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Kamala Das: A Confessional Ecofeminist

Amstrong Sebastian

Kamala Das is an inheritor of many traditions. The regional cultural traditions of Kerala and the pan-Indian traditions are the two significant influences on the author. She belongs to the rich tradition of Dravidian culture and Malayalam language is an offspring of this culture. She says:

... I am an Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one... (*Only the Soul Knows* 96)

The matrilineal tradition of Nair community and the rich heritage of Malabar, a peculiar province of the erstwhile Madras presidency, are two other factors of her formation. She is heir to two poetic traditions, the tradition of Malayalam literature and the tradition of colonial and post colonial Indian English literature. She also belongs to the long tradition of women poets in India, starting from Sanskrit and Tamil poets like Andal and Auvaiyar, Mira Bai, Ratna Bai, and Janabai, the devotional poets or the Buddhist nuns renowned for Pali songs are other examples. This rich heritage of women's poetry in India, reminds us that it is not a post colonial phenomenon.

Thematic or methodological analysis will not entirely help to understand a poet. The ideological standpoints of an author are to be considered seriously. Such an ideological understanding of Kamala Das can bring out unexplored avenues. She is quite often considered as a confessional poet. Confession is only the means to her end. Kamala Das was a feminist poet with a deep rooted environmental awareness. The environment created by her is an environment not only for the cohabitation of man and woman, but for the entire animate and

inanimate forms on the earth. She adored and accepted nature with the age old Indian reverence for nature. The utilitarian approach of the westerners towards nature is not seen in her writings.

Kamala Das could very well absorb the changing patterns of sensibility from a global perspective. In the long span of her literary career of over five decades she could imbibe the features of modernism, postmodernism, feminism and environmentalism.

The Ecology Feminism Centre was started in 1972 in Paris by Francois d'Eaubonne. She published the controversial book *Feminism or Death* in 1974 in which she established the relevance of ecofeminism in the chapter "The Time for Ecofeminism." The five main streams of ecofeminism: radical or cultural ecofeminism, spiritual ecofeminism, ecofeminist theology, social ecofeminism and socialist ecofeminism are utilized by Kamala Das in her poems. Environmental Economics, Green Politics and Deep Ecology provide the background for the radical ecofeminists and Spiritual Ecology and Deep Ecology form the base for spiritual ecofeminists. Ecofeminist theology has its roots mainly in spiritual ecology and Environmental Justice. Social ecofeminists borrow their ideology from Murray Bookchin's ideas of Social Ecology and the patterns of Environmental Justice. Socialist ecofeminism has a Marxian background

Kamala Das does not approach nature like a romantic or a pantheist. Nature is an organic presence in her poems, interacting with people and interfering in their lives. The poem "For Cleo Pascal" is a striking example:

Only the trees seem glad to see me
As if I were their kith and kin
I take on their characteristics
As the days one after another pass by
While I wear this land as an over coat
Warming my breasts and belly
I begin to look like its trees
My skin dries like the bark of a birch
My hair smells of spruce. (126)

The opinion of Judith Plant is applicable for this poem,

The shift from the western theological tradition of the hierarchical chain of being to an earth based spirituality begins the healing of the split between spirit and matter. For ecofeminist spirituality, like the traditions of native Americans and other tribal peoples, sees the spiritual as alive in us, where spirit and matter, mind and body, are all part of the same living organism. No one aspect is any better than another, each has its own ability to grow, develop and-in its unique way-it can enhance the whole. There is no differing until the after life, nor is there any supreme authority figure. Goddess, Gods, Creators are part of each person, plant and animal. Immanence takes the place of transcendence. (113)

People need not be segregated for being a Canadian or an Indian, and there should be an all embracing ideology for mankind. The cultural alienation and segregation that prevail among people vanish in the lap of nature and a fresh realization,

Of one thing I am certain
the forest and I,
We have something in common
We do not speak French. (Das 126)

Speaking French or Malayalam may create separation among people but not between nature and men. The variation in the content of melanin causes 'trauma' for the darker race, in the land dominated by the people of the "White God."

"Composition" is a fine poem that can be interpreted from the point of view spiritual ecofeminism. This poem is very deep and symbolic and affords us the vision of the poet from an elevated perspective. The remarks that poet makes about life, its goals, its struggles, about man-woman relationship, about the ultimate merger of man with nature are quite unique among her poems. She discovers that "both love and hate are/involvements" (21) and that, "The tragedy of life/ is not death but growth" (21). The growth is the progress towards worldly desires and worldly love. The quest for love drives her only to desperation. There she realizes that,

The only secrets I always
withhold
are that I am so alone

and that I miss my grand mother. (23)

The grand mother is an oft repeated presence in several of her poems. The grand mother and her love is both a reality and a symbol in the poem. The grandmother reminds her about the lost charms and innocence of childhood, the warmth of the ancestral home, the purity of maternal love and also the congenial environment of her childhood at Nalapatt. The longing to go back to the lap of the grand mother and to the lap of nature remained as an obsession in the personal life of the author and it became the topic for several poems and stories.

We shall talk, she said,

Darling,

we shall talk all night

.....

My grandmother's lamp burned

All night

On the window-sill. (24)

The grandmother goes on waiting for her and Kamala Das is unable to reach back to her.

The sea is another powerful symbol used in the poem. The sea was very close to her when she was with her grandmother, in her childhood. The sea got distanced from her as she grew up. At the fag end of life she again longs for the sea.

All I want now

is to take a long walk

into the sea

and lie there, resting,

completely uninvolved. (26)

The sea symbolizes nature and she accepts that ultimately we are,

To crumble

to dissolve

and to retain in other things
the potent fragments
of oneself. (27)

This poem persuades us to remember Rachel Carson's *The Sea around Us*. The world view of a spiritual ecofeminist can be noted at this point. All the life forms are to merge with the nature and the continuity of nature is made clear. The concept of 'Panchabhootha,' the five basic components of nature and life is suggested by the author. The humility of man in nature is another notable aspect in the poem and then she reminds us,

We are all alike
we women,
in our wrappings of hairless skin. (24)

'No Noon at My Village Home' (134) is a poem that is generally categorized as a poem on nostalgia. But the ecosystem portrayed in this poem has biological precision and the poet reminds us about the loss of natural habitat. The poet here shares the spirit of an environmental activist and she prefers to be an optimist when she says that "I must stay." This "stay" is the stay with the nature, experiencing and enjoying together with the nature. The trees, the owl, the pond, the wind and the moon are all participants in the drama of nature and man should not disturb their harmony.

'Evening at the Old Nalappatt House' (142) is a poem where the lost virtues of rustic existence and the warmth of the love of a grandmother are described. The Nalappatt house repeatedly becomes a symbolic ecosystem in her poems. The house is only a part of nature, with its animate and inanimate forms. The civets, bats and the insane rats and the human beings try to coexist in the house. "Blood" (72) is also a 'grandmother poem' which is also located in the grandmother's house where the snobbery about lineage is ridiculed by the poet. Kamala Das fails to keep her word to repair the grandmother's house and the house is abandoned by her,

From every town I live in
I hear the rattle of its death,
The noise of rafters creaking
And the window's whine.

I have let you down

Old house, I seek forgiveness. (74)

The decay of the house is a natural process and at the same time the decay of the bond of man with nature is to be seen as unnatural. The memory of the organic bond with the old house and the nature is held warmly by the author and she seeks forgiveness for her neglect.

The village is not the only 'ecosystem' for existence. The urban life is the present reality and the urban world also should be made a suitable environment for existence. Two poems, "Farewell to Bombay" (38) and "After July" (75) portray how life can be made livable or not. "Farewell to Bombay" is a consideration of the harmony of the life in the city, how various elements of the city life peacefully co-exist. People freely move about and,

...to the crowd

Near the sea, walking or sitting

But always talking, talking,

Talking (38)

But life in Colombo has become frightening due to ethnic cleansing. In Bombay people of various categories live together, while in Colombo Tamilians are massacred. Freedom of existence and expression are vital requirements for the preservation of a human ecosystem. The poet is keenly aware of these facts. These two poems can be approached from the perspective of social ecofeminism.

Unfair distribution of resources, wealth and opportunities can harm the harmony of the system and the socialist ecofeminist system go unattained in Colombo. Cordiality and understanding enliven the situation in Bombay. Hierarchy and domination are to be removed from society and the resources and energy of the bioregion are to be fruitfully utilized.

"The Suicide" is an ecofeminist poem written in a highly confessional mode on the lost simplicity of life and the deprivation of love in life. The sea is the symbol of the natural rhythm of life to which every individual longs to retract.

O sea, you play a child's game

But,

I must pose,

I must pretend,
I must act the role
Of happy woman
Happy wife.
I must keep the right distance
Between me and the low.
And I must keep the right distance,
Between me and the high.
O sea, I am fed up
I want to be simple
I want to be loved. (86-87)

The life of a woman is made miserable by her man. “Yet I never can forget / The only man who hurts” (88). The feminist seeks refuge in the lap of nature and the eternal and primeval patterns of existence.

The pattern of ecofeminist theology can be noted in this poem. Happiness in life can be had only if we move in unison with nature;

O, Sea, I am happy swimming
Happy, happy, happy...
The only movement I know well
Is certainly the swim. (87)

It is obvious that swimming is the symbol of life in harmony with nature, without exploiting or overpowering nature. As Judith Plant says,

The essence of feminism, that the personal is the political, is the driving force behind all ecofeminist political action. For we know that when we resist the rape of the earth, we are fighting the same mentality that allows the rape of women. We know, too, that insisting on healthy relationships with each other lays the foundation for healthy relations with the natural world. The existence of the humanity and without doubt, other species as well, is literally at stake. In our desire to save the earth, we as ecofeminists, believe

that it is folly to overlook the interconnectedness of the war on nature and the daily, often hidden war on “others” - whole cultures, women children and animals. (49)

Though the poem “A Holiday for Me” (61) can be read as a poem on death, it is also a poem on life. The mountains invite the author for the holiday trip which may be death. But the charm of the mountains is irresistible and the luggage that is left behind is definitely the worldly luggage. The author knows that the travel would be delightful if she travels light, without much worldly worries and possessions. The eternal charm of nature is the powerful undercurrent of the poem.

Very obvious ecofeminist suggestions are noted in “The Anamalai Hills” (47), where the lofty Anamalai hills are contrasted with the puny behaviour of man :

Wrapped in the shrouds of betrayals, the woman walks along.

No longer seeking comfort in human speech. The mountain

Seems deaf-mute, but the flesh of her spirit is but its flesh,

and her silence, despite the tumult in her blood, its destined hush. (47)

The woman is comforted not by the man, but by the mountain. The mountain is the representation of the ecosystem which should protect the woman. The words of the mountain, “I was alone, I am alone, I will be alone” (47) reveal the continuity of nature. The mountain is also an internal mountain; the presence of the gentle warmth of nature in the mind of the woman: “Within my heart, the mist ascends, the mountains/awake...” (47).

Nature is not merely a background in the poems of Kamala Das, but nature is an active participant in her poems. Also it cannot be said that she had consciously inculcated her environmental awareness and she was not following the patterns of environmentalism from the West. The awareness about the inseparable bond between man and nature came naturally to her from the rich tradition in her family, the habits of life of people in her village who had an organic relation with nature, the rituals and customs of village life, and also there was the great influence of her grandmother.

Though it is difficult to find out a poem with radical ecofeminist view among the poems of Kamala Das, all other four branches of ecofeminism are used by her in her poems. Poetry becomes not a mere tool for confessional self expression, but it attempts to present the totality of existence in nature. A new definition for the identity and existence of man in nature and a new perspective in man-woman relationship is noted in several of her poems.

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Belonging and Displacement in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*

Roshni C

The works of Caryl Phillips have largely been approached from post-colonial theoretical perspectives, a trend which appears entirely appropriate given their recurrent themes of immigration, ethnic discrimination and the legacy of the TransAtlantic slave trade. Interviewed about his novels, Caryl Phillips declared 'These all seem to be the same book, part of a continuum' (Morrison). Obviously, his seventh work of fiction, *A Distant Shore* (2003), does not disrupt this sense of great cohesion, also acknowledged by his commentators. Although the contemporary setting of *A Distant Shore* is unusual for a novelist who has occasionally been labelled a chronicler of the African Diaspora, this new book constitutes another memorable stage in Phillips' subtle, yet dogged fictional exploration of the tension between attachment and detachment, between belonging and unbelonging that has been part of human life since the beginning of times, especially for the migrant. His works almost always focus on the experience of slavery and its legacy: by describing the discrimination of people of colour in past and present times, he shows how today's race relations have a long history. By extension, *A Distant Shore* also raises questions about contemporary British fiction and what can be regarded as its enduring inability to mirror a society in flux.

