclusion.

The dynamics of space presented in WALL-E gains significance along different contours. The present geopolitical scenario, unsustainable developmental strategies, and the advancement of virtual space and social media at the cost of real life relationships and spatial connections point to a future earth not unlike the one WALL-E tries to cleanse. Moreover, it accurately captures the post-modern spatial and diaspora experiences which involve geosphere and infosphere and often lie between these spheres.

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The Trial of Dedan Kimathi: A Revisionist Historiography

N.H. Kallur

The Trial of Dedan Kimathi is a collaborative creative writing by two well known Kenyan writers namely Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo. A revisionist historiography implies re-reading, re-evaluation, revising, re-writing of official history or established history. The task of revising implies excluding or including of something, providing the space for the unrecorded and subversion of established history. According to Franz Fanon reclamation of history is one of the major traits of postcolonial literature.

The article aims to illustrate how the play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is a revisionist historiography. Mugo's view in an interview with Adeola James supplements this idea. She remarks, "We were using drama specifically in order to conscientize our people, to review our history with them and theirs with us to be able to answer the questions, 'where are we? And where are we heading?' " (quoted in Sinha 51) In the preface to the book the authors ask certain questions which underline their intention of re-writing the history. They put the questions like: whether the heroic peasant armed struggle against the British Forces had been adequately treated in our literature. Why was Kenyan Literature on the whole so submissive and hardly depicted the people, the masses, as capable of making and changing history? Why were our artists not singing songs in praise of national heroes and heroines of our history and their epic deeds of resistance? Whose history and whose deeds were the historians and creative writers recording for our children to read? They feel that there is no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the heroic resistance of Kenyan people fighting against foreign forces for their exploitation and domination, though its history goes back to 15th and 16th centuries. The

documenting the same colonial myths that Kenyan people wandered aimlessly, engaged in purposeless warfare and let the British forces to occupy the land. Some were outright defenders of imperialism and lauded the pronouncements of colonial governors. Ngugi remarks that the play is an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers to break sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement. In a nutshell the play aims to sing the songs of those who were unrecorded or not provided the due space in the official or established history.

The Trial of Dedan Kimathi is a revisionist historiography in many respects. It reclaims the history of a legendary freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi, of Mau Mau movement-an army of freedom fighters, of a woman, a boy, a girl and a people. These are recreated in the play as follows. Firstly, the paper analyses how the protagonist of the play Dedan Kimathi is recreated. As recorded in the preface the authors went to Karunaini, the actual place of Kimathi, to collect the actual information about him. They visited the school where Kimathi taught and the place where Kimathi was shot down. They met a woman, Kimathi's student, and some people who were Kimathi's childhood companions. They got factual as well as conflicting legends about Kimathi. For instance, it is assumed that Kimathi fought in the Second World War and that was where he learnt his military skills as well as his skills in making guns. But there is another belief that Kimathi never fought in that war. He evolved his brilliant guerrilla tactics and organizing capacity from the needs of the struggle. The people of Karunaini were proud of their son. They talked of him as a dedicated teacher, committed organizer, man with tremendous sense of humour, a man of warm personality, and loved his people. He was their revered leader and beloved son. They believed he is still alive. The woman said that Kiamthi would never die.

But in the play Kimathi is recreated in a different fashion. He is undoubtedly an anti-imperialist and believes nature of capitalism is to live on

the blood of others. He calls its culture as anti-human culture. Kimathi is not only delineated as a fighter fought against the British but also as a passionate fighter fought for the total liberation of Kenya throughout his life. He sacrifices his life for that great cause. Being an ardent patriotic he fights against colonial as well as neo-colonial forces. In the play he is accused of being in possession of a rifle which is against the prevailing rules. So, the judge, representative of the British, in order project the impartial and fair play of judicial system during the colonial rule, provides him opportunity to plead for on behalf of him. Kimathi rejects the offer stating that he doesn't want to be adjudicated by "a criminal judge, in a criminal court, set up by criminal law: the law of oppression" (TDK 25). Further he categorically says that he would not plead to a law in which they had no part in forming. He doesn't consent the projection that there is only one law or one justice. He believes there are two laws and two justices: "one law and one justice protects the man of property, the man of wealth, the foreign exploiter, another law and justice silences the poor, the hungry, our people" (26). He despises the British laws and courts because they protect the oppressors and license the murderers. He recognizes and reveres only one court and one law of those who fight against exploitation. That law is the eternal law of the oppressed, of the humiliated, of the injured and the insulted. He opines first of all freedom must be offered because there is no law and order without liberty.

Kenyan's fierce struggle for total liberation under the leadership of Dedan Kimathi troubled British and made them sleepless. So, the conviction of the British was that if Kiamthi surrenders by accepting his guilt all the guerrilla fighters would come out of the forest and the united struggle of Kenyans for freedom would come to an end. So, four trials are arranged to offer opportunity to Kimathi for pleading. In all the four trials Kimathi does not yield to any provocation. He firmly adheres to his objectives. In the first trial using his childhood intimacy with Kimathi Henderson tries to convince him stating that he has come to make a deal. But Kimathi considers him as friend and killer of Africans. He says you have wiped out many nations under this treaty and that treaty and he has the higher goal of protecting the struggle from betrayal,

opportunism and regional chauvinism. He suspects perhaps Henderson is doing so to get a medal. So, Kimathi asks him, “Must you kill people, wipe out nations for medals?” and tells him categorically, “we have bled for you. We have fought for you in wars against the Germans, Japanese, and Italians. This time we shall bleed for our soil, for our freedom, until you let go” (34). Henderson requests him to plead guilty for life because he is in custody hanging between life and death and life comes before pride. We must end this strife. He further tells that he can name his prize and they will spare his life if he pleads his guilty. Kimathi reacts strongly by asking him, “Who are you imperialist cannibal to guarantee my life? My life is our people. We are fighting not to maintain slavery, oppression and exploitation but to end them. Kimathi will never sell Kenya to the British or any other breed of man-eaters, now or in the years to come” (36).

In the second trial also the British continue their efforts via a banker and an Indian to convince Kimathi and to make him accept his guilt. The banker says I am one of the makers of modern Kenya; hunger disease and ignorance are enemies of our people. We have built many banks, roads, cities and financed railways. Now this war is holding back investment, the flow of money and development. Time is money and money is development. Banker tells Kimathi to confess, to repent, to plead guilty, to surrender like many generals did and to tell his people to come out of forest. Because stability is needed and there cannot be progress without stability. If stability prevails they are ready to finance big hotels, sea-side resorts, night clubs, refineries, pipelines roads connecting important cities and nations. He promises that racialism or colour bar will not be there and they are ready to offer partnership to black people in all these sectors. He tells his motto “investment, development, prosperity and happiness”. Kimathi replies him calmly that it is not true that their money has built this country. It is our sweat, it is our hands and the labour powers of our land have transformed this land. Then Kimathi asks, “What is the position of his people in the partnership for progress?” Banker replies the classes of masters and servants exist in almost all the civilized countries of the

world. The Indian also supports this opinion by saying in holy religion like ours also divisions like Brahmins and untouchables exist. Kimathi laughs at his idea and considers that as the religion of enslavement. Like colonialism this too makes the colonized sweat and bleed while masters harvest.

In the third trial we have a business executive, a politician and a priest. They, epitomize neo-colonial forces, attempt to persuade Kimathi to call off the struggle, to plead, to accept the guilt and to save his life. Kimathi's mind is in a great turmoil now and he feels "he has been sitting on hot coals of trials and temptations" (44). The business executive has come with two proposals from the British. The first one is, there will be no more colour- bar in public places, in administration, in business, in the allocation of loans and in the acquisition of land. The second proposal is the partnership in progress. Consequently, any black man who works hard and has capital can make it to the top. Black men can become local directors of foreign companies. They can buy land in the White Highlands also. So, now they can become the willing sellers and willing buyers. He believes perhaps they are fighting for these advantages. But Kimathi says ironically what fun it is to buy our own land from those who have stolen from us.