This article focuses on the British immigrant experience depicted in *A Distant Shore*, paying attention to the lives of the prominent characters in Britain during the twentieth century. This book slightly deviates from Phillips' previous novels as it is set in present-day Britain, though it must be noted that his drama was always situated in today's society (Ledent 13). As a consequence, Phillips now openly addresses the British nation whereas his previous fictions speak to British society in a much more indirect way.

According to Paul Gilroy in his work *Postcolonial Melancholia*, British society wants to put an end to multicultural society; it wants to abolish "any ambition toward plurality" and consolidate "the growing sense that it is now illegitimate to believe that multiculturalism can and

should be orchestrated by government in the public interest” (*Postcolonial Melancholia* 2). As a consequence of this desire, “diversity becomes a dangerous feature of society. It brings only weakness, chaos, and confusion” (Gilroy, 2). It is thus not surprising that immigrants are not welcome in Britain as they form a primary threat to the society’s homogeneity. In *There Ain’t no Black in the Union*, Jack Gilroy relates the desire for homogeneity and the loss of imperial prestige to one another.

As is clear from this passage; some members of the British nation desire that immigrants leave the mother country and head back home, for then Britain would have the chance to become, once more, a great nation marked by homogeneity. As Britain thus represses the atrocities of its colonial past, it equally represses and discriminates the most obvious results of its colonial past; those who lived in one of Britain’s colonies and who now want to find a better life in the mother country. The incomers are therefore unwelcome, “unwanted and feared precisely because they are the unwitting bearers of the imperial and colonial past” (*Postcolonial Melancholia* 101).

Some members of British society thus do not want immigrants present in Britain because they remind them too much of their awful past; they do not want to feel guilty for the mistakes that their forefathers have made.

What immediately catches the eye when one compares *A Distant Shore* with previous novels by Phillips is that this book is set in today’s world, though of course one could say that his former fictions “allegorically address the present” (Ledent 13). Benedicte Ledent notes that all of Phillips’ novels are set in the past whereas his plays and scripts for radio and television often focus directly “on what it means to be black in Britain today” (13). *A Distant Shore* thus contains a clear break with Phillips’ earlier novels as far as the temporal setting is concerned. It is true that Dorothy and Solomon share quite a few characteristics with many of Phillips’ previous protagonists, just as it is true that many themes such as displacement, alienation and discrimination are a constant throughout his work. The description of how Solomon crosses the channel by having to hold on to the side of a ship recalls how slaves had to cross the Atlantic. Tournay-Theodotou says that in general, the description of Gabriel’s flight is “strongly reminiscent of depictions of the Middle Passage . . . The intent of evoking a connection between the days of slavery and contemporary migration cannot be ignored. In other words, *A Distant Shore* is also a contemporary rewriting of the Middle Passage” (n. pag)

When Solomon arrives in England, he is struck by the many differences between his and Britain's culture. As he first meets Denise he is irritated, offended almost by the way she dresses and how she interrogates him as if she were his equal: "She is asking him questions that do not concern her, and it troubles him that she cannot see that he is a grown man and she is merely a child" (Phillips, 165). This is one of the reasons why he likes Dorothy so much; she is one of the only persons in his direct environment who is "respectable" (Phillips, 266). Another passage, though, shows that Solomon is equally disturbed by the fact that British people seem determined to make no contact whatsoever with people that they do not know; they tend towards very antisocial behaviour:

To Gabriel's eyes, English people look unhappy, and he notices that they walk with their heads down as though determined to avoid one another. It is strange, but nobody is looking at anybody else, and it would appear that not only are these people all strangers to one another, but they seem determined to make sure that this situation will remain unchanged. (Phillips 144).

Solomon is not only isolated by society, he himself is to some extent responsible for his sense of lonesomeness, as he declines the first contact that he encounters in Britain. Nevertheless, the aforementioned passage demonstrates one of the main themes in this novel: the loneliness that is sensed by both protagonists. This feeling seems to be inherent to Britain's culture. Nobody wants to know anyone new; everyone wants to be by him- or herself, and this completely isolates Dorothy and Solomon. Apart from suffering from extreme loneliness, Solomon is the victim of racism and racially inspired vandalism, which brings me to a second major theme in Phillips' work. When he is locked up for the abuse of Denise, he is either ignored or treated like an animal by the guards. When Solomon lives in the north of England with his family, he again becomes the victim of racism when the house where he stays is decorated with racist slogans. As a result, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson are completely stressed out and Solomon once more feels that he is not welcome in Britain. What is very interesting in this passage is the explanation that Mike gives to Solomon to make clear why certain people react to him in this awful way:

I'm an old traditionalist, Solomon. I want fish and chips, not curry and chips. I'm not prejudiced, but we'll soon be living in a foreign country unless somebody puts an end to all this immigration. These Indians, they still make their women trail after them, and

they have their mosques and temples, and their butcher shops where they kill animals in the basement and do whatever they do with the blood (Phillips 258)

As is apparent from this excerpt, Mike is a racist himself, but instead of blaming black people for everything that goes wrong in Britain, he accuses the Indians of being the source of Britain's misery as they are "peasants". It now becomes clear to Solomon what is going wrong in this country. Mike's speech reminds one of the infamous speeches that Enoch Powell gave in 1968. Caryl Phillips quoted the following sentence of Powell in his book *A New World Order*: "The West Indian or Asian does not by being born in England become an Englishman. In law he is a United Kingdom citizen, by birth; in fact he is a West Indian or Asian still" (274). Mike says that Solomon's case is different from that of the West Indian or Asian because Solomon had to escape oppression, yet what Mike fails to understand is that in all probability the West Indian and Asian also wanted to escape a form of oppression, namely poverty.

When Solomon moves to Stoneleigh to become the "handyman-cum-night-watchman" (Phillips, 13), he again becomes the victim of racism. This time he receives insulting letters of which some are filled with razor blades so that Solomon would have his fingers sliced off. We thus see that the theme of loneliness and the topic of racism are strongly intertwined in this novel, as the discriminating attitude of some members of British society is one of the main causes for Solomon's isolation. His lonesomeness is also strengthened by the fact that he cannot speak his own language anymore. The point that he is losing his language implies a loss of identity. England is clearly changing him into another person, so if he were to return to his home country, he would never fit in there again. Stuart Hall wrote about immigrants like Solomon that their identity formation cuts across and intersects natural frontiers as they have left their homelands and have no hope of ever returning there: "they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several homes" (Hall 310). They thus belong to a culture of hybridity: "they must learn to inhabit at last two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them" (Hall 310). As a result, Solomon belongs to neither nation, and this again enforces his feeling of loneliness. Despite the fact that one cannot know the truth about Solomon raping the girl, some characters in the novel, like the guards, tend to believe that Solomon is guilty. Solomon is thus declared to be a criminal by these people even though there is no proof for his offence. This is true for all immigrants who come to Britain: they are found to be the cause of everything that goes wrong, they are the scapegoats of the British nation and this will remain so until their innocence has been proven which, of course, is impossible.

Dorothy is not entirely likeable either; she did not like the fact that the school in which she worked had been turned from grammar into comprehensive and as a consequence she now had to teach “whoever came into the school” (Phillips 5). Apparently Dorothy preferred to teach only those who came from a rich background. The problem that she has with the homeless is another aspect that makes the reader feel uncomfortable. Clearly she is unable to disentangle the knot of attachment and detachment that, much to her irritation, also characterises present day England where, she thinks, ‘it’s difficult to tell who’s from around here and who’s not. Who belongs and who’s a stranger’ (3). *A Distant Shore* does not attempt to unravel this knot - an impossible task - but presents it to us in all its rough complexity. In addition to the bizarreness of human behaviour, destiny too plays a role in keeping people apart and brands human relationships with a tragic denial of consummation.

Mahmood comes to Britain at the age of sixteen to escape the humiliations that he experienced in his country of birth, India. He joins his brother, who owns three restaurants in England, and dreams of making enough money so that he can go to college. However, this dream is quickly torn apart. Mahmood quickly realises that he will never be accepted in this society. Mahmood is one of the scapegoats that Britain craves for. He is also a typical example of an immigrant who has large hopes and dreams but whose expectancies are quickly shattered; Britain can only become a disappointment to him. This is something that Phillips and his parents also experienced when they came to Britain. Phillips describes this in *A New World Order: The greatest blow to their [Phillips’s ‘parents’] soul was the news that because of the colour of their skin, they would inevitably experience difficulty being accepted as British . . .* (Phillips 244-45)

However, not only the position of blacks is put into the spotlight; the extreme loneliness of Dorothy is also focussed upon. This means that the problem of isolation is not something that can be dealt with by changing some immigration laws; it is an issue that goes to the very foundation of British culture. However, it is not her new environment that makes her forlorn; before she moved to Stoneleigh she already suffered from a strong sense of abandonment. This is clearly illustrated at two different points in the novel; firstly when she starts an affair with Mahmood and secondly when she almost pounces upon the new teacher of geography. It is not only the lonesomeness that bothers her; the predictability of her life disturbs her as well. She needs someone who gives her the feeling that there is more to life than she is experiencing. What is above all striking about these two affairs is the fact that Dorothy herself is largely responsible for their coming to an end. Some features of Dorothy do not make her very likeable.

The fact that she deliberately sleeps with two married men and then confronts their wives certainly adds to this sense of discomfort with Dorothy. The fact that Dorothy fits into Gilroy's description of someone who is irritated by the inability to classify people in clear ways also makes the reader feel ill at ease with her. It has been argued by Ledent that Dorothy can be read as an allegory of Britain, and Tournay-Theodotou agrees with this: "Dorothy's disturbance with the changes and her general mental instability aptly reflect the current „disturbed state of the British nation" (n. pag.).

A Distant Shore's style tries to reproduce the trauma that the protagonists with the protagonists' positive and negative features, makes this have experienced for the reader, makes us realise a little more what it means to be unaccepted in today's British society. The structure of the novel is anti-linear. In *A Distant Shore*, for example, it is only in the second half of the novel that we learn that Gabriel and Solomon are one and the same person. Solomon's thoughts are also frequently confusing because at one point we read what he was thinking while fighting in his home country, and on the next line he is suddenly back in his British cell. According to Stef Craps, this deliberate confusion is an emblematic feature of literature that aims to "embody or reproduce the trauma for the reader" ("Introduction: *Bearing Literary Witness*. 78). This novel thus wants the reader to experience what a certain character feels and thinks during a traumatic event.

In *A Distant Shore*, as in the rest of Phillips' fiction, togetherness is never very far from parting. This pervasive, never-resolved interplay between attachment and detachment is contained in the title as well. The combination of 'distant' with 'shore' evokes a place- or person-that is far away, possibly out of reach, but can nonetheless represent a possibility of rescue for the individual who has lost all moorings. In other words, the phrase 'distant shore' encapsulates the simultaneous hopeful pull, yet inherent hopelessness, of the longing to belong.

The setting and the characters of *A Distant Shore* make its topicality quite obvious, and the novel can indeed be read as a forceful comment on Britain's current situation, and as a nuanced, humane contribution to the debate on asylum seekers in that country and elsewhere in Europe. Yet, however accurate and well-researched, Phillips' fictional depiction of life in today's Britain, and in particular of the plight of refugees, should not be confused with a sociological or journalistic document. In this regard it is interesting to briefly compare the novel with an article on the Sangatte Red Cross refugee centre that Phillips wrote for *The Guardian* in November 2001. Entitled 'Strangers in a Strange Land', the article is a piece of

sensitive investigation into the reasons why people leave their country and attempt to reach England, often at the risk of their own lives. Such elements can be found in the novel too, but there are divergences between the two texts even though both emanate from a profound desire to understand human nature.

This being said, there is in *A Distant Shore* a clear will to assert the presence of the ‘other’ in contemporary British society, to root the stranger and the disenfranchised in the national narrative. Phillips took the title of his novel from a song on that album, ‘Distant Shore’, which is spoken in the voice of an asylum seeker who might well be Solomon:

Everyone knows that there’s no place like home
But I’m just seeking refuge in a world full of storms
Washed up on a distant shore, can’t go home anymore
The natives are hostile whatever I say
The thing they fear most is that I might want to stay
By their side on a distant shore can’t go home anymore
I escaped my tormentors by crossing the sea
What I cannot escape is memory
Washed up on a distant shore can’t go home anymore

What remains after one has read the novel is not a sense of outcry at today’s injustices, but rather a profound sympathy with two wounded individuals who could have remained ‘strangers to one another’ (163), but are brought together by fiction, yet also separated by it. *A Distant Shore* can therefore be read as a renewed act of faith, on Phillips’ part, in a genre that, for him, ‘requires a great deal of generosity from the writer and the reader alike’ because ‘both have to imagine themselves in somebody who is not them ;in short they have to enact a simultaneous process of attachment and detachment .

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A Transcultural Re-reading of Black Experience in the Poems of Gwendolyn Brooks and Benjamin Zephaniah

Nisha Mathew

Poetry has been variously defined down the centuries and was initially accorded a grand and majestic stature among the literary genres. Though poetry is a fertile ground for conveying the angst and fears of the world, it often gets marginalized and is oppressed by the dominance of fiction. The contemporary poetic scenario is prosperous with meticulous poets who have become spokespersons of the society but their poetry is either unnoticed or is relegated to the backseat. Poetry, however, serves as an apt tool in bearing the signatures of an age, its developments and declinations. It has grown to gain significance as a cultural apparatus and is in the mainstream to aid the marginalized and the downtrodden in representing the story of their pathetic existence. This is where postcolonial poetry takes a new turn and acquires a new realm.

Postcolonialism is a term that has been subjected to indepth studies and has wider implications than is often thought of. It is said to indicate a period that came into being after colonialism. However, critics consider it faulty to think so as colonialism does not stop when a colony formally achieves its independence. The newly established freedom is only a shifting of Governmental powers from the imperialists to the hands of the authorities of the nation. Postcolonial theory is one master narrative that explains all forms of oppression. Colonialism was built on the hegemony of the Eurocentric where the Western culture was at the centre of all civilizations and the non-European lands were at the periphery and considered to be the margins. All the cultures of the world are placed in such a manner that they are “before” or “after” the European civilization. This resulted in a construction of the binaries of European Self and Non-European Other bringing in a series of binaries like centre and margin, Self and Other, Culture and Nature.

Colonisation forced people out of their homelands either through slavery or economic necessity. They formed a community of slaves or forced labourers in the alien land and later

when decolonisation took place they found it difficult to go back to their homeland settling in their plantations as minorities. As a result of colonisation and decolonisation many people had to suffice themselves with the atmosphere of new places like England where they had to blend themselves though unwelcome. This mainly included the South Asians and the Caribbeans. Moving away from their homeland caused displacement, cultural depression and instability in the immigrants leading to identity crisis. The consciousness that emerged out of it was complex and hybrid, an intersection of Eurocentric and non-western cultures that developed as a consequence of imperialism. For the postcolonialists, it was a movement from the margins to the so called centres providing opportunities to settle in the US and the UK. The change was bitter and undesired. Though the claim is movement from the margins to the centre of hybridism and cosmopolitanism, it affected the psyche of the individual dislocated from his homelands, family, history and past.

Postcolonial literature serves to delineate an answer to the aforementioned conditions of the people and often it asserts that the imperialists were forging their culture as superior imposing it on the colonized, sneering their culture as superstitious and contemptuous. Culture cannot be bordered and bound to a particular location as all cultures are transnational. They form a part of the negotiations of their identity and challenge simplistic definitions. Antonio Gramsci has pointed out that every man is a philosopher and that every man and every woman is involved in the processes by which culture connects all the operations of the political, social and economic life. The various perceptions and perspectives of culture have opened up new vistas for expressing the anguish of the sidelined and have gained significance through a new arena called transculturation. A term coined by Fernando Ortiz, transculturation has come to signify the merging of cultures. Ulrich Beck in his popular work *The Cosmopolitan Vision* exhorts: "My life, my body, my 'individual existence' become part of another world, of foreign cultures, religions, histories and global interdependencies without my realizing or expressly wishing it" (Schulze xiii).

A poem is said to be postcolonial if it is written from a place implicated in colonial history and written by a person who has attained language through colonial associations. An array of writers representing the so called barbaric and culturally backward lands projected the torture, abuses and torments they underwent through words which emanated as Black Literature. The new black ideal italicizes black identity, black solidarity, black self-possession and self-address. The prevalent understanding was that black literature is literature by blacks, about blacks directed to blacks and is essentially the distillation of black life. It is this question

of the identity of literature, whether it is black or white that got explored when in the 1960s when a young black woman with pen in hand responded not to pretty sunsets and the lapping of lake water but to the speech of physical riot and spiritual rebellion – Gwendolyn Brooks. A similar and stronger voice emerged later who not just dealt with the oppression and tortures the blacks were subjected to but travelled as far as creating a new identity through children of different nationalities – Benjamin Zephaniah.

Gwendolyn Brooks is a major figure in American literature having produced a body of work that extends over four decades, poems that still linger in the hearts of people that have kindled them to celebrate her hundredth birth anniversary. Brooks has remarked of the black writer: “He has the American experience and he also has the black experience; so he’s very rich” (Melhem 2). Nevertheless the works of Brooks are also grounded in a consciousness of race. Thus race, ethnicity, subjectivity and identity form integral parts of her works. Clenora F Hudson has observed that Miss Brooks’s poems accurately reflect what and how blacks felt and feel about racial issues in the country. She has been responsive to turbulent changes in the black community’s vision of itself and to the changing forms of its vibrations during decades of rapid change. Benjamin Zephaniah, a Rastafarian oral performer and poet and a major poetic voice of England also highlights the grueling experiences of the blacks, the brutalities they were subjected to as an ethnic community, and how they were stripped off their subjectivity and identity.

In this context it is essential to understand the distinctions between ethnicity, subjectivity and identity. In Britain, America, Australia the historical formation of ‘race’ is one of power and subordination. People of colour have occupied structurally subordinate positions in relation to every dimension of life-chances. The concept of racialization refers to those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristic in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities. The drastic changes in the historical, social and political arenas after colonialism became impetus to the formation of ethnic groups that nourished under specific socio-historical conditions. A culturalist critiques that ethnicity is a valiant attempt to escape the racist implications that are inherent in the historically forged concept of race. Stuart Hall expatiates: “If the black subject and black experience are not stabilized by Nature or by some other essential guarantee, then it must be the case that they are constructed historically, culturally and politically – the concept which refers to this is ‘ethnicity’”. The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as

well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated and all knowledge is contextual.” (Barker 250)

Gwendolyn Brooks’ first volume of poetry *A Street in Bronzeville* accurately portrays the Negro life. The work presents Negroes as people and not exotics or non-Christian savages who required civilizing by British missionaries and adventurers. This sequence of vignettes gives a cross section of the residents, young, old, middle-aged, mostly poor who reveal their hopes, needs, commonalities and differences. They analyse the nature and consequences of segregated black life and call for integration to combat its evils. All the poems included give humanistic and compassionate glimpses of black life concentrating and structuring around two units: local/black and national/multiracial. In *Primer for Blacks*, Brooks passionately observes the trials and tribulations underwent by the black race when at the same time she expresses her solidarity for them being a member of their community. It is a bereaved call to return to old values and traditions and take pride in one’s race. Being black should be a matter of pride and rather than brooding over the derisions poured in for the tanned skin, the community should explore the rich cultural heritage and ethnicity contained within each of them.

Benjamin Zephaniah has keenly analysed his observations of multicultural Britain comprised of people of multiple ethnic groups in the opening section of *Too Black Too Strong* and offers a strong critique of the position of the various tribes of the world branded as ‘black’ in his renowned work *Wicked World*. The various ethnic groups around the world get a reopening and are introduced to the readers with their ethnic qualities. The immaculacy of their traditions, the rituals they performed, the heritage they held on to are painted with sharpness and makes the reader feel distressed at the encroachment of the colonialists over them in the name of cultural refinement. A linguistic decolonization is effected through the collection bringing to focus the existence and significance of diverse ethnic cultures. This is clearly portrayed in “Before all these Cities”:

Once we were masters of self-education
Now we all live on a dry reservation,
Before all these cities, and factories and trains
We brave Apache once lived on the plains. (Zephaniah 3)

Through *Wicked World*, Zephaniah vehemently asserts the cultural significance of the real ethnic groups who were derided by the Whites according to new racism which relies not

on biological discourses of superiority but on cultural differences that exclude black people and ethnic groups from being fully a part of the nation. The fearless bushmen, true to their word, caring, fearless and peaceful, the nomads who roam the world unmindful of wealth and possessions, the greatness and generosity of the Chinese, the Cherokees who lived in harmony with the surroundings and married the earth, the cool and fresh Bengalis, the non-violent Tibetans with their custom and Karma, the Pygmies who love their neighbours and hate wars are all stark reminders of the cultural diversity of the world that have been stumped by the hegemony of the Eurocentric. The concluding poem “Be Cool Mankind” is an exhortation of how beautiful the world will be wrapped in love and humanity:

There is one race
The living race
Spread love mankind, spread love mankind
...
And let us live as one people
Be cool mankind, be cool. (Zephaniah 88)

Like Ethnicity, Culture and Identity are two important and crucial factors forming an integral part of literary tradition and has been engaging the minds of critics and theoreticians involved in the examination and exploration of cultural studies. From it emanated questions of subjectivity, identity, social meanings, values and power. Thus in the words of Ien Ang Cultural Studies tend to be:

Positively and self-consciously eclectic, critical and deconstructive. ... Ultimately, doing cultural studies does not mean contributing to the accumulation of science for science's sake, the building of an ever more encompassing solidly constructed, empirically validated stock of 'received knowledge' but participating in an on-going, open-ended, politically-oriented debate, aimed at evaluating and producing critique on our contemporary cultural condition. In this context, topicality, critical sensibility and sensitivity for the concrete are more important than theoretical professionalism and methodological purity. (Waugh 250)

Brooks and Zephaniah have variously determined the issues of identity and subjectivity experienced by the Blacks. Identity in simple terms is the ability to sustain a narrative of the self and is recognizable by the person and others. Identity is a creation. Subjectivity and

identity are contingent, culturally specific productions. Identities are wholly social construction and cannot exist outside of cultural representations. They are the consequence of acculturation. Identity crisis forms a fundamental part of Brooks' poetry and is best exemplified in the poem *Annie Allen*. The poem is a portrayal of the life from childhood to maturity of the young black girl Annie which at a higher realm is also a glimpse into her response to racism, murder and death. The poem links to the black and tan motif pervading the works of Brooks. Annie tries to improve her appearance, 'Printing bastard roses' upon her image in the looking-glass, "the unembroidered brown" and dresses her black and boisterous hair, / taming all hat anger down" dreaming of getting a man in tan:

Think of sweet and chocolate,
Left to folly or to fate
Whom the higher Gods forgot
Whom the lower Gods berate;
Physical and underfed
Fancying on the featherbed
What was never and is not. (Melhem 64)

In a newly contrived form the poem in disguise, and through the brave and romantic reformative notions of Annie, is ultimately a plea for the Negroes to be treated with humanity. The Blacks were invisible to the Whites and had no identity of their own. They worked as slaves and the Whites were reluctant to acknowledge the human emotions and passions they possessed. "The Mother" stands apart and expresses the heart rending experience of a black mother who had to thwart her maternal desires by aborting her child due to poverty. Brooks comments: "Hardly your crowned and praised and customary Mother; but a Mother not unfamiliar, who decides that she, rather than her World, will kill her children. The decision is not nice, not simple and the emotional consequences are neither nice nor simple." (Melhm 68). "Bronzeville Woman in Red Hat" exposes the repugnance of a White woman when her child was kissed by her black slave and kisses her in return: Her creamy child kissed by the black maid! Square on the mouth! / World yelled, world writhed, world turned to light and rolled / Into her kitchen, nearly knocked her down. (Brooks 55). The child's response however, has some optimism:

Child with continuing cling issued his No in final fire,

Kissed back the colored maid,

Not wise enough to freeze or be afraid.

Conscious of kindness, easy creature bond.