The Politician has come with the proposal of getting independence province by province. He opines as the British have already given them seats in the Legislative Council it is a great victory for them. Moreover, they are ready to offer independence to Central Province and to allow Provincial and District Political Parties. So, he proposes the acceptance of these offers. He also suggests later on they will have serious negotiations for complete freedom and country-wide political party. Kimathi wonders what colonialism has done to thinking of these people. He asks the politician, "Would you call the war for national liberation a regional Movement? Kenya is one indivisible whole. The cause we fight for is larger than province; it shatters ethnic barriers" (46). He wonders what revolution will unchain these cursed minds! He considers them as neo-slaves.

Next the Priest arrives; he says he doesn't wish to talk about worldly things but spiritual things. He views even God and Satan locked in an immortal struggle for the domination of our souls. Gradually he comes to the point and says they are Africanizing the Church. He preaches we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We should not waste more lives in this struggle. Jesus will never betray us. He suggests Kimathi to call off bloodshed and to surrender...that is the word of God. Plead guilty and ask God for forgiveness. Let Jesus speak to you. After listening to the Priest's words Kimathi asks him, "Can it be wrong even in the eyes of your God for a people to fight against exploitation" (50). Thus, Kimathi overcomes all the temptations and further pronounces he will fight on to the end alone.

When the British fail to convince Kimathi through their messengers they resort to the final and fourth trial of giving him physical torture. Once again Henderson comes and says the democratic government has done all what it could do. Finally he orders Kimathi to call off the struggle, to give call to his followers to come out of forest and to tell where is Stanley Mathenge? Kimathi does not yield to this. In fact he challenges Henderson, "if you are a fighter, unfetter me now. Let us face each other. Man to man. Let us see which wrestler fells the other, you coward" (55). Henderson calls two strong African soldiers and orders them to give Kimathi physical torture. They go to the extent of giving hardcore electric treatment. Consequently Kimathi receives injuries, body bloodstained, unable to walk, obviously broken in body but not in spirit. He makes it clear to Henderson that, "Our people will never surrender, they fight against oppression, against humiliation, against enslavement of body, mind and soul" (58).

The third movement of the play takes place in Nyandarua Forest, a Guerrilla camp. Here Kimathi is recreated in a different way. Here he holds discussion with his followers and generals regarding various issues. He has formed six brave armies and places them at strategic places. As they have had great victories all over Kenya the enemies are unable to sleep and they have called their best generals. He plans of sending envoys to various parts of Kenya

and of forming a grand alliance of Kenyan People. Kimathi discusses about getting a supply of arms, manufacturing excellent machine guns, opening of cloth factory with excellent material, recollects heroic deeds of ancestors who fought against oppression and exploitation. He instils patriotism with inspiring words that we must learn from our past strength and weaknesses, from past victories and defeats, talks of increasing requirement of crops, acquainting with birds, animals and entire environment. He is very much aware of strengths of enemies. He says that they have bombers, machineguns, greater and efficient weapons of propaganda like radio, newspapers, schools and universities. But he inspires his followers thus; we need not to worry, our love of freedom is our bullet, our successes are our newspapers, our unity and discipline in struggle is mightier than the enemy's best generals. With our unity and discipline we can move mountains. Truth is our atomic bomb and discipline is our hydrogen bomb. Our victory is the victory of working people. These actions and words of Kimathi illustrate that he is a committed fighter, best organizer and an inspiring leader.

Kimathi also discusses with his followers about what is to be done regarding followers who tried to hold negotiation with enemies without bringing the matter to the notice of him. The opinion of fighters is divided. Some of them suggest that they are guilty and traitors must be punished because "it is better to have fifty men armed with faith and discipline than a thousand villains, doubters and possible collaborators" (72). But some fighters suggest that as it is their first offence they must be forgiven. Otherwise they will run away to the enemy and further betray us. For fear of people's wrath and justice they should not do another wrong. Kimathi believes that the decision must uphold the struggle, must be wise and it should advance the struggle for liberation. After listening to the suggestions and careful consideration Kimathi decides to condone them. It exemplifies the human side of him.

The character of Kimathi is recreated employing the technique of point of views of other characters, mainly from point of views of woman, boy, girl and people. In the first movement we are not directly introduced to Kimathi

but it is done through the views of people. The important character in the play is woman. She tells the boy and girl that Kiamthi is a committed fighter, best organizer and an inspiring leader and “he is a genius in this struggle. It is therefore important to rescue him even at the cost of our lives” (61). On another occasion she remarks, “Kimathi is never alone ...will never be alone. No bullet can kill him as long as women continue to bear children” (21). She further tells them that Kimathi could do many things: “he can bring down enemy aeroplane with only a rifle. He was a wonderful teacher. He could act and mimic any character in the world: a story teller too, can make people gay with humorous anecdotes. Above all he loved his people and his country.”(62). He is a great commander, great organizer, great fearless fighter and great human being.

The boy and girl have heard much about Kimathi. This also contributes to recreate Kimathi. The boy has heard that “Kimathi could turn himself into an aeroplane. Before an attack on a garrison, he would go and blow a bugle from the inside. That he could walk for a hundred miles on his belly” (61). The girl has heard that he could mimic any noise of a bird. Thus, the views of these characters amount to recreation of multifaceted personality of Kimathi.

The character of woman also is recreated in the play. In the official history women are absent or marginalized. But in the play the writers have deliberately provided due space to women. Woman in the play is an ordinary woman. Because of call from exploited and humiliated people she has left city and joined the freedom struggle. She does wonderful job to carry on the freedom struggle. She inspires the boy and the girl and advises them not to fight each other. Finally she brings them to the fold of freedom struggle. She travels far and wide to bring people into the fold of struggle. The words of Kimathi speak much about this woman: “How many tasks has she performed without complaint? How many people has she snatched from jails, from colonial jaws of death! How many brave warriors has she recruited at great risks? How many days has she walked for miles without food and sleep?”(73). Kimathi invites her with honour to teach the fighters a lesson on diligence and

commitment. She inspires the fighters with her inspiring words. Thus, altogether we have a decolonized woman fighting for the freedom till the goal is achieved.

In the official history boys and girls of teenage are not given space. But in the play we see these boy and girl, in spite of initial hesitation, move into the freedom struggle, carry on and carry out the task of giving a loaf of bread consisting of gun to Kimathi.

The Mau Mau movement led by committed freedom fighter Kimathi and their efforts ultimately led to the ouster of the British from Kenya. But historical records misrepresented the nature of this movement and frequently portrayed the organization and its leaders as barbaric and evil. Ngugi and Micere Mugo correct this perspective in the play. The movement is given much space in the play. It is depicted as a movement which made the British sleepless and spend days without food. Throughout the play we see people sing songs and dance. They are committed and fearless fighters.

The delineation of these characters in the official history, as pointed out by the writers in the foreword, is completely different. It may be considered as a perverted history. But the play depicts the same characters from the native point of view. For instance, in the official history Kimathi is depicted as a man fought for British in the Second World War. But nowhere in the play we notice Kimathi's inclination for the British. The neo-colonial powers are unable to colonize the minds of people and their leader Kimathi. So, it is a history of decolonized minds. But in the established history we read the glorified fact that the colonial powers and neo-colonial powers succeed in colonizing, controlling and exploiting the natives.

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Therapeutic Culture of Political Humour in the Audio Visual Media: An Eye Opener

Manju P.B

Human emotions are governed by four humours of Hippocratic medicine-black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood. The excess or deficiency of these fluids can affect a person's temperament and health. Four temperaments is a proto-psychological theory that suggests that there are four fundamental personality types, sanguine (pleasure-seeking and sociable), choleric (ambitious and leader-like), melancholic (analytical and thoughtful), and phlegmatic (relaxed and quiet). Most formulations include the possibility of mixtures of the types. These temperaments are difficult to bridle as the imbalance of any of these can affect human health and emotions.