Love had been handy and rapid to respond. (Brooks 56)

Poetry has always had its standard canon of English authors from Chaucer to Donne, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Eliot, Hughes and Larkin. Then there emerged multicultural poetry represented by a few anthologies or by a small selection of photocopied poems and included mainly African, Caribbean and British. The new representative poets of multicultural Britain have broken the canon foregrounding the Black struggle for culture and identity. Benjamin Zephaniah has explored in detail the issues of culture and identity placing it against the background of multicultural Britain. Though being born to non-British parents in an entirely different cultural background Zephaniah has been able to identify himself with the culture of Britain and has never lost his identity. He identifies himself with the monoculture of the world. And this makes him question and look at the state of justice in both of them. Even with racial persecutions and allegations raised against Britain, Zephaniah has said that Britain is a wonderful place. However, the title of British evokes multiple responses among the people. For some it emanates memories of its former greatness when Shakespeare was the top of the list. While for others it represents the melting pot bursting with vitality and smiling multiculturalism. Even with these diverse opinions on Britain, it cannot be neglected that it is one place where racism looms large segregating the Blacks and submitting them to religious, political and racial persecutions. The Afro-Caribbean population forms 16% of the prison population and they are arrested for no cause or reason. It is against this vandalism unleashed by Royalty, the so called British Empire that Zephaniah is against. His *Too Black Too Strong* is a vigorous expression of the cultural angst felt by the Blacks. The word Black to Zephaniah transcends the superficial skin colour. It includes Romani, Iraqi, Indians, Kurds, Palestinians and all those who are treated black by the United White States. Thus to him 'strong' is the strength gained when one stands up and gets counted as opposed to sitting in workshops and applying for lottery money. His *Too Black Too Strong* is unity is strength: "I say *Too Black Too Strong*, I mean unity is strength, I mean "true" free speech, I mean no justice, no peace." (Zephaniah 13) This essentially points to a fact of cultural identity which is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of being. From this can be derived the traumatic character of 'the

colonial experience', which positioned and subjected Black people and Black experiences. They used their power to make them see and experience themselves as 'Other' with what Foucault mentions as the fatal couplet power/knowledge. His voice is for the oppressed, for the ones who have lost their culture and identity or rather were robbed of their cultural identity. Zephaniah has asserted without doubts that he does not face an identity crisis even in the midst of raging racism in Britain and makes it clear in his poem "Knowing Me": "Being Black somewhere else/ Is just being black everywhere/ I don't have an identity crisis" (Zephaniah 62).

Zephaniah wanted to teach the people to create an identity of their own and achieves his purpose through his works especially *We are Britain*. In *We are Britain* he paints the life of thirteen children who are ready to embrace a multicultural multicoloured Britain and none of them are native British but come from a whole range of cultural backgrounds. Zephaniah announces that if Britain is going to be great in the future it would be because these kids want curry and chips, mangoes and strawberries and banana crumble and still think of them as British. He believes that young people can help to keep Britain a place where everyone is accepted and where they can delight in the diversity of the nation. The collection is a culmination of Zephaniah's efforts to make his wonderful place (Britain) a land of cultural diversity and paving way for people to create an identity of their own. Standing within the heights of his cultural identity Zephaniah concludes: "The British are not a single tribe, or a single religion, and we don't come from a single place. But we are building a home where we are all able to be who we want to be, yet still be British. That is what we do: we take, we adapt, and we move forward. We are the British. We are Britain!" (Zephaniah 5)

Henry Louis Gates has reflected: "Ours is a late twentieth century world profoundly fissured by nationality, ethnicity, race, class, and gender. And the only way to transcend those divisions – to forge, for once, a civic culture that respects both differences and commonalities – is through education that seeks to comprehend the diversity of culture." (Waugh 381). So are the works of Gwendolyn Brooks and Benjamin Zephaniah. Though belonging to two different time periods and two different places, their voice gets united in transmitting the issues of race, ethnicity, subjectivity and identity and the ways to resolve them to the generations flummoxed by racial discriminations and segregations gnawing the world today.

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The Silent Voices of the African Woman in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*

Divya Johnson

Postcolonial feminism has inspired the forms and the force of postcolonial politics and has never operated as a separate entity from postcolonialism. Where its feminist focus is foregrounded, it comprises nonwestern feminisms which negotiate the political demands of nationalism, socialist feminism, liberalism, and ecofeminism, alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide, child abuse.

Feminism in a postcolonial frame begins with the situation of the ordinary woman in a particular place, while also thinking her situation through in relation to broader issues to give her the more powerful basis of collectivity. It will highlight the degree to which women are still working against a colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal - institutional, economic, political, and ideological.

Post-colonial feminist theory has departed from mainstream postcolonial theory by highlighting the importance of gender to understand concepts of colonialism and nationalism. This theory states that oppressions relating to the colonial experience— particularly racial, class, and ethnic oppressions—have particularly marginalized women in postcolonial societies. In addition, postcolonial feminist scholars contest the Eurocentric gaze that privileges Western notions of liberation and progress and portrays women in developing countries as victims of restrictive cultures and religions. Scholars like Chilla Bulbeck (1997) argue that Western feminist philosophy posit white feminists as more advanced and liberated, with the underlying assumption that women all over the world want to be more like Western women or that their ideal is to gain the same rights as men. In these characterizations, little attention is paid to history and difference; Western feminism becomes the norm against which all other women are judged.

Buchi Emecheta's initial work *The Bride Price* deals with the adolescence and marriage of the African woman. As the novel opens, the family relocates themselves to their roots in the Ibo village of Ibuza after a stint of life in Lagos where Akunna and her brother Nna-Ndo spent their childhood. The enslavement of women to ancient beliefs and traditional dogmas despite their allegiance to Western/modernized outlook is foregrounded in the novel.

Emecheta brings to the fore a darker side of Africa exemplified in the life of the woman and the psychological and physical pressures upon the weaker sex 'through cankerous customs like arranged marriages, polygamy, perpetual pregnancy and widowhood. Emecheta attacks the inhumanity of the traditional culture that exploits, degrades and abuses the womenfolk and pushes her down. For Emecheta, women constitute the most oppressed, the most underprivileged and the most unfortunate of all the disaffected groups and she has made the championing of the cause of womanhood her own peculiar territory (Osa 124).

The women of Africa are introduced to society by means of numerous ceremonial customs and traditional rituals that characterize the civilization. Buchi Emecheta in *The Bride Price*, records the growing pangs of the young African girl, carefully delineating the gradual submergence of the central character, Akunna, into traditional society and its mores through various religious and social rituals that are part and parcel of African society.

Depicted as seeking shelter in the traditional roots of Iboland from the colonial Lagos on losing their father, Akunna with her family is received back to their land. A chorus of chants and burial rites shocks her into accepting the truths of life, such as death in the family.

In spite of being an ardent lover of her culture and the ancient customs of the land, Emecheta depicts the unpleasant truth while speaking about women's life in traditional Africa. Even though sociological studies show that women were relatively autonomous, *Bride Price* presents women as the voiceless section of the society that has to bend to male prerogative as exemplified in Akunna and her mother Ma Blackie.

Emecheta discusses at length the anthropological customs of the land. She introduces the age groups, each created at three year intervals' and shows them as rehearsing the fertility dances that coincide with Akunna's graduation to womanhood. Emecheta thus demonstrates the protagonist's deepening identification with her African mould.

To quote Lloyd Brown: Her growth is simultaneously the development of her own personality and will and her perception of the rituals, the values, and the institutions through which her community celebrates its traditions and exercises its will. (50)

Other customs of Africa are described by Emecheta as a strategy for securing the reader's sympathy for the women. The weird customs in the land which relegated women to being victims of fate are part of the novel:

In Ibuza young girls must be prepared for anything to happen. Some youth who had no money to pay for a bride might sneak out of the bush to cut a curl from a girl's head so that she would belong to him for life and never be able to return to her parents. (106)

This occurs in its worst form in Akunna's life when she is kidnapped by Okoboshi, the cripple, in order to make her his bride. The novel gets the name *Bride Price* from the custom of the land, whereby the groom's family gives to the father of the bride a sum of money, according to the merit of the girl. Only marriages performed as per such rites were sanctioned formally by the society. It is the defiance to such customs that forms the plot of the novel. Polygamy, the hateful African tradition that ensures male hegemony and anarchy, is one of the things revolted against in *Bride Price*. As soon as Akunna reaches her native traditional village, she is informed by her cousin, "You still don't know the customs of our Ibuza people? Your mother is inherited by my father, you see, just as he will inherit everything your father worked for(63). Likewise Akunna's bride price as a girl child was also to be inherited by him. Since he was aiming at the Obi position, he was pinning his hopes on the lucrative bride price the educated Akunna would fetch him.

Emecheta in this novel highlights women in pre-colonial Africa. As a sociological record *Bride Price* enumerates the various customs and beliefs of the land—many of them detrimental to the marginalized of the community.

In *Bride Price*, the slaves too are a subaltern group—a minority who can claim few privileges to themselves, represented by Chike. The irrational discrimination whereby Africans demean a sect of their own community by naming them slaves or *osu* is castigated by Emecheta. The attitude of the free born natives of Ibuza to a relationship with a slave born is presented throughout the novel, right from the initial warning given by her friend Ogugua to Akunna to the heart-rending wails of her mother, who, in spite of her liking for Chike, bewails her lot in being saddled with such a daughter. "Had they ever seen a girl like this daughter of hers who

was wanted by so many good families, but who preferred to choose a common... (125). It was considered the greatest insult that could befall a family of good ancestry to be despoiled of it with the blood of slave origin.

Emecheta points out the folly of such demarcation, drawing out the past history and present status of the Ofulues — the supposed slave descendants. Chike's great grandmother was a princess who turned into a slave when she was captured in war. Now generations later, the family of Ofulues was one of the most influential and wealthy in the tribe. With Westernization and education imparted to them, the once slave category had risen in the social ladder to acquire posts such as those of lawyers and teachers of which Chike was one. Yet the unreasonable and inflexible attitude of the traditional concepts is evident in senior Ofulue's words:

Although he was a member of the Native Administration, the people had never allowed him to become a chief... His children taught in their schools, his children treated their old people free in the hospitals. Yet they were still slaves, *oshu*. (86)

Like all postcolonial literature, Emecheta's *Bride Price* too is a document on the influence of colonization upon the land. Western principles and mores slowly seep into the land — some of them good for the country but some detrimental to the future of the people. Thus the collision of cultures could be said to bring about an amalgamation of the two civilizations — East and the West. Chike is the offspring of Westernized Africa and the seeping in of European outlook and mode of living into Africa. The impact of colonial invasion of the land and the adaptation of native culture to it are vividly delineated in the initial chapters of the novel.

Akuna's father is presented as the sorry remains of Nigerian collaboration with the imperial power in fighting Hitler. The British who could not bear the swamp in Burma made the West African soldiers stand in for them. Many of them died from the miserable conditions they were subjected to and her father barely escaped with a very badly affected leg, which despite the injections of the railway doctor and the incantations of the tribal dibia, drove him on to death. This mixing up of both traditional and western modes of living is again seen in the dreams Akunna has of her future marriage:

She would have her marriage first of all solemnized by the beautiful goddess of Ibuza, then the Christian would sing her a wedding march — Here comes the bride — then her father Nna would call up the spirits of his great, great grandparents to guide her, then... she would leave her father's house. (4)

Similarly the burial of her father was "like all ceremonies in colonial Africa, a mixture of the traditional and the European. ...He was buried in the same way that he had lived: in a conflict of the two cultures (26). The ambivalence and dislocation of the people caught between two worlds come forth in the argument on whether he should be given a Christian or pagan burial. Since he was a mixture of both in his life, they seek the final word of his only son. The innocent young boy's preference for Christian heavens for his father was greeted with approval especially by women:

They preferred Nna to go to heaven, because heaven sounded purer, cleaner and to cap it, the heaven of the Christians was new and foreign, anything imported was considered to be much better than their old ways. (40)

Though there is an underlying strain of love for natural and traditional mode of love, Emecheta charts out the need for the women of Africa to come out of her restrictive hut and reach out for wider expanses and unlimited opportunities. When Africa was brought into contact with the outer world with colonization, its women folk ventured out in search of better options. The culture conflict syndrome, reflected in Emecheta's novels, is similar to male canonical literature but has a different story to narrate, as it focuses on the second sex of the society. As a pre-colonial figure Akunna hardly manifests the problems of postcolonial bifurcation of double colonization like Nnu Ego in Lagos or the racial question of Kehinde's London, nor the creole identity in Gwendolen, the heroines in her later novels. Thus Emecheta could be seen tracing out the metamorphosis of the African woman through historical and geographically wide ranging adventures.

As Katherine Frank says:

Such customs and mores, in fact, are actually institutionalized forms of male oppression: inheritance of widows by their brothers in law, the custom that a man could make an unwilling woman his wife by kidnapping her and cutting off a lock of her hair, the prohibition against women marrying descended of slaves, and numerous other inhibiting manifestations of traditional culture in *The Bride Price* are all determined and enforced by men. (Frank, *Death of the Slave Girl* 483)

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Colonial Resistance in Sara Joseph's *Gift in Green*

Kripa Vijayan

The tendency to dominate is inherent in human nature. Time and again, this tendency gives its manifestation to the world. Racial tensions, class conflicts, patriarchy, caste hierarchy and Nazism are some of the testimonials of this human tendency. However, it was the 16th century European colonialism which manifested this human urge to conquer and dominate, to its fullest. This is, undoubtedly, one of the most dreadful events that the history of civilization has ever witnessed. It, indeed, generated great waves. It influenced the successive history, culture and literature. Writers, especially those who belonged to the previously colonized countries, started to celebrate this theme of colonialism. They have been trying to explore the execution and impacts of colonialism and Sara Joseph is not an exception. Even after five decades of independence of India, Sara Joseph still tries to instill this theme in her contemporary work, *Gift in Green*.

Sara Joseph, one of the most renowned female writers of India, is the author of several novels, short stories, essays and plays. Her writings are marked by their deep concern for women, ecology and colonialism. Even though her literary career started by writing poems, she has published six novels and several short story collections. Her novels such as *Aalahayude Penmakkal*, *Maattathi*, *Othappu*, *Aathi (Gift in Green)* brought her national recognition as well as national fame.

Gift in Green, which was published in 2011, describes how the peaceful life of a society which lived in complete harmony with nature, is disturbed by the arrival of a group of colonizers under the leadership of Kumaran. Kumaran wanted to establish his power over Aathi and for that he turned Aathi upside down. "The process of 'forming a community' in the new land necessarily meant un-forming or re-forming the communities that existed there already" (Loomba 8). *Gift in Green* also describes the relentless fight of the people of Aathi to resist this invasion.

Aathi is a mystical as well as utopian eco-friendly terrain. It has its own culture and lifestyle. This place is marked by its purity, holiness and uniqueness. People for centuries lead a peaceful life in Aathi. But gradually this peace is lost when Kumaran, the powerful colonizer tried to trespass on this land for his material advantage.

The fear that Aathi was in peril of being ruined had been haunting her for some time. Were the days when Aathi belonged only to its people coming to an end? Aathi had its own life and life style, its own truth, its own codes and courtesies. What should happen and when, were all clearly set out. They did not have to fret, or wonder what the day would be like or what the night would bring. But that no longer the case. Life in Aathi had begun to lose its serenity because of the continual incursions from the external world. (151)

One of the inevitable effects of colonization is the spirit of nationalism and resistance that such an event would generate. It is natural that when an alien force tries to disrupt the nature of a land it will try to oppose it with all might."Opposition to colonial rule was spearheaded by forms of nationalist struggle which cannot offer a blueprint for dealing with inequities of the contemporary world order"(Loomba 17). Thus, when the colonizer tries to establish him on the natives, they will oppose it rigorously. This novel traces the fight for survival by people. Like a typical colonizer, Kumaran tried to abduct their land and culture. But each of his attempts has to face staunch resistance from people.

Like every other invader, Kumaran also came in the disguise of 'progress'. "Development is generally recognized to be a strategically ambiguous term, adapted to the different needs of those who use it, and shot through with self-congratulation and condescension, based as it all too often is on the enormous cultural assumptions and presumptions of the west"(Black 3). He tried to convince the people that he has come there to better their lives. "I have done great things in so many places, but nothing for my native place,' lamented Kumaran, looking remorseful, within the hearing of those present.' The ferry bank lies in the same pitiable state it was when I left. Everywhere, the same drabness, the same destitution, and even the same dullness on every face. How awful!"(40).

His words speared the content and happy life of Aathi. He showered arrows of criticism over the culture, practices and believes of the people." I ask you the same question I asked thirty-six years ago. What do you hope to gain by staying planted in water three hundred and sixty-five days of the year? A little rice, fish, oysters. How long will that do for you?"(42)

Initially, when Kumaran started to force the images of development and luxury, most of the people remained silent. But when Thampuran, their deity, who is the very centre of their culture and tradition, was questioned, they raised their voice and created a wall of resistance over the shrine. As part of the colonizing tactics, Kumaran tried to shake the very foundation of Aathi, by questioning the authenticity of Thampuran as a God. "I warn you, Ambu, if you touch Thampuran's shrine, I will chop off your hands," said Ponmani, rising to his feet. "Aathi has only one Thampuran. We will have no other" (109).

Resistance of different degrees can be found in Aathi. Dinakaran's resistance is dominated by his idealism, whereas Ponmani's resistance is marked by rage. However, the radical Ponmani and liberal Dinakaran together made Kumaran's first attempt void. But they have to exert the resistance outwardly as well as inwardly because a group of Aathi natives started to live in Kumaran's dream land. They have petrified by the progressive dreams shown by Kumaran. "Meanwhile a group of gang of young men, ready to do Kumaran's bidding by fair means or foul, was formed in Aathi"(124). Therefore Ambu and Prakashan met with strong content from the people of Aathi.

Kumaran exploited every single possibility of law, administration and force. Even though Kumaran sought the help of police, Aathi natives showed their protest when their Thampuran was disowned by Kumaran's men. Kumaran's attempt to demolish Thampuran's shrine was to disrupt the peace and unity of Aathi. However, his next move was to build a bridge in order to meet his colonial material agenda to exploit the land. This, indeed, provoked Ponmani. He rose to the situation and gathered people and tried to convince them the necessity to resist and protest against these atrocities. "Ever one of Ponmani's spirited words pulsed with fervour. Shailaja burned with zeal" (153).

Many people like Shailaja, the one who has abandoned her husband for the water life of Aathi, joined Ponmani on his venture. They decided to blast the bridge, but the plan actually boomeranged. They had to put their lives at stake or it. But they didn't give up. The spirit of nationalism and the urge to protest filled their veins. Shailaja's words reflect their attitude "the bridge shall not stand there for vehicles to ply. Mark my words. Tomorrow, if not today..." (154).

Kumaran's next attempt was to usurp the land from natives. For that, he has first chosen Kunjimathu; a woman had already suffered a lot. With the help of Komban Joy, Kumaran disturbed the age-old tradition of Kappu Kalakku which was supposed to take place in

Kunjimathu's land. There, she came to know how Kumaran forged the documents and became the owner of a majority of Aathi which included her land also. The construction of a bund over the river fuelled the rage of Kunjimathu. She took the protest to a new level. She opposed this injustice with all her might. She started her own struggle injustice with all might. She started her own struggle standing still in the middle of water. "Kunjimathu sat, still and sleepless, in waist-deep water" (210). This determination and courage indeed acted as a source of inspiration to others. Gradually people started to join her protest. "One by one, all the people of Aathi came to Kunjimathu, drawn by rumour and reportage. Even those who came to dissuade her ended up staying on in solidarity with her" (204).

But, on the other hand, Kumaran paid no heed to the protests. He went ahead with his plans. He burned the Green bangle which was the heart and soul of Aathi. Then he started to trade the soil from Aathi. This time he really annoyed Aathi people. They have joined together. People with their solidarity created a hurdle for Kumaran's tippers. "But the men stood there like blocks of granite. Were they statues carved in stone? The piercing cacophony could not ruffle a hair of theirs" (214).

Neither the threats nor the police succeeded in their attempt remove them. "The protesters who blocked the road did not flee or scatter under the police lathi charge. Shailaja heard screams, soaked in the blood gushing from their injured heads" (217). Shailaja came to their rescue. She took a kerosene can and emptied it on her head. Her suicide threats silenced the situation. This was the zenith of resistance where somebody is ready to risk one's own life to prevent this invasion. The lathi blows had worsened their situation. The injuries were grievous but they continued their struggle. "Until the last breath departs from our bodies we shall not leave,' Ponmani declared vehemently" (220).

Advocate Grace Chali came to their help. She advised that women should come to forefront where as men should hide themselves. Otherwise there is a chance that men would get arrested by the police. Women were ready to face even their worst nightmares to rescue Aathi. Kumaran had to retrieve his lorries. After waiting for three more days the strike was dispersed since they mistook that he has abandoned his plan. But the lorries returned this time they have brought with them the waste of city to dump it in Aathi. Veritably this turned out to be a huge blow on the people of Aathi. This dumping wrecked havoc in Aathi.

The beginning of the nineteen days that shook Aathi to its foundation the first epidemic in its history. Typhoid! Stricken by fever and diarrhoea, children lay weak and lifeless

in their mothers' laps. Before they could be taken to the hospital they began to collapse and die like the yellow lantana flowers turning red dropping down one after other. Aathi quivered with the sound of mothers weeping inconsolably. By the time it could be brought under control typhoid had purloined the lives of nineteen children. (271-72)

This time their rage had no limits this time. "Even though Kumaran did his best to convince the people that, true to his promise, he had buried the environmental disaster safe under the earth, the people of Aathi became widely agitated that he had caused the death of their children. They burst into the streets. For once in his life Kumaran saw for himself what 'the people' meant" (272). Though it shook Kumaran for a brief moment, he regained his stability by paying compensations. The people of Aathi were ready to fight and resist till their last breath but they could not bear witness in the last breath of their children. People started to prepare for their imminent departure for the sake of their children.

Still Dinakaran and a few others did not withdraw from their struggle. Dinakaran, Kunjimathu and Ponmani tried to heat the situation with their words. They tried to warn and instigate the people to do their duty towards Aathi. But in the end these feeble voices had to succumb to the power and tactics of Kumaran. The novel end with Dinakaran's burnt dead body floating on the water. Thus the man who dedicated his entire life to protect the water life of Aathi finally drowned in the water body with the remorse that he could not rescue Aathi from the clutches of the colonizer.

Colonization is a planned tactical master plan by the tyrants. It takes time and experience for a colonized terrain to regain their freedom. Initial resistance which gets its inspiration from the emotional turbulence gets under toned. This is what happened in the case of Aathi. Though the people mustered all their forces up it could not over power the shrewdness and tactics of Kumaran. However this instance throws light into the resistance generated by the colonized to protect their ethnicity, culture and environment.

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Mapping the Ecological Consciousness in Select Australian Aboriginal Poems

Asha P. V.

Literature and nature have been intimately interlinked in the long history of literary production throughout the world. The association between literature and environment in the latter part of the twentieth century appeared promising to literary critics in a context of increasing public discourse on environmental horrors. It is now a truism to say that mankind is efficiently committing ecocide making the planet inhospitable of any kind. Ecophilosophy or ecosophy indicates a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. Its aim is to explore a diversity of perspectives on human nature interrelationships. The term ecosophy refers to any articulated philosophy of life in harmony with ecocentric values. It is a way of life that has or strives for ecological wisdom and harmony.

Aboriginals are the original inhabitants of Australia and they share a special rapport with nature. The relationship between the land and Aborigine is explicitly explained by Marcia Langton when she says, “The land, for Aboriginal people, is a vibrant, spiritual landscape. It is peopled in spirit form by the ancestors who originated in the Dreaming, the creative period of time immemorial. The ancestors travelled the country, engaging in adventures which created people, the natural features of the land and established the code of life, which we today call ‘the Dreaming’ or ‘the Law’” (qtd. in Mudrooroo 202). These Aboriginals view the universe as,

A living thing... everything is connected to everything else and everything is alive and is responsible to its relationship in every way. The human being is not the crowning glory of creation and certainly not its master. We are but a small, but nevertheless vital, part of the universe... because everything is alive and because we have responsibilities to all living things, we cannot force the rest of nature to do what we want. (Deloria 148)

Australia is a land of diverse landscapes. The Europeans were indifferent to the Australian landscape and they considered it as a barren land. To the eyes of the early settlers, the landscape,

trees, flora and fauna of Australia appeared alien and outlandish. But in the literature of Aboriginal people land and nature gets a prominent role. To understand the intricacies of Aboriginal literature it is pertinent to know the dreadful phase they had to undergo during European colonization. The ill fate of the aborigines started when Captain James Cook ‘discovered’ Australia in the late eighteenth century. The white colonizers failed to understand the customs and rituals of the Aboriginal people and they considered them as uncouth barbarians. After the establishment of the Australian Federation in 1901, the government decided to ‘civilise’ the children of mixed Aboriginal European heritage and they were snatched away from their families and sent to various missionary reserves. Thus they were systematically removed from their cultural practices, their land and their languages. This phase of massacres, coldblooded murders and maltreatment made their writings a form of protest literature.