Humour is the tendency of particular cognitive experience to provoke laughter and provide amusement. Humour comes under the ambit of the 'nava rasas' in Bharata Muni's *Natya Shastra*. Each rasa is associated with a specific bhava portrayed on the stage. In the case of humour it is associated with myrth or hasya. Humour can be invoked in different ways: by behaving in an unusual way, by being in an unusual place and by being the wrong size. The present paper explores the potential of satire to bring forth laughter and the way in which it sifts through the political scenario to unmask new dimensions which makes us think and at times makes us act. It also unearths the therapeutic culture of the audio visual media. In a world dominated by technology and life style diseases the humorous political satiric programmes offer families a break from the reality shows there by acting as a laughing pill.

Satire has a long history and even from the early 21st C, there has been an upsurge in the use of satire's edge to draw attention to hypocrisies and

ironies in the supposedly serious world of political discourse and to advocate for alternative formulations of the issues of the day. It is thus inadequate to treat satire as a mere commentary on the political landscape, rather it seems crucial to understand it. As Leonard Feinberg puts it “satire offers the reader the pleasures of superiority and safe release of aggressions” (qtd.in Day 11). Satire would be pleasurable if it push for political change.

Political satire had its predecessors in the early 1960s with *That Was the Week That Was* and *This Hour Has Seven Days*. Both shows courted the genre blending hybridity between satiric comedy and reportage that has now become common place. Both shows were extremely popular and controversial and ended with early cancellation and public debate in their wake. *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, *The Rick Mercer Report* and *Seven Days* are a few that became popular. Premiering in 1962 *TW3* was one of the most popular and iconoclastic of the group. Satire is closely involved with comedy. The satire that produces no comic reaction may turn out to be an accidental tragedy. Joseph Brooker in his article on “Satire Bust: The Wagers of *Money*” muses that “What distinguishes satire amid comedy’s broad remit is the intensity of its attention to a subject and the sense that something is at stake beyond sheer laughter. Perhaps comedy can have its own practical aims: one can construct instrumental views of the genre in which laughter is good for spiritual or even physical health, or confirms the benign spread of a comic world-view” (326).

Political satire has a long history in many parts of India especially in Kerala. Keralites often feel proud when they talk about Kunchan Nambyar who invoked laughter in the audience through his ‘Ottam Thullal’, a temple art form. Cartoons by Sankar and Laxman have also tickled our minds. The medium is going still strong with Yesudasan and Gopikrishnan. Another parallel movement can be evinced in Cinema with artists belonging to old and new generations like Adoor Bhasi, S.P Pillai, Pappu, Jagathy, Innocent and Suraj Venjaramoodu to name a few.

In order to vie with the 24x7 entertainment channels the news channels have created a new infotainment programme interspersed with movie clips, songs, cartoons and news footages to emphasise the views of the presenter. Camera eye of the audio visual media is now targeted at various politicians in Kerala and humour is evoked at their expense. Sometimes the politicians presented in mimicry or cartoon forms look more real than their real counterparts. These capsule programmes provide us an escape from soap operas and soothes our mind. Absence of paid actors also makes the show cost effective. Channels telecast programmes like *Vikadakavi* (Asianet News), *Dhim Tharikida Thom* (Mathrubhumi News), *Natakame Ulakam: A Political Satire* (Amritha TV), *Democracy* (Reporter), *Politrics* (India Vision) and *Thiruva Ethirva* (Manorama News).

The satirical programmes consist of a wryly sarcastic commentary on the political scenario of the state and it lays bare the virtuous mask worn by the deceitful and hypocritical self-serving public men. It also comprises witty cynical monologue which introduces the issues, comments on it and add a tongue-in-cheek epilogue. This is interspersed with clippings of major politicians and events and sound bytes relevant to the issue.

The presenters of these satiric programmes with their sharp wit, intelligence and mode of presentation enthral the viewers. Being a critical commentary on the present political scenario these shows finally emerge as eye openers invoking humour in the process. These bracing programmes have a formative influence on the viewers with presenters like George Pulikkan, Gopi Krishnan and K.V Madhu who juggles the words thereby creating mirth, laughter and food for thought. Content and humour are meshed and allows satire to seep in. These programmes usually fan the flames of controversy and function as a kind of caveat to the politicians. Viewers get a vicarious pleasure in hearing their opinions aired on television. The satiric programmes have also created an image for the politicians, many have become celebrities and others but of ridicule. Achuthanandan is addressed as 'Achu Hazare', Ramesh

Chennithala as 'Chennithala Gandhi', K.M Mani as 'Money Manthri Mani', Oommen Chandy as 'Oochandy' and K.Muraleedharan as 'Churalidharan'.

The triumph of these programmes can be attributed to the rise of multimedia which has played a crucial role in these satiric programmes. Real and the satiric are interwoven in a tangible way. The ability to manipulate and alienate the real gives the satire a great deal of power and appeal. As Amber Day opines, "One of the primary factors that set these shows apart from other examples of political satire is this weaving of real news footage or the actions of real public figures into the satirist's narrative" (54). The satiric programmes dissect the politicians and we could see a 'political autopsy' which often puts the politicians under tremendous pressure to perform well. Usually people want the satirists 'to represent' them and to push their particular worldview into the wider public sphere. In his text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Jürgen Habermas talks about the concept of public sphere. Amber Day quotes Habermas who defines the "bourgeois public sphere" as "the sphere of private people who come together as a public" (14). Habermas attributes its development to the 18th C coffee houses of England, France and Germany where people gathered for debate irrespective of their class and social backgrounds of other speakers and concentrated on the relative rationality of the debate. From these coffee houses press came to take on the responsibility and then the audio visual media. My contention is that these programmes even paved the way for the Supreme Courts' landmark judgment which gave citizens of India the right to reject all the candidates in election by 'Negative Voting'. 'None of the Above Option' in the Electronic Voting Machine watered down the message that people cannot be fooled always.

Satire is sometimes difficult to brook but it also helps to transform the politicians. Correction and moral retribution are considered to be the work of satire. The satirical programmes aired on television offers a salubrious cuisine to the viewers. Instead of simply sitting in our sofas munching pop corns and cheetos, watching these political satires rakes our mind and makes us think.

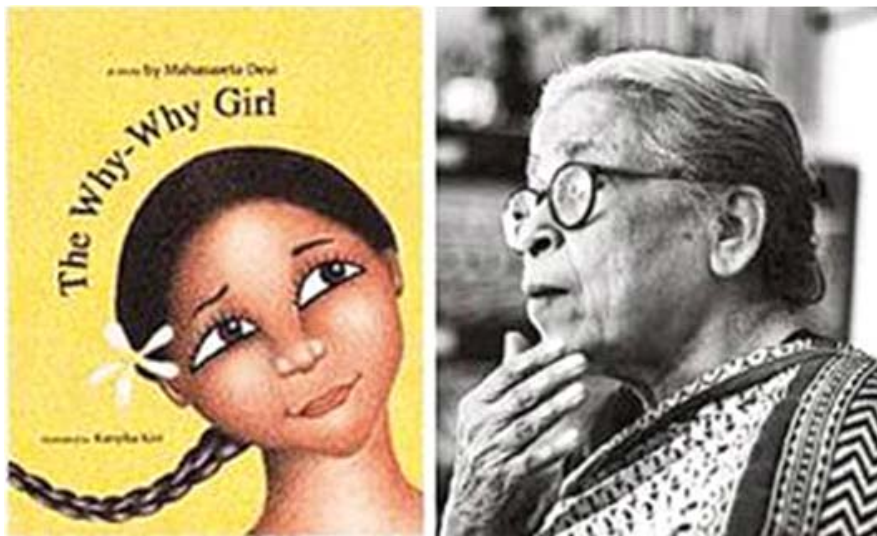
The therapeutic culture of these humour programmes is now welcomed with much applause and critical approval from the public.