In the beginning Aboriginal writing was seen as an exotic literature. But now “there has been a sea change in the field of indigenous writing: from the exploration of the ‘fringe’ to a consideration of centrality” (Shoemaker 346). International community is beginning to recognize and to respect the unique features of Aboriginal culture, in legal, moral and creative terms. Though many of the Aboriginal songs about country have now been lost, others have been recorded and translated. Poetry had been one of the earliest and most effective forms of verbal communication and creative expression and Australian Aboriginal people had a long and rich tradition of poetry in the form of oral song-cycles. Australian Aboriginal poetry in English is a recent phenomenon, but they had a rich cultural heritage of oral literature.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s (Kath Walker) (1920-1993) collection of poems *We are Going* was the first book to be published by an Aboriginal woman. It was a poignant response to Aboriginal dispossession. When *We Are Going* was published in 1964, it shook a whole segment of Australia’s reading public. As Adam Shoemaker says in “Tracking Black Australian Stories: Contemporary Indigenous Literature,” “Rarely in the nation’s history has a collection of poetry sold more quickly: it was reprinted seven times in seven months and was published the following year in the Unites States and Canada” (335). The poem effectively portrays the pains and angst of the Aborigines who are thrown out of their native land. For the Europeans land is just a piece of soil and they do not have any attachment to it. They had a mechanistic, consumeristic, anthropocentric worldview towards nature. But the Aborigines had a very special relationship with their nature. The land was synonymous with Aboriginal existence. The natives were made to feel as if they are strangers to their own land because all their heritage and

sacred sites were destroyed by the colonisers. Their “bora ground”, which is their sacred place is converted into a garbage point. She says:

We belong here, we are of the old ways.

We are the corroboree and the bora ground,

We are the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders.

We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.

They see themselves as part of the environment. Their connection to land has been severed with the arrival of European colonizers. She calls the colonizers “shadow ghosts,” and grieves for the lost of old ways,

we are nature and the past, all the old ways

gone now and scattered.

Towards the end of the poem she says,

The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.

The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.

The bora ring is gone,

The corroboree is gone

And we are going.’

The poem thus ends with a lamentation of lost heritage. There is sadness and a sense of loss in this poem on how the colonisers have abused the land. The natives used to have a peaceful coexistence with the nature. After the loss of that symbiotic environment they were unable to survive. Her writing is a powerful and passionate plea for justice.

Hyllus Noel Maris (1933-1986) is an Aboriginal rights campaigner, community worker, and poet. Her poem “Spiritual Song of The Aborigine” sheds light on the relationship with land and culture. All forms of life are a part of one unchanging, interconnecting system; one vast network of relationships, which can be traced to the Great Spirit ancestors of the Dreamtime. The poet explores the subject of the Aboriginals deep and unique relationship with their country Australia. The poet starts the poem by seeing herself as part of the dreamtime people. “Dreaming may be viewed as a past era in which the creative activities took place and from which all life on earth has originated” (Edwards 13).

I am a child of the Dreamtime People
Part of this land, like the gnarled gumtree
I am the river, softly singing
Chanting our songs on my way to the sea
My spirit is the dust-devils
Mirages, that dance on the plain
I'm the snow, the wind and the falling rain
I'm part of the rocks and the red desert earth
Red as the blood that flows in my veins
I am eagle, crow and snake that glides
Through the rainforest that clings to the mountainside

The poet is successfully able to assert the Aboriginal legacy, individuality and pride through this poem. It also reflects a strong sense of Aboriginal identity. Her poem assumes greater power when seen in the light of the atrocities they have to face in the name of land rights. They do not see themselves separate from the land around them; they are a part of everything in nature. The land is not an inanimate thing in their belief, it is alive. The poem focusses on the various aspects of their culture, such as viewing the land as mother, their creation story and their Dreamtime ancestors. At last the poet completely identifies with the land and says:

I am this land
And this land is me
I am Australia.

Phill Moncrieff is an Aboriginal poet and singer who in his poems describe the deep bond Australia's Aboriginal people share with the land. For Aboriginal people the land has special meaning, for all over the land, rivers, gorges, rocks and mountains are reminders of the Great Spirit Ancestors of their Dreamtime creation. In his poem "My Mother the Land" Phill Moncrieff effectively illustrates how the land is not just a piece of soil, but his "Mother." He laments at the fact that the precious bond between them is lost because they felt the "brunt of the whiteman's curse." He says:

So we turned to the land, our Mother the Land
For comfort, our refuge at last
But the feeling was gone, brown children now born
Not black like you gave in the past
Please take me back my Mother the Land
The white man he'll never accept me
The milk that you part will soothe my heart
And your spirit of place will hold me

The colonizers and the white Australians sought to segregate full blood Aboriginal children and remove half-caste children from their families to be absorbed into the white society. The goal was to 'breed out the colour' and eventually create a white Australia free of black Aboriginals. He is aware of the fact that the whites will never accept "brown children" as equal to their midst, so they have to live with "Broken pride in their hearts, they live torn apart." The poet realizes that even the land is not spared by the colonizers, he says:

You are my Mother, my Mother the Land
You provide me for thousands of years
But now your soul, like a rock waterhole
Is drenched, not from water, but tears
The sadness you feel as you weep on your own
While your children remain scattered and torn
The white system of life, it cuts like a knife
And the Old People are weary and worn

The Aboriginal people see whiteness as a "disease." The Aboriginals are forced to live with broken hearts because as the poet says, "ancient tribes whose culture was alive/ Are gone like a leaf in the wind." The poem talks about the spiritual, physical, social and cultural connection they had with their land. Through this poem Moncrieff depicts the depth of pain the Aboriginal people had to suffer because of their severed relationship with the land. Moncrieff

is able to portray the deeper, ancestral meanings behind the Indigenous peoples connection with the land.

Lionel George Fogarty was born in 1958 at Barambah, now known as Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve, in the South Burnett region of southern Queensland. He is one of “the most radical Aboriginal poet living today” (Toorn 33) and has been active in many of the political struggles of the Aboriginal people. Fogarty regards himself as a speaker and not a writer, and does not like to be characterized as a poet. Mudrooroo has called him a “guerilla poet” (qtd. in Toorn 33). An unabashedly political poet, Fogarty’s poetry employs Aboriginal English in innovative ways, challenging readers to reconfigure cultural assumptions.

Lionel Fogarty in his poem “Balance of Nature” talks about the need to have an equilibrium between all forms of life. Aboriginal people always respected nature and they believed that nature will also shower blessings to them, but the Europeans were interested only in the monetary benefits they get from nature. It is hard for the Europeans to comprehend the holistic approach which comes so naturally to the Aboriginal people. Land could not be defiled, desecrated or cheapened. Land to the Aborigines is “not a possession in material terms, as the white man looks upon land, but a responsibility held in sacred trust. We do not say the land belongs to us, but we belong to the land” (Mudrooroo 200). Aborigines never hunt for fun because as the poet says:

Long long time ago blackfella hunt for tucker
Never kill funny way
Or leave for a joke
Cause he knows if you spear things and don’t eat it
It gets really wild and smell dirty
Grass get dead
All get sick.

Fogarty reminds the readers that to survive in this world will be difficult without respect. He says, “all nature needs love and understanding/ we need each other always.” Loss of land and the sense of dispossession have had a deep impact on the Aboriginal psyche as Aboriginal people consider themselves inseparable from their lands.

Aboriginal poetry conveys a deeper connection with nature, illustrating their understanding of the environment and their spiritual connection to it. Their concern for nature is a part and parcel of their spirituality also. Aboriginal spirituality according to Mudrooroo “is a oneness and an interconnectedness with all that lives and breathes, even with all that does not live or breathe” (33). One of the main features of Aboriginal spirituality “is to keep the earth and the environment in good repair, to look after it, and this obligation has been passed down as Law from the Dreamtime” (Mudrooroo 52). These poems convey a new relationship with the land as well as a sense of belonging. An interpretation of the natural environment can be found in almost all aboriginal poetry since their way of life is one that is deeply connected to the land. W. E. H. Stanner in *The Dreaming and Other Essays* has commented that, “no English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word ‘home’, warm and suggestive though it be, does not match the aboriginal word that may mean ‘camp’, ‘hearth’, ‘country’, ‘everlasting home’, ‘totem place’, ‘life source’, ‘spirit center’, and much else all in one. Our word ‘land’ is too spare and meager” (206). What makes these poems special is their concern for their natural environment, their ability to live in harmony with nature, and their holistic approach to all life forms. Loss of land, identity and dispossession gets reflected in their writings and these poems have a special place in the history of Australian literature.

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Home is where the Heart is! Ruminations about Nationhood of Arabs Caught in Israel-Palestine Quagmire with Reference to Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack*

Susy Antony

They can take everything you own—your property, your best years, all your joys, all your good works, everything down to your last shirt—but you will always have your dreams, so you can reinvent your stolen world (Khadra 257).

The 'stolen world' has myriad connotations in the context of Palestine-Israel conflict. Yasmina Khadra in *The Attack* explores the mental vibrations of a 'well assimilated Arab-Israeli couple' living in Tel Aviv. The novel opens with an explosion in which Dr. Amin Jaafari is injured. The workings of his mind are detailed in the following chapters before he succumbs to his injury. The story unfolds through the words of the lead character, Dr. Amin and moves forward as a flash back. Dr. Amin attends to bomb explosion victims in the emergency room of a Tel Aviv hospital. An injured Israeli refuses to be treated by Amin as he is an Arab. Such a gesture at the wake of even an emergency raises several questions regarding assimilation of Arabs in Israeli mainstream society. The police stop the doctor on his way home and let him go only after checking his identity. Little does he know at this point of time that it is just the beginning of the many interrogations he has to face regarding the enquiry into the bomb attack. Later he gets a rude shock when he comes to know of his wife Sihem's death in the explosion and her involvement in the suicide bombing though at first he refuses to believe so. But Sihem's letter posted before her daring act torments him. Suddenly Amin's life falls apart. The Israeli neighbours turn against him and try to vandalize his house. He is left with only two friends, both Israelis: Kim Yehuda, a medical doctor and colleague and Navid Ronnen, a senior police officer. These two friends stand with him through thick and thin and Amin recaptures his sanity because of them. But he is restless till he finds out why such a self contented Sihem took up such a drastic act. His enquiries take him to the heart land of Palestinian Arabs. Their grit at the wake of adversities sets him thinking about the idea of nationhood. He cannot but sympathise with the Palestinian cause. But he differs from them in that, being a surgeon, he has chosen the path of saving lives and they have decided to

use destructive forces. Realisation dawns on him about the depth of agony experienced by his brethren as he empathises with them. Amin leaves the world with his father's words about the permanency of dreams and the reinvention of stolen worlds ringing in his ears.

A back ground analysis of the Arab-Israeli conflict adds to the comprehension of the concept of home of the Palestinians in *The Attack*. In order to comprehend the depth of rootlessness experienced by Palestinian Arabs, it is of supreme importance to look into the history of Israel-Palestine conflict. Philip Robins in *The Middle East* sets down the two phases of the conflict. The first phase was over the control of the land of historic Palestine between Jewish people and Palestinian Arabs. The struggle started in the late nineteenth century and continued to the middle of the next century. The long drawn conflict finally resulted in a reluctant acceptance by both sides that the monopoly of the region under question is a distant dream. From this frame of mind emerged, "a struggle for mutual recognition and acceptance, and some form of territorial compromise (53)." This happened in the late twentieth century. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) formally recognised the state of Israel by 1989. The mutual recognition of Israel and Palestine resulted following discussions between both sides in Washington DC in September 1993. The relations turned sour by September 2000 with the start of the second Palestinian uprising. Palestinian Islamists of Hamas emerged victorious in the elections of January 2006 to the de facto Palestinian parliament. Though they formed a government, international pressure led to its replacement with a unity government. In 2007, Hamas seized power in Gaza which led to the collapse of the unity government. Fatah, the dominant part of the PLO since the late 1960s formerly led by Yasser Arafat, consolidated its power in the West Bank. Robins terms the consequence of the Hamas-Fatah split as disastrous for the Palestinian people. The principle of mutual acceptance followed by Israel and Palestine in the previous century gave way to mutual disdain and intolerance in the beginning of the present century which is illustrated in Gaza by the 2008-09 war. Robins expresses his concern over the recent happenings in the region which can snowball into a third phase of Israeli-Palestinian struggle (52-56).