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Countering Hegemony : A Postcolonial Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Picture Book, *The Why-Why Girl*

Nazneen Mashall



The 21st century is often referred to as “new times”. The age of the Internet, smartphones, television and films now demands not just literacy but multiliteracy, to read and analyse multiple modes and technologies. The postmodern picture book incorporates new literacies in its subversion of hegemonic modes of presenting text, theme, illustration and design.

Just as new times and new literacies challenge us with change at a number of levels, so does the postmodern picture book. Author and illustrator consciously employ a range of devices that are designed to interrupt reader expectation and produce multiple meanings and readings of the book. These books also challenge the traditional audience of picture books. Traditionally the picture book has been seen as the province of the young, inexperienced reader. However, the postmodern

picture book appeals to a much wider age span, level of sophistication, and range of reading abilities. (Anstey 447)

As children, all of us have read picture books. But are we truly aware of the impact picture books have on us? Picture books “offer young readers their first big window on the world. Besides, as picture books cater especially to an age group that can either be read aloud to or take its first steps in reading alone, they provide the perfect space for textual and visual narratives in which readers can find themselves and discover ‘the other’”(Menon 16).

Postcolonial Studies gives attention to cultures previously neglected by or invisible to the ‘central’ Anglo-American colonizing culture. The picture book then becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the writer/illustrator who can verbally and visually communicate stories about such cultures to the reader.

This paper is an attempt to study the representation of the life of a girl who is triply marginalized. Mahasweta Devi, the noted writer-activist from Bengal, in her first picture book, *The Why-Why Girl*, represents the life of Moyna, a young girl, who belongs to the tribal community of the Shabars who live, landless, on the hills of North-east India. This paper also studies the coming of age of the picture book in English published in India – in terms of creating verbal/visual narratives relevant to the Indian child, in terms of celebrating differences, in terms of appropriating the coloniser’s language and making it its own, and, most importantly, in narrating stories about the ‘other’.

Mahashweta Devi wields her pen to raise awareness against social injustice, discrimination and poverty, especially against the 25 million tribal people in India, who belong to approximately 150 different tribes. Her pioneering work with the Sabars/Shabars, a tribal community in the North-east of India, has earned her the name “The Mother of the Sabars”.

Devi’s sensitivity to local problems, realities, beliefs and notions makes her story a counterdiscourse – one which contests the existing configurations of class, caste and gender. This picture book also challenges traditional modes of picture book creation in many ways, making it truly postmodern.

During the British Raj, the Shabars were classed as a ‘criminal tribe’ under Criminal Tribes Act 1871, because of which they still suffer from social stigma and ostracism. The traditionally forest-dwelling tribe lack experience in agriculture and rely on the forests for their livelihood. The PaschimBangaKheriaSabarKalyanSamiti, mentioned in the picture book, has been working with the Shabars for about 30 years. The results of the Samiti’s efforts are noticeable among the Shabars.

In independent India, the Shabars continue to remain under the thumbs of the internal imperialists – the rich and powerful landlords, the Babus, who enjoy lives of luxury and idleness. In the picture book, Moyna’s father has gone to Jamshedpur in search of better prospects. Her brother, Goro, has to go every day to the forest to collect firewood for the family. Her mother, Khiri, cannot work due to a bad leg. And so, in a community which does not usually let its girls work, Moyna becomes shepherd to the Babu’s goats.

Nobody in the community complains; except Moyna, that is. Moyna asks many questions and her questions go on endlessly. So much so that the postmaster who cycles to the village calls her the “Why-Why Girl”! Incidentally, the story begins with a question by Moyna “But why?” and ends with another “Why?”.

Gregory Castle, in his *introduction to Postcolonial Studies* cites Albert Memmi, a leading postcolonial theorist, who has written about the three major ideological components of colonial racism – “. . . one, the gulf between the culture of the colonialist and the colonized; two, the exploitation of these differences for the benefit of the colonialist; three, the use of these supposed differences as standards of absolute fact”(245). Mahasweta Devi questions and challenges the internal colonisers’ age-old exploitative practices and beliefs through the questions thrown at the rich landlords by Moyna.

Moyna defiantly questions gender bias, inequality in class and caste, and neglect of educational facilities for children. “Why do I have to graze the Babu’s goats? Their boys can do it. . . Why should I eat their leftovers? . . . Why do I have to walk so far to the river to fetch water? . . . Why should we

live in a leaf hut? . . . Why shouldn't I study too?" In a marginalized community like the Shabars staying in the marginalized region of North-East India, it is a member of the marginalized sex and a 10-year-old child at that who has the courage to question the autocratic ways of the internal imperialists. Incidentally, this book has been written, illustrated and published by women.

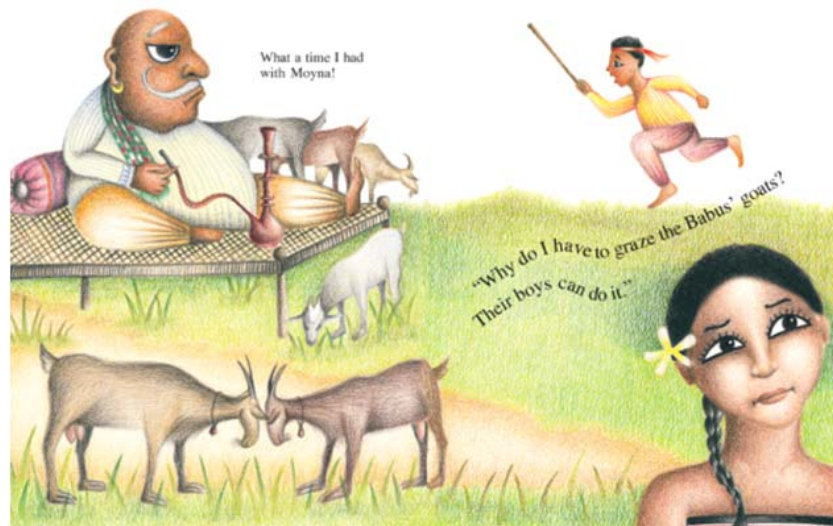
Mahasweta Devi comments on the back cover of the book, "All over India there are children, tribal and non-tribal, who always ask the question 'Why?'" She highlights the close relationship tribal children share with nature and how easy it is to explain things scientifically to them. Moyna is satisfied with the answers she gets to her endless stream of questions on nature – "Why can't fish speak? . . . Why do stars look so small if many of them are bigger than the sun? . . . Why shouldn't I catch a cobra?"

When Moyna declares that she is moving in with Mahasweta Devi, who has come to work at the Samiti, her mother disapproves of it. Out pop the questions again – "Why not? It's a big hut. How much space does one old woman need?" The child-reader, across the world, would enjoy the bold, impish quality of Moyna's questions and identify with the endless curiosity Moyna exhibits.

The culture and landscape of the Shabars seeps through both in the visual and the verbal text. Moyna walks with a pet mongoose on her shoulder. She loves to eat snake curry and crabs. She wears a white dress with a broad red and black border typical to the tribe, while her mother and her teacher wear saris. Moyna plaits her long hair and tucks a frangipani flower behind her ear. Her brown skin and her facial features, especially her sparkling, black eyes, resemble those of Indians who live in the North-east.

Illustrations of bamboo shoots, grass, roosters, mountain goats, snakes, mongooses and crabs bring to life the flora and fauna of the hills of the North-east. The wicker-basket lying on the road, the leaf huts they live in, the basket that Khiri weaves, Moyna's dress and a striped rug on which Moyna and her siblings sit, highlight the skilled craftsmanship of the tribe. So too does the

charpoy on which the long-moustached Babu sits, resting on his cushions and smoking his hookah.



In keeping with the theme of the book, the illustrator, KanyikaKini has allowed Moyna's questions to rise and fall across the pages like the rolling waves of an unquenchable sea. The title on the cover page too is printed in a semi-circular curve at once challenging expectations in more ways than one. Devi writes the story of the 'other', the poor, female, tribal, North-east subaltern, but makes her speak boldly, at least within the text. Moyna's nickname, "Why-Why Girl" is appropriately intra-iconic, illustrated in the shape of a huge question mark using a big, bold font. The paratexts, namely the cover pages and the end pages, have the curve of the question mark set in a pattern endlessly repeated, echoing the myriad questions put forth in the text by Moyna.

The postmodern picture book is consciously constructed to challenge and engage the reader in new and different ways. Innovativeness in design and layout challenges the reader's perception of how to read a book. Just as Devi, through Moyna, challenges the hegemonic structures, norms, practices and beliefs of a gender-biased, class-conscious and caste-conscious India within the story, the pictures which are strewn in a non-linear fashion, the font that changes in size and flows across the pages, the narrator's voice heard in the

verbal text but not seen in the visual text except for the hand that holds back Moyna chasing a cobra on the first page of the story, segmented streams of visually portrayed thoughts flowing from Moyna's head across the doublespread, all break the expectations of the sophisticated implied reader, the parent/adult, armed with the knowledge of literary conventions, who remains uncomfortable with this rupture. On the other hand, the unsophisticated implied reader, the child being read to or reading independently, takes it naturally in her/his stride.

Peter Barry, in his book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, has mentioned that all postcolonial literatures progress through the 'adopt', 'adapt' and 'adept' phases (196), the last stage being the one in which the colonial writer is an independent 'adept' in the form. Mahasweta Devi is 'adept' in moulding the English language to reflect the structural idiosyncracies of Indian regional languages as seen in the repetition of the word 'why' in the title *The Why-Why Girl*. Names typical to the Shabar tribe like Moyna (an Indian bird), Khiri and Goro (cow) also ushers in a whiff of North-east culture. Some unfamiliar words like 'Samiti' and 'Shabar' are explained to the child-reader with the help of 'Wordbirds' that streak across the pages, giving them access to a multicultural, multilingual vocabulary. Some others like 'Babu', on the other hand, are not glossed. This story, incidentally, has been translated into six regional languages by the publishers.

In a picture book, the verbal narrative is diegetic, that is, it tells the story in time. The visual narrative on the other hand, is mimetic, that is, it shows the space which can only be described in the verbal narrative. In *The Why-Why Girl*, the verbal narrative tells us the story of 10-year-old Moyna who meets the author/narrator, Mahasweta Devi, at the Samiti set up to help the Shabars. Moyna's rebellious questions actually reveal the life of every Shabar, more so the girl child. She complains about walking miles to fetch water from the river, of looking after the Babu's goats while his own sons sit idle, of having to tend goats during the time classes are taken for children at the Samiti, of living in a leaf hut, and of not being able to eat rice twice a day. She also has to bring

the goats home, collect firewood and lay traps for the birds. Moyna refuses to thank the Babu for sending them rice, as her mother wishes her to. “‘Why should I?’ Moyna said. ‘Don’t I sweep the cowshed and do a thousand jobs for him? Does he ever thank me? Why should I?’” It is Moyna’s self-respect which touches the narrator and the reader. The story of Moyna’s father having to migrate to Jamshedpur far away from his home in the hills in search of a job, her mother who can’t work due to a bad leg which reveals much about the availability/lack of medical facilities, her brother who goes into the forest every day just to get firewood and Moyna who can’t attend school because of the many chores she has to finish, is the story of the Shabars, a neglected poor, landless, tribal community in the hills of North-east India, a region which remains undeveloped due to step-motherly treatment by the government of India, insurgency and lack of political will.

The visual narrative is complementary, in that the lives of the Shabars, the difficult but beautiful terrain they live in, the animals they tend to and the ones they eat, the huts they reside in, the clothes they weave and wear, the baskets they weave and use, the food they eat and the pots they cook in and their facial features and nut-brown complexion, are all shown to the reader through double spreads of pictures in muted colours. As Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott remind us in their book *How Picturebooks Work*, the visual narrative allows the reader “considerable freedom of interpretation” (62) unlike the verbal narrative which forces the reader to see certain details of the setting while ignoring others. “Visual representation of setting, [on the other hand], is ‘non-narrated’ and therefore ‘non-manipulative . . .’” (61-62).



The postmodern picture book engages a dual audience through a double address. In *The Why-Why Girl* multiple readings and meanings are available for a variety of audiences. The path to empowerment, for the voiceless and the powerless, Devi suggests to the reading adult, is education. The advantages of literacy is highlighted metafictionally towards the ending of the story. “Why do you read books before you go to sleep?” asks Moyna. “Because books have the answers to your whys!” replies the narrator/author. Moyna then decides, “I will learn to read and find the answers to my questions.” She goes on to become the first girl to be admitted to the village primary school and, at eighteen, becomes a teacher at the Samiti.

As Gayatri Spivak in her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” reminds us, “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (285). She goes on to state the role of the female intellectual.

The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with ‘woman’ as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish. (312)

Chimamanda Adichie, the noted Nigerian novelist, in her speech on the TED stage, warns us against the danger of the single story presented by the West of the 'other'. Moyna's story is an/other story among many, many other stories which have remained unvoiced over the centuries. Until tribes like the Shabars and girls like Moyna are empowered, writers like Mahasweta Devi must continue to represent their stories. They must continue to bring the margin to the centre. And what better way to do it than engage a dual audience in a postmodern picture book?

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Conceptualising ‘Cross-Cutting Identities’ in Herta Muller’s *Herztier*

Chitra.V.S

“Each culture” as stated by Wolfgang Welsch, in his *Transculturality: The Changing forms of Culture Today*, “is unique and exclusive” (Welsch 2). Moreover, he argues that the peaceful co-existence of cultures is not realistic and they travel across borders. Increased global connectedness seated tightly entangled cultures characterized by high degree of hybridization. ‘Transculturality’ and ‘interculturality’ are two terms which acknowledges the fact that exchanges takes place between and among cultures. Transcultural experiences, opportunities and predicaments are labeled as central features of various literatures across the globe. The establishment of cultural dialogues among more or less clearly definable homogenous or heterogeneous cultures gets asserted through the very concept of interculturality where as transculturality is perceived as an outcome of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern culture, this concept indisputably acts as a frame work to examine societies, cultural products and personal and cultural identity. The exposition of individuals’ multicultural connections discloses the fact that cultural identities are shaped not just by the borders of national cultures. Said’s words on culture in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) assumes importance at this moment:

Culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought.... In time culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state, this differentiates ‘us from them’ almost always with some degree of identity (xii).

The emergence of transnational literature all through the world at the end of the twentieth century had its impact on Germany as well, resulting in the increasing flow of the intercultural, transnational and transcultural literature. The oppression and suppression imposed by totalitarian regimes, their fall and the migration of the German speaking people across the borders creating ethnically mingled societies, have attributed its inevitable complexities to German literature, and caught in a variety of cultural and ethnic entanglements. It is in this context that the questions of identity –cultural identity – gains currency in German literature. Being a much discussed question all over the world, it became part and parcel of literary texts as well due to the process of particularization. Literature and language which acts as an essential medium for shaping the cultural identity, has always been part of the colonial, post colonial, intercultural, transcultural and multicultural discourses.

The concept that hybridity of cultures abet in shaping the cultural identity at two important levels forms the core context of this article – one is in relation to the writer herself and the other with respect to the work *Herztier*. Relating to this perspective, the notions of transculturalism, hybridity or ‘Third Space’ concept of Bhabha, the displacement and unbelongingness, the centre- periphery concept, are explored. German- Romanian authors and- the writers of second or third generation- immigrant writers in Germany conceive their identity as a culture related one. During the Communist regime the ethnic Germans who lived outside the Reich had a rather controversial hybrid social status owing to their simultaneously being Romanian citizens and ethnic Germans. These factors accelerated the German concepts of transculturality. The third generations of German immigrant writers confer their writing with a transcultural and hybrid structures. While simple cultural themes backed the earlier literary texts, the contemporary ones are entwined with transculturality. The transcultural structure of these texts along with a migration background leads to the concept of cultural hybridity. The post-colonial literature and the transcultural literature shares some common grounds arising out of the fact that postcolonial literature in its state of transition –with changing phases and contexts- accommodates almost all aspects of literature.