The Attack was first published in French in 2005 against the backdrop of mounting tensions between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. The meaning of home needs to be re-examined in this renewed context. For the Palestinians, though their physical homeland is a contested terrain, they carry a slice of home in their minds wherever they go. The destruction of a physical home does not affect them drastically as is seen when Israeli soldiers come to destroy Amin's ancestral home. Amin is moved thoroughly when he tries to drive sense into

the Israeli soldiers. But his relatives try to salvage their belongings before the bulldozer pulls down the house. One of Amin's relatives, Fatin says "What's a house when you've lost a country (248)?" The idea of a lost country engulfs them all the while. They try to rebuild it in their hearts and make it a reality some time in future. They live with such a hope. The country, Palestine is a reality which they would like to believe in though Israelis think otherwise. The Palestinian dreams never die. That is why Amin on one occasion says, "...I don't want to bury the dream that made life worth living as it will never be for me again (230)." Home is where the heart is.

The problematic issue of home is explored in other works also from the region. Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is one such work which addresses the problems encountered by migrants once they return to their homeland. Nafisi returns to Tehran after her educational and professional sabbatical in the U.S. At the Tehran airport itself she is rudely awakened by the changes which have happened in her home country. She realises that her faith, traditions and religion have been confiscated and redefined. Her dream home-coming gives way to a life of adjustments in the constrained environment of her mother country. She tries to throw challenges at the authorities against the stringent laws which stifle individual freedom. At times she makes compromises for the benefit of university students for their future. All the while she works for the betterment of the youngsters of her country. The clandestine school she runs helps her students stay in touch with the Western literary scenario. Through those works she creates imaginary, adopted lands for her students which provoke them to think out of the box. Nafisi keeps a slice of her 'ideal' homeland in her mind despite the changing scenario in Iran. Home occupies a central position in the lives of the students who come for her classes. Though they criticise the situation at home, they have hopes for a better tomorrow where the youngsters have an active role to play in the development of the country. They are willing to relocate from home to broaden their realm of ideas so that they can come back to benefit their homeland.

In Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed*, the concept of home is explored through the lead character, Abdullah. He tries to recreate a part of Afghanistan in far away U.S. The poster of an Afghan girl, a painting by his daughter depicting the minarets of Herat and a copper bell which adorn his restaurant in the U.S. are his way of holding on to his homeland. His daughter, Pari is made to learn Farsi though she finds the writing from right to left difficult. Pari leads a hybrid life but Abdullah keeps his mother country close to him. He realises that cultural and social integration with the host country is stressful and rarely achieved by first

generation migrants. The ties with their mother culture remain strong. This sometimes gets manifested in the form of philanthropic activities in the homeland. Abdullah sends money to his brother in Pakistan. The second generation migrants find the going a little easier, but often they have psychological clashes with their parents' views. The pull of the home land is less compared to that of their parents. But they experience an identity crisis because a total integration with the host culture is a distant dream.

The myth of Arab assimilation in Israeli mainstream society is interspersed in *The Attack*. Sihem and Amin are well settled in an Israeli neighbourhood. They lead comfortable lives and have friendly relationships with the neighbours. Outwardly it is an example of how Arabs can get along with their lives peacefully in Israel. But the placid exterior is broken by Sihem's drastic act of being a suicide bomber in an Israeli restaurant killing many including children. This volcanic eruption from Sihem's part stupefies her husband. Sihem used to be a very content lady leading a happy life with Amin. Later when Amin goes on a trail to rediscover Sihem's mentality, he stumbles on her childhood of penury. She grew up as an orphan. Moreover she was an Arab. Amin feels that the world is not yet ready to accept both. So the seeds of hatred which have been sown in Sihem's mind since her childhood have grown and assumed enormous proportions that warranted the drastic act which she executed. She could not get over the emotional scars which marred her heart but she hid it well. Even her husband thought of her as a well contented lady which proved to be terribly wrong as her fatal act revealed. Amin's exploration into Sihem's mind after her death makes him empathise with her but he is dead against the path that she has chosen. As a surgeon, Amin fights a battle to save people from death. So he cannot accept inducing death as a form of revenge.

Salman Rushdie, who is a migrant himself, in his essay 'Imaginary Homelands' speaks about his reflections about homeland which were made "in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost (11)." Sihem also must have had similar feelings about Palestine. This must have made her go back to her homeland while leading 'successful' assimilated life in Israel as a Palestinian Arab. She wanted to recapture homeland not just by imagination but by contributing substantially to the Palestinian cause. She would always have felt a sense of displacement in Tel Aviv. Her husband Amin could not empathise with her till her death.

The introductory chapter 'Locations of Culture' of Homi K. Bhabha's essay collection, *The Location of Culture*, explores the lives of those who live 'border lives'. Sihem is in a similar state of mind. She has crossed over physically to Israel but it does not happen at an

emotional level. Border crossing is a complex affair with her as with most migrants. The empowerment which happens with the migrant, when they stand at the border, through the transmission of cultural inheritance is not complete as far as Sihem is concerned. Though Amin is empowered as an agent of change in his well-assimilated state, it never takes off with Sihem inwardly. Thus the hybrid identity of Sihem takes unpredictable routes to come to terms with her new existence. The roots remain strong with her as she cannot assimilate fully to her renewed state of being.

An analysis of the workings of Sihem's mind throws light on the collective consciousness of the Palestinians. Personally Sihem is a well settled lady as the wife of a famous surgeon, living in the wealthy Israeli neighbourhood. Their assimilation with the Israelites outwardly is perfect. But all is not well with Sihem or the Palestinians as she envisages. Her bitter childhood memories and her youth as a member of the deprived community in want of a homeland make her nurse a grudge which makes her ready for the suicidal attack. Amin stumbles upon certain truths from the Palestinian warriors on why their youth get ready for suicidal attacks without any qualms. A commander explains to him how youngsters have been robbed off their homeland and thereby their future. "When dreams are turned away, death becomes the ultimate salvation (220)." Sihem comprehended the situation well and that is why she has become the martyr for the Palestinian cause. As Adel, Amin's nephew explains, no one could dissuade Sihem from the act. There was no persuasion from the Palestinian warriors. She wanted to do her bit for the greater good of Palestinians. In fact some of her brethren tried to talk her out of her decision to be a suicide bomber as she was more useful to them alive than dead. She allowed her bank account to be used for their cause and her house had become the venue of their secret meetings in Tel Aviv. Adel praises Sihem's act saying, "Sacrifice isn't a duty for other people (226).

Dr. Amin's quest for truth takes him to the heart of Palestinian strong holds. He comes across a close knit community of Arabs in Bethlehem. They guard their secrets well. Probably it is a matter of their survival. Or else they consider Amin, though an Arab, an outsider since he is a naturalised Israeli citizen. Amin feels that the people were closer to Sihem than they are to him. He gets assaulted in search of Sihem's comrades. Finally he meets a commander who acknowledges the brave act done by Sihem. The Palestinians feel that they should recover their homeland and their dignity. Any sacrifice is welcome if it serves this purpose. In Sihem's case, her Palestinian brethren try to dissuade her first. She was invaluable to them for their effective functioning. But Sihem was not willing to lead a luxurious life when her brothers

were suffering. Her collective consciousness makes her feel passionately about the Palestinian cause. Only a spark was needed to set alight the hatred embedded in Sihem's mind. The well-assimilated facade is torn down and Sihem gets down to the business of doing maximum damage to the Jews for the sake of the Palestinians.

When Palestinians get displaced in other parts of the world, they still keep their home land close to their hearts. As Adel puts it, "Sihem was the daughter of a people noted for resistance (227). Though she was living in luxury with Amin, she did not forget the plight of her brethren. It cast an ugly shadow on her mirth. Though Amin is content with his assimilated life, Sihem's collective consciousness did not allow her to enjoy the same happiness as Amin. There were differences between the views of Sihem and Amin. Sihem not only empathised with the Palestinian cause but she also wanted to participate actively with the fighters waging war against Israeli high handedness. Adel aptly comprehends Sihem's mind when he says, "Freedom's a deep conviction, the mother of all certitudes...There's no happiness without dignity, and no dream is possible without freedom (227)." So Sihem was on her way to attain ultimate freedom and achieved success by bursting herself up in a restaurant. She came from people who are noted for resistance. The realisation dawns on Amin very late only when he goes on a trail to discover Sihem's mind after her martyrdom. Even when he finally empathises with Sihem and the cause for which she stood, he is strongly convinced of his path. As a doctor he cannot under any circumstance side with the death of people.

During the interrogation of Amin, the question of Arab integration with the Jews crops up. The officer is perplexed that a well-assimilated Arab with a lot of Jewish friends could pull off something as macabre as a suicide attack in a restaurant killing many including some innocent children celebrating their friend's birthday. He points out to the incongruity of the situation when he says that Sihem has loaded herself with explosives and done, "...something that calls into question all the trust the state of Israel has placed in the Arabs it has welcomed as citizens (48)." The implications are far reaching. The Jewish officer interrogating Amin feels that though a Jew, he never got the privileges in Israel as Amin and his wife did. But still Sihem pulled out something very treacherous which would shake the foundation of Arab-Jewish harmony which many have envisaged.

At the time of Amin's distress, Navid tries to alleviate his pain of Sihem having chosen the path of the suicide bomber with his reason. "Something clicks somewhere in their subconscious, and they're off (93)." Navid tries to ease Amin's guilt feeling that he did not have any clue regarding the workings of Sihem's mind before her chosen task. Amin is at a

loss in comprehending Sihem. It adds to his misery, the wife whom he thought he knew well has pulled out a desperate act which takes grit to come to terms with. Being a surgeon, Amin does not agree with the path of destruction which his wife has chosen. At the time of distress, it is his Israeli friends, Kim and Navid who try to pull him out of his despondency. The discussions which take place among them regarding the reasons for Sihem's 'barbaric' act try to help Amin in taking stock of the situation. Amin repeatedly brings back to his memory how happy Sihem was with him. Yet he realises that there was a volcano inside Sihem which made her act the way she did. The three friends part only after they have become closer than before through this disaster. The meaning of Arab-Israeli integration has to be seen in a new light in the friendship of Amin, Kim and Navid.

Apart from the friendship among these three people, there is much to be desired in the integration of Arabs in mainstream Israeli society. Though outwardly there is nothing amiss, the assimilation is just a charade as is seen from the Israeli patient who refuses to get treated by an Arab doctor even in the wake of adversity. The well behaved and accommodating neighbours turn monstrous when they come to know that their Arab neighbour was the suicide bomber. They make attempts to ransack his house. Cultural integration now sticks out like a sore thumb. In the wake of the attack, Amin is faced with thorough checks from the police on his way home from the hospital. Once the investigations begin, the police try to implicate Amin also in the unfortunate incident. The twenty four hour-questioning leaves Amin drenched of all his mental and physical energy. Interrogations leave him a mental wreck. It is only because of his true friend Navid that he manages to escape the situation.

Trust and hatred are two sides of the same coin of Israel-Arab relationship as depicted by Khadra in *The Attack*. Navid and Kim trust Amin and try to comprehend him and his wife. They console and comfort him in his misfortune. Whereas the officer interrogating Amin, the patient who refused to get treated by Amin and Amin's neighbours show their hatred and distrust at an Arab whom the society deems as a well-assimilated Palestinian. Navid helps Amin to be exonerated from the charge of the bomb attack but he has to pay a fine for his wife's conduct. Kim helps him to get back on his heels after going to the brink of insanity. It is worthwhile to ponder over the reasons why they came to Amin's aid in spite of being Jews. They did not subscribe to the mob psychology which set the other Jews off when they heard of Sihem's involvement in the suicide bombing. Kim's grandfather Yehuda's words offer some sort of consolation and a tiny spark of hope for Amin to continue living. He expresses his fondness for the sea which is like a mirror. It has helped him to stop thinking about his past

and grieve over it. Bitter, old memories prevent one from rising from the ashes of despondency (77).