The arguments of Welsch and Bhabha in relation to the transcultural literature are examined to bring to light its reflections in Muller's life as a writer and her work *Herztier*. Transculturality is an attired term used by Welsch, to refer to the interaction of different cultures, their intersection and the point where the cultures no longer subsist as real ones but merges with the other: "Transculturality is, in the first place, a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures" (Welsch 250). Undoubtedly, the multiple cultural connections lead to a process of hybridization – 'cross-cutting identities' (Welsch 203). Welsch goes on to state that today's writers are no longer products of one culture, "they are shaped not by a single homeland, but by differing reference countries" (98). Crossing of borders gives way to new cultures and identity which are determined by individuals' nationalism and ethnicity.

As different from the migrant writers, the hybrid writers from Germany are caught in 'in-betweenness' conceived as a space in which cultures and languages overlap and intermingle. Seheyan conceives the in between space as a "terrain of writing", a 'third geography' of memory, languages and translation. According to her, 'the texts which thematize this space represent both "a celebration and an incisive critique of the different cultural spaces they inhabit". A culture is seen in its interaction with other culture. Bhabha's concept of 'Third space' appears very true to the works of German Romanian authors. Homi.K.Bhabha conceives the 'third space' as a bridge connecting the two cultures but retaining its unique identity: 'a contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation' (37). Hybrid identity is no doubt a third, autonomous entity that results from the union of two opposite cultures.

German Romanticism enriched the concept of exile with new lexical and psychological meanings for the writers who rebelled against the utilitarian society and went in search of 'pastures new'. Karl Marx, Richard Wagner, Henrich Heine were few among the long list of writers and intellectuals whose work reveal the pain of separation from house, their center of belonging as a

fertile land of growth of their artistic creativity, widening their perspectives and attaining self transcendence through intellectual or aesthetic effect.

German Romanian authors established their transcultural or hybrid identity by discovering a 'third space' for themselves outside of the 'Center – periphery polarity. For authors like Paul Celan and Dieter Schlessack, it is a geographic location i.e.; Paris and Italy respective. Oskar Pastior and Muller felt it is the forgoing of personalised language of their world. Muller's invention of 'third space' can be correlated with the unique poetic language she creates. She invests her metaphors with new meanings, both alien to Romanian and German language, but a strange combination of both. The poetic language of her texts provides a private world represented through her language. Muller retained her position as a professional exile by remaining at the periphery, even while keeping a strong hold of the past as the center.

Herta Muller's life as a writer reveals an interesting picture of her transition from the German speaking Minority village in Romanian to West Berlin. This marks the cross cultural spaces in her life as a writer and left a stamp of herself in her literary texts. Having been born in 1953 in Nitzkydorf in Banat region, her native tongue was the Banat- Swabian dialect, a dialect of German spoken among minority. The new political changes under the Ceausescu's regime accelerated multicultural changes in Muller's life. Her University studies acquainted her with German and Romanian literature which aided her entry into *Aktionsgrupe Banat*, a literary group which fought for freedom of speech. Unable to withstand the persecutions imposed by the dictatorship, Muller left for West Berlin in 1987 with her husband Richard Wagner. Her settlement in Germany never gave her a feeling of being at home which she tried to discover through the invention of transcultural space in her works.

The hybridity in Muller, firstly, presents itself through her language and its representations. Having Banat-Swabian roots, Muller explains how she was amazed to witness the transformation of objects through the Romanian language. Muller became increasingly attracted to Romanian because of its sensorial terms

and phrases that corresponded better to her feelings than those offered by her mother tongue. Her bilingual existence has helped her establish a critical distance between experience and language.

Muller frequently draws from Romanian folk songs, legends and sayings. Her play with contrasting connotations in German and Romanian of the same word and the new image(s) that result form the intertwining of the two languages goes to establish her invention of third space. The titles of her novels itself illustrate the effects of estrangements and ambiguity of the same word in two language, which she employs to her advantage. The 'imagined perceptions' and the 'work on depiction' serves as a tool to disagree with and intervene in the reality and image construction of the Banat- Swabian community and the communist state. Muller's means of investing objects with new meanings and her use of neologisms with remarkable lyrical intensity and poetic sensibility establishes her as a transcultural writer. With life under dictatorship in the background, she successfully invents the paradigm of transcultural identity. The lyrical passages explored in her works bear fluid identities, floating between fixed linguistic identities. Muller's life under dictatorship perhaps served as an inspiration to invent the cultural hybridity underlying her writing.

Coming to the second aspect of hybrid identity in relation to *Herztier* is far more interesting, with its autobiographical tones. *Herztier*, translated into English as *The Land of Green Plums*, is the most autobiographical of Muller's fiction and presents episodes from the lives of several people of different ethnic and social backgrounds who become victims of Ceausescu's regime. The structure of the novel travels through the complex ways in which episodes from the present describing life at the university and in the city intermingle with scenes from the protagonist's childhood in a Banat-Swabian village. Valentina Glajar and John J. White inquired Muller's treatment of the Banat-Swabian Nazi past and its implications for the cultural identity of the narrator. Both critics concentrate on the father's role as a former SS-soldier who would not confront his Nazi past. In addition to the father figure, Lola, the narrator's Romanian roommate, and Edgar, Kurt, and Georg, her three Banat-Swabian

friends, play in the development of the narrator's cultural identity. The narrator succeeds in constructing a personalized identity by becoming an opponent of the communist regime, denouncing her father's Nazi past, and refusing to follow Banat-Swabian traditions. Lola is one of the narrator's five roommates whose curious habits distinguish her from other students. Lola's story of a neglected and unloved child in a poor Romanian village bears an weird similarity to the tyranny under which the narrator lived as a child in her Banat-Swabian village. Episodes evoking Lola's life and death intermingle with snapshots and fragments depicting the suffering inflicted by her family on a young child living in a Banat-Swabian village. The narration switches from the third to the first person indicating that the child in the village is the adult narrator. Lola's story and her own experiences in the city, prompt the narrator to view the totalitarian state as an extension of the oppressive, tyrannical atmosphere of the village.

Intrigued by the similarities between Lola and herself and her sudden death, the narrator feels connected to Lola and decides to preserve her story. The narrator distances herself from her roommates and becomes a distinctive – 'ich'—a distinction disowned by her earlier in the narrative. Edgar, Georg, and Kurt, also suspect that Lola was murdered and they approach the narrator to talk about Lola. When she starts showing them Lola's diary, which is forbidden material, the narrator becomes a dissident. They read and discuss smuggled books written by West German philosophers, write poems, take pictures of vans carrying prisoners, sing forbidden Romanian songs, and recite in public a poem by Romanian poet Gellu Naum. Participating in these activities with her three friends, the narrator becomes part of a dissident circle of – 'Wir' – denoting a cultural transformation of her identity. The narrator learns about the history of the Third Reich and the possibility of her father being a murderer. This perspective change has implications on her cultural identity as well. Re-evaluation of childhood memories leads to exposing and condemning her father's actions and interactions with her. The father's inability or unwillingness to admit his guilt is suggested in *Herztier* through the image of the graveyards which are kept locked up under the his pointed larynx. She establishes the

father as a maker of graveyards. Her father was an SS-soldier in the Nazi regime that was responsible for deporting and killing Jews.

The transformation affected in her identity gets reflected through her hatred for her father which progresses with the development of the narrative and the narrator announces the father's death through the short sentence: *Dann starb der Vater* (71) [Then the father died]. Her pressing need to detach herself as much as possible from her father is evident in her desire to put in the coffin all his belongings that the undertaker gives her: his wristwatch, dentures, and brown-and-white checked slippers (72). The narrator's efforts at detaching her from her father's memories lands up more as a reminder of childhood incidents. In another childhood memory, the narrator and the father play a game of death and survival with nuts. Pretending that nuts represent the heads of various people such as the father, mother, the child, the grandfather, the barber, etc., the child places a nut in the father's hands. After he closes his hands and cracks one of the nuts, the child is eager to see whose head has survived and whose has been crushed (205).

In the prohibited West German books, the narrator discovers new ideas as well as a different use of German. Here it is a language of inquiry and not the language of oppression she had been used to in her childhood. This new use of German expands the understanding of the four friends. The fact that in the West, people can think freely startles them. They feel that knowledge acquisition have transformed them and they are different from the other villagers, who like them, have moved to the city. The metaphor of the mulberry tree symbolizes the inherited identity of the people and illustrates their in-between identities: physically they live in the city, but mentally, they are still villagers. Gradually they realize that knowledge can't hide their problematic, inherited cultural heritage. The relationship and attachment the four friends maintain with their mothers is again an inevitable element of their Banat-Swabian cultural identity.

The poem by Gellu Naum is assumed by the four friends as a means of resistance and survival, which lands them up in trouble. Except for the narrator,

all recite it aloud in public places resulting in a series of interrogations, persecutions and brutal torture by Captain Pjele, a true representative of the *Securitate*. These harassments continue which persuade the protagonists to stop their investigations of Lola's death. Like Lola, they are now victims of the regime. Even after they graduate from the university and take up jobs in various parts of the country, their escape remains impossible. In spite of being ethnic Germans they leave the country without exit visas hoping for a return to the liberated land, which remains only a dream. They had access to information that was denied to Romanians owing to censorship and language barriers. Like members of other ethnicities during the dictatorship, once they opposed the regime, the four become political victims. Although their actions do not bring about any immediate change in the Communist regime, their stories are documents of political persecution that show the courage of those who have succeeded in exposing the tyranny of a political system that terrorized and oppressed people for decades.

The analysis of aspects implying culture in Muller and her works reveal that under the terror and fear governing Ceausescu's regime the individuals knowingly or unknowingly created a hybrid cultural identity. The concept of center-periphery pervades her writings as it was impossible to confine to either but creates in-betweenness. This in turn gives flourishing choices for its victims. David Malouf gives an account of how the exiled poet Ovid sniffs up newness from Rome's 'Nose' seeing everything afresh, freed from the chains of conventions and providing him opportunity for self-discovery and transformed self. He writes:

How I have changed! What a very different self has begun to emerge in me! ...It is a different world... I feel the ice of myself cracking. I feel myself loosen and flown again, reflective of the world. That is what spring means (Malouf 65).

Muller's transcultural space bears the 'spring' of self-discovery evident from the critical reception she attained in the literary world and the autofictional impact evident in her writings. Bhabha speaks of the power of hybridity that

enables the colonized to appropriate the language, the texts, the knowledge of the colonizer in such a way as to “estrangle the basis of its authority- its rules of recognition” (Gates 173).’Third Space’ as visualized:

...may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity (Bhabha 38).

Further he goes on to state:

It is the power of hybridity that enables the colonized to challenge the boundaries of discourse and which breaks down the symmetry and duality of the self/other, inside/ outside and establishes another space of power/ knowledge (Bhabha 175-177).

Muller’s works, agreeing with, Bhabha’s concept creates a hybrid culture contoured as interstitial passage between fixed identifications. The productive capacity of ‘Third Space’ opens up new ways of conceptualizing the politics of polarity and the subjects emerge as the ‘other’ of themselves. The flourishing opportunity provided through literature indubitably illuminates the writings of Muller and similar German immigrant writers.

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Testing Newer Grounds-the Representation of Autism in two Popular Bollywood Movies

Anju Sosan George

Bollywood has been testing newer grounds by introducing bold autistic characters, who unlike the earlier days are not marginalized by the script (being added to showcase the tolerance of the hero or heroine) but emerge in the central role. Movies like *Taare Zameen Par*, which was immensely popular, introduced to the ordinary viewers the concept of Dyslexia or learning difficulty. In the movie, an empathizing AAmir Khan urges the educational system to show more tolerance to their students who tend to have the difficulty. Movies like *Barfi!* (2012) star popular actors (Priyanka Chopra) who showcase their talents as convincing autists in an attempt to test their level of acting by venturing into a newer and more complicated arena- the realm of the psychological. *Koi Mil Gaya* (2003) starring Hrithik Roshan as a developmentally challenged person who befriends an alien, who restores his brain damage is another addition to the oeuvre of mainstream movies dealing with the topic. *Margerita with a straw*(2014) explores the sexuality of a girl affected with cerebral palsy with Kalki Koechlin in its lead.

Today, many studies on disability have looked at the way deviations from the ordinary physical or mental norm have been seen by the public eye. Often there is a demand to know ‘what happened to you?’ (Couser,603). This underlines the need for explanatory narratives, introducing the cause, the reason, the impact of disability and finally labelling the person as falling under a particular category. Such explanations can be seen at the very beginning of movies that tend to channelize the attention of its audience explaining the reason of its hero/heroines behavior traits. Frequently, it is to prove that the reason they behave so is because of no particular fault of theirs. The initial scenes in the doctor’s clinic in *Koi Mil Gaya* explains the reason for Rohit’s (Hrithik Roshan) seemingly bizarre behavior.

Karan Johar's popular movie, *My name is Khan*, starring Shah Rukh Khan successfully brought Asperger syndrome into the midst of the common audience. Asperger Syndrome is at the higher end of the Autism Spectrum Disorder, an Intellectual Disability. The movie attempts to portray that in spite of the differences posed by autism, the hero is able to accomplish an otherwise impossible task. To make the success story more beguiling, Karan Johar and his team pose not just physical and emotional barriers en route to the completion of the task, but developmental barriers that stems out from the very grain of the hero's personality. No one can be blamed for his differences, but he is visibly quite different in the way he carries himself. Yet the overcoming narrative clearly implies that there are visible traits of autism in the middle aged protagonist. Rocking movement, inability to maintain eye contact, irritability of specific colours(yellow in particular) intolerance to loud noises, mechanical repeating, dislike of physical contact, are spread intermittently through the three hour long movie. In particular, some traits become characteristics of the protagonist, for example, his constant rotation of the stones in his hand. Repeated visualizations zoom in on the hero's rotation of the black balls again and again, especially during an emotional turmoil.

The message that has been tried to be driven into the mind of the audience is that of all battles to be fought, the inner war (one within your head) is the toughest to be won. As the plot progresses, the hero visibly outgrows many of his prominent autistic features which were dominant in the former scenes. In particular, his dislike of physical contacts is totally forgotten as a happy Rizwan Khan links his hand with the crowd in the Black church (most of them strangers to him) and helps them in their crisis.

Yet, terrorism is the focus of the movie, not autism. Johar and his team works at the post September 11 trauma that tagged all Muslims to Al Queda, and the ensuing identity crisis faced by them. This racial threatening seeps into the happy Mandira- Khan family when their 13 year old son Sameer is found dead in the soccer playground. Mandira, the jovial, animated, gregarious single mother whose life solely revolved around Sameer, bursts into a litany

of hate, which sets Khan's odyssey through the United States in motion. She asks him, which later becomes the oft quoted by line of the movie, to tell the President of United States and the whole of America that "my name is Khan and I am not a terrorist."

In a sense, Autism or Asperger's is downplayed in the latter part of the movie as the focus changes from the trouble caused by an autistic to the prospective trouble caused by a Muslim. Khan's mission to reach the President becomes arduous due to his autistic body language. He is twice mistaken to be an actual terrorist and is unable to emerge from the locked up situation without external help.

Khan's mother plays a significant role in recognizing her son's difference and trains him in life skills and social cues which otherwise eludes him. The text attributes Khans vaulting progress to the extra effort she puts in, in spite of her limited resources to make sure that her 'different' son was given a different opportunity.

As the plot shifts through Khans odyssey, near savant like features (can repair almost anything) mingle with his humanism (help for cyclone affected victims) convert shy Rizwan Khan into the messiah for Muslims in America.

The plot loosens at the seemingly improbable love story between Rizwan and Mandira, almost letting the viewers think that Mandira has married beneath her chances. General tendency to ignore or overlook autistic sexuality is not seen in the film. In the initial part of the movie it is Mandira's effervescence that overlooks Khan's inconsistencies. By not patronizing either, the movie attempts to draw the family as a regular family with understanding neighbours and loving camaraderie – regularity and normalcy, an underlying thrust in the former half of Khan- Mandira married life.

The latter half of the married life, post 9/ 11 and after Sameer's death, all trace of normalcy vanishes. Autistic khan is thrust to one extreme, intolerant, hate driven Mandira is on the other. It is also noticeable that Mandira in the

course of the movie, never regrets marrying an autistic though she regrets marrying a Khan.

Khan's lack of understanding social cues is drawn heavily in the initial stages of the text and more subtly in the latter half. Mandira's tolerance threshold snaps when Khan seems unconcerned to Sameer's death or her pain and appears to be more bothered of his dinner time.

Adherence to routines, which is essential for an autistic's understanding of the surroundings is one of the least developed areas in the movie. Khan's odyssey across America gains gargantuan dimensions precisely because of this. It is evident that the text visibly downplays this particular aspect as the story revolves around the unpredictability of his journey following the President.

Eventually in the overcoming narrative, the hero wins two battles. His battle against autism and racism. Yet by pitting one against the other, the connotation points them out as two equally dangerous entities a man had to endure.

Anurag Basu's *Barfi!* Played an equally significant role in introducing Autism into the mainstream audience with the popular actress Priyanka Chopra cast as an autistic person. Chopra's Jhilmil, is seen as an autistic person who unlike *My Name Is Khan* does not boast of any savant like qualities, but possess all idiosyncrasies of an autistic person.

The film deserves credit, as it does not at any point show condescension towards Jhilmil. Rather, it encourages in understanding and to an extent in respecting her eccentricities as similar to that of any other person.

Barfi (Ranbir Kapoor) is a deaf and mute person, whose exuberance makes the audience forget his disability. Comedy is featured through gestures and actions. Barfi's endless energy, guileless animations render voice to the film which words deny. Otherwise, Barfi's silence, conjoined with Jhilmil's occasional words, deem the movie more or less silent compensated with soulful musical interludes.

Traversing over thirty years with the lead characters, the audience watch their love flourish in the nonlinear narrative. Basu by introducing autistic Jhilmil, highlights the innocence of his character. She is surrounded by loving caretakers at Muskan, an extremely rich grandfather, and good natured Burfi who plans to kidnap her and later on falls in love with her. What is strangely amusing is that inspite of being given a choice of accepting the hand of the extremely beautiful Sruthi (IllenaD'cruz), Barfi desires the company of Jhilmil. He is seen to take care of her through the daily routines of changing clothes, to taking her to the toilet and putting her to sleep. Jhilmil requires assistance in dealing with her day to day affairs which Barfi happily concedes.

Pitting two heroines together, is a definite tactic for the box office revenue generation. The initial romance between Sruthy and Burfi compensates the need of masala box office audience who would have difficulty in accepting the role of an autistic heroine. Sruthy's poised dazzling beauty and old world charm, compensates Jhilmil's innocent demeanor. The hero's acceptance of innocence over beauty is the striking message that the movie leaves with us. The message that an autistic is capable of love, of relationship, of family life if found in an accepting society is shown by the end of the movie where we see the elderly couple still deeply in love and happy with their lives. This does give hope to many people with autism who are denied a family life.

Attempting to compare *My name is Khan* and *Burfi!*, what is visibly striking is that in the latter work, neither is autism downplayed throughout the entire course of the movie, nor does it attempt to sympathize or to normalize it. Rather the movie encourages the audience to accept the person with autism for who they are. But coincidentally, the representation of autism in both the movies, one with its savant like feature and another with its total innocence and childlike bliss doesn't compensate the hard realities of a person who is autistic or the struggle of a family who has an autistic member. It is a challenge, popular cinema with its big budget finds too risky a water to tread on.

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When God Created the World

Alphonsa P O

I wonder what God thought of man
When He created this wondrous world.
Did He foresee the havoc he will wreak oneday
Through poor reason and unlimited pride?
Did He foresee his attempt to negate the creator
Through pseudo-science and devilish tricks ?
Did He ever think of his efforts to deny life
And turn the womb into a tomb ?
Did He ever imagine a time
When man will announce “God is dead; dead; Now’ do what you want ?
I wonder what God thought of man
When He created him.

Solar Wonders

Alphonsa P O

Gray, crimson red, yellow white
He rises up like a princes!
Shining and filling with for unspeakable
Every little den and dale
All the creaks and streams and seas
The wells, and ponds and puddles
The trees and shrubs and plants
The roses, lilies and daisies
The Sunflowers, Mayflowers and Dahlias,
His warmth is life to the lambs
His radiance is balm to the sparrows
His presence is cherished more than emeralds
A day with out him is doom to the world
O! there is no end to the Solar Wonders !

The Magic of May

Valsa George

May has arrived, the season of sunshine and rain
Bringing the magic of bright tints in its train
All around are fresh and fair flowers
Peeking out from the foliage and peeping from bowers

In the tranquil bosom of this now beauteous land
An array of varied and glorious sights abound
And how my sauntering gaze labours to trace
The shifting scenes in all their loveliness and grace

Look at the hare bounding away to its covert boroughs
And the pheasant suddenly bursting upon its wings
How the swans playfully glide over the still waters
And the birds in resonating melody charm the woods

There is love in the quickening breath of May
Drowning all Nature in song and mirth's sway
The whole atmosphere is made electric and gay
The air is so jovial and children are at play

My heart quakes in a rush of exuberant delight
At the memory of something I am unable to relate
My sky is aflame in colours splendid and bright
And I have spun the web of a dream, delicate and sweet

My blood runs in tumultuous flow, warm and fervent
And each heart beat sounds sonorous and vibrant

My lips though silent, longs to tell a tale
Of a moment that still leaves me joyously hale

Drunk in the loveliness of this season of delight
And choked by an inexplicable ache, that is sweet
Here I stand so dazed and distraught
Festering and panting for some coherent utterance!

My Stroll to the Seashore

Valsa George

As the shadows began lengthening
I slowly walked to the sea shore
Through the cobbled path
With stinging stones under my feet
And piles of golden clouds floating above
Enjoying the whistling of the wind through the reeds
Inhaling the saline air, smelling of rotting seaweeds

On the vast strand, I stood for long
Feeling the foamy fringes of water lapping at my feet
And sensing the sand slipping away under my feet
I watched the gentle undulating billows
Rolling their silver volumes
As if to die away on the happy shores

The sapphire waters and the roaring waves
Made me wonder at the horror and beauty
That inbred dichotomy Nature carries within

I saw numerous fishes gambol beneath the waves
Do the finny herds that roam
The fathomless valleys of the Deep
Ever experience the tumult and scuffle
Of the roaring waters?
Oh! Never!

Like them, I too floated weightless
With all the barbed distractions drifting away
Wishing to get a pair of wings of the swallow flying high
To soar safely away from all gadflies who disturb
And cocooned in the inner citadel of my privacy
Enjoying a permeating peace, I had seldom known!

Then Byron's words came floating to me
Mingling with the cadence of the waves
'There is rapture in the lonely shores
There is society where none intrudes'

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