In the long run, a transcultural approach to the Israel-Palestine problem should be aimed at. Richard Slimbach in “The Transcultural Journey” envisages transculturalism as being rooted in the pursuit of finding shared interests and common values across cultural and national borders (2). Without losing the perspective of one’s cultural centre, one should focus on a broader outlook of other cultures and nations. The salad bowl approach in multiculturalism gives way to the melting pot approach in transculturalism. The line between the two is thin. The old charlatan, Shlomi Hirsh in *The Attack* makes a very poignant comment regarding walls in the lives of Jews when Amin meets him. He says, “The Jew wanders because he can’t stand walls (240).” Not many people visit him these days because of the wall. Hirsh is of the opinion that walls cannot separate the Palestinians and Israelis. One is reminded of Robert Frost’s views regarding walls between people in “Mending Wall”. Human beings tend to forget the teachings of all religions that there should not be any hatred among people. Live well is the idea which all religions try to drive home which ordinary mortals tend to forget when they try to grow hatred among their brethren. Though there is negative criticism against *The Attack* for glorifying Palestinian extremism, Khadra tends to set down glimpses of successful Arab-Jewish integration through his portrayal of relationships among Amin, Kim and Navid. The question of Israeli-Palestinian assimilation can be best answered if a cue is taken from Hirsh’s words, “Every Jew in Palestine is a bit of an Arab, and no Arab in Israel can deny that he’s a little Jewish (Khadra 242).”

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Reading Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* in A Post-colonial Perspective

Dhanya Panicker

“If untouchability lives, Hinduism perishes and even India perishes, but if untouchability is eradicated from the Hindu heart, root and branch, then Hinduism has a definite message for the world,” rightly quoted by Mahatma Gandhi. This crime against humanity is a much discussed topic. Many people raised their voice against this social evil. But only one writer in India took the initiative to bring the pathetic plight of the untouchables before the whole world. To make a sweeper the hero of his novel was really a revolutionary deviation for an Indian writer of the nineteen-thirties. Till then English fiction was about middle and higher classes for the middle classes by middle class writers. Even if low class life entered it, it could not descend so low as to make a sweeper boy the subject of the novel.

A prolific writer of the twentieth century, Mulk Raj Anand is a pioneer of Indian writing in English. A follower of Mahatma Gandhi, he too was against this social injustice which prevailed in India. What Charles Dickens is to the English people, Anand is to Indians. Like Dickens, his heart always bleeds for the needs of the downtrodden. He too wished to eradicate the social evils prevailed in the Indian society through his novels. He is of the view that a literary work should come from the first hand experience of the writer. Then only, the readers can immerse themselves into the writing and feel the heart of the writer. In his Preface to this novel E.M. Forster opines, *Untouchable* could only have been written by an Indian and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles.”(10-11) Anand thus aimed at a realistic portrayal of the society of his age. No doubt, he has won his aim through his first novel, *Untouchable*. The awards bestowed upon him shows that each Indian was against the caste discrimination once prevailed in our society. The aim of this chapter is to explore the post colonial elements in the novel *Untouchable*.

Untouchable tells the story of Dalits who were once given a derogatory position in our society. We can see different post colonial elements in Dalit literatures. Thus Anand's novel *Untouchable* too can be viewed in a postcolonial perspective. The novel centers around an eventful day in the life of an untouchable named Bhakha. He is a young sweeper living in the outcastes' colony of a north Indian cantonment town. The atrocities he has to face, being an untouchable, forms the crux of the novel. The novel opens with the pitiful narration of the place where the untouchables live.

“The outcastes' colony was a group of mud walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes”(13)

This realistic description of the outcaste colony is what Anand himself has seen in his life. This is where Bakha and his men live, the most uncongenial place in that society. The untouchables live in an area much away from the caste Hindus. They are alienated in their own country. Anand severely criticizes the hegemonic structure based on caste system prevailed in colonial India. The hero of the novel, Bakha, belongs to the lowest section among the untouchables. Thus he and his family are thrice marginalized in the society. First as a colonized, second as an untouchable and thirdly who belongs to the base of the untouchables. Thus they were assumed to be in the nadir of the society. Their wretched condition is thus depicted in the well episode in the novel. In those days, the untouchables were not allowed to touch the public well. If they do so, the high castes believed that the water in the well gets polluted. Therefore they must wait at the foot of the high caste well for the high caste to come along, take pity on them and pour water into the pitchers for them. When Sohini reached there, she finds that already ten people were there. Disapproved but not disappointed, Sohini patiently awaits her chance.

Here, a washer woman named Gulaboo being jealous of Sohini abuses her, “Think of it! Think of it! Bitch! Prostitute! Wanton! And your mother hardly dead. Think of laughing in my

face, laughing at me who am old enough to be your mother. Bitch!” the washer woman exploded.” (30)

The names she showered on Sohini are too uncouth for a little girl like Sohini to abide. But she patiently bears it. Such was the treatment with the outcaste people in the early decades of the twentieth century in India.

Another incident which reveals the hypocrisy of Hinduism is the Sadhu episode. When Bakha and sadhu stand at a doorstep begging for food, we can see the contrasting attitude of the woman towards them.

“She stared eagle-eyed at Bakha and remonstrated: ‘Wah! You have wrought strange work this morning, defiling my home!’ Then she turned to the holy man and heaped a steaming hot vegetable curry and a potful of cooked rice into the sadhu’s black skull of a begging-bowl..... ‘May you die’, the woman cursed Bakha, thinking that she had gained enough blessings by speaking gently to the holy man and wouldn’t lose much of it by being unkind to an untouchable. “What have you done to earn your food to-day, you or your sister? She never cleaned the lane this morning, and you have defiled my home. Come, clean the drain a bit and then you can have this bread. Come, do a bit of work now that you have defiled my home.”(83-84)

After his work, the woman flung a pancake at him from upstairs. It fell like a kite on the brick pavement. Poor Bakha picked it up quietly and wrapped it in a duster. Anand seems to get a better hold to lay bare the real inhumanity to which the untouchables are subjected. They are treated as subhuman species between humans and dogs.

Subalternity is the most debated topic in Indian sub continent, not only that they are subjugated but also they are exploited pervasively. The term ‘subaltern’ is described as the lower classes and social groups that are at the rock bottom of the society. They are marginalized in their own homelands. Bakha’s marginalized position in the society is well utilized by the upper caste Hindus. He is exploited brutally. The caste Hindus view the untouchables as the “other”- the demonic other. They were not even treated as human beings. The high castes see Bakha as a demon. They couldn’t even bear the sight of Bakha. They considered it as evil. Whenever he goes out from his house, the treatment that is given is worse than that given to an animal.

So poor Bakha has to call out whenever he passes through the way. The most pathetic scene is 'the touching scene', which takes place in the market of Bulandshahr. A caste Hindu slaps Bakha for having polluted him. This incident really shocked Bhakha, for it was not his mistake. Though the man bumped into Bakha, he blames Bakha for running into him. He accuses Bakha for failing to warn others of his approach. He abuses:

"Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock-eyed son of a bowlegged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning!"(53)

Then follows 'the pollution scene'. Here the victim is Sohini, Bakha's young sister. The hypocrisy and lustfulness of the pretentious so called priests in those days are clearly exposed through the character of pandit Kalinath. He has strong sexual desire for Sohini, the untouchable. But he is also a hypocrite who believes that the touch of the untouchables pollutes him. His evil intention urges him to ask Sohini to go to clean the courtyard of his house at the temple. Sohini innocently goes to do so. The monster in him arises and he catches her by her breast but she refuses his suggestions. He then raises an alarm of, "Polluted, polluted, polluted!" shouted the Brahmin. "(71). Another man from the crowd shouted, "Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. Get down, get away, dog!"(71). This is the height of hypocrisy. Everybody knew the truth. But nobody was there to raise voice against caste Hindus. People like to find fault only with untouchables.

What makes this novel postcolonial is that there is a voice of protest underlying throughout the novel. Anand not only reflects the exploitation faced by the untouchables, but also raises his voice against these incidents. The way he narrates each incident encountered by Bakha in one day, arouses the feeling of sympathy and voice of protest in his readers. The readers themselves step into Bakha's shoes and experience his feelings as if those feelings were churning inside them. Thus Anand rightly owes the title of a post colonial writer.

The hero is simultaneously a victim and a rebel. The touching scene is a clear instance. The slap of the high caste Hindu on his face enraged Bakha. "There was a smouldering rage in his soul. His feelings would rise like spurts of smoke from a half-smothered fire in fitful jerks when the recollection of abuse or rebuke he had suffered kindled a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him"(59-60). He later thinks, "'why was all this?' he asked himself in the soundless speech of cells receiving and transmitting emotions, which was his usual way of

communicating with himself. ‘Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him?’(60) But later finds it as his own fault, “why didn’t I shout to warn people of my approach?”(60) Though he protests against the callousness of caste Hindus, as a tradition follower, he cannot think of going against the norms of society. In the touching episode we can see that the slap on his face awakens in him the humiliating existence as a sweeper. “For them I am a sweeper, sweeper – untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!”(52)

In the pollution scene too, we can see the voice of protest arises in the mind of Bakha. Bakha gets enraged and he exclaims, “Brahmin dog! I will go and kill him” (73) But soon the sight of the temple and thought of tradition melts away his anger. Here we can see the pathetic plight of a brother who couldn’t save his sister only because he is an outcaste.

In both these situations Bakha has the muscular strength to hit back, but he remains silent, taking all the indignity to his face. Here we can compare Bakha to a strong Negro who shivers before the gun in a white boy’s hand. Though both have the power to hit back, they cannot do so owing to the norms of the society and the tradition to which they follow. Here we find the concept of double consciousness. In Post Colonialism the colonized see themselves from the eyes of the colonizer. Here Bakha and his father see themselves through the eyes of the high caste Hindus. The touching scene and polluting scene left deep imprints on Bakha’s mind. Bakha wanted to manhandle the upper class who treated him atrociously for no fault of him. But Lakha reminds Bakha of their position in the society. He knows the limitations of the untouchables. Lakha convinces his son,

“No, no, my son, no, we can’t do that. They are our superiors. One word of theirs is sufficient against all that we might say before the police. They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us” (92).

Another aspect of post colonialism in the novel is that the writer projects Bakha as a rebel. He aims to unveil the tragic dilemmas of the untouchables. Bakha reveals the real cause of their endless misery and exposes his wish to terminate the troubles he has been experiencing every day.

He thus realized his place in the social order. He is below all the four major caste divisions in Hinduism – the untouchables. In the social order the untouchables are in the lowermost position. “Like a ray of light shooting through the darkness, the recognition of his position,

the significance of his lot dawned upon him. It illuminated the inner chambers of his mind. Everything that had happened to him traced its course up to this light and got the answer.”(61)

From this moment of self-realization, Bakha wishes to eliminate the question of untouchability from the society. He begins to think like a matured person.

Towards the end, we find the novelist urges for a social transformation, another objective of a post colonial work. For this Anand suggests three solutions to overcome the vice of untouchability— Christ, Gandhi and flush system. A Christian missionary tries to persuade Bakha to become a Christian, so that he can escape from caste taboos. Then he came to hear a speech by Mahatma Gandhi. In his speech, Gandhi tells about the two strongest desires that kept him alive. One was the emancipation of untouchables and the second was the protection of the cow. He asserts that all public wells, temples, roads, schools and sanctoriums must be declared open to untouchables. he advises untouchables to cultivate clean habits and give up drinking. The untouchables could secure their emancipation by refusing to accept leavings from the plates of high-caste Hindus. They should receive only good, sound grain and that too offered only courteously. Thus Gandhi’s speech made a great effect on Bakha’s thoughts. He hated the distinction which the caste Hindus made between themselves and the Untouchables.

After Gandhi’s departure, Bakha heard two men discussing Gandhi’s speech expressing opposite views. R.N.Bashir, a British educated barrister calls Gandhiji a humbug, a fool and a hypocrite. Iqbal Nath Sarshar, a young poet defends Gandhiji but advocates ‘the use of machines.’ Caste is mainly governed by profession. When the machine which clears dung is accepted, then there will be no need for humans to handle it. The flush system will free the sweepers from the stigma of untouchability. They can assume the dignity of status. The flush system would thus bring a casteless and classless society and wipe off untouchability. Thus Bakha too realizes that the only solution to get rid of untouchability is the use of machine or the flush system. This way the novel ends with a resounding note of optimism.

Voice of the oppressed, Anand can rightly claim the title of a post colonial writer. Not only has he raised concern for the oppressed, but has protested against the oppressors in his writings. His debut novel *Untouchable*, though written during the thirties, has all the characteristic features of a post colonial work. By writing about the dalits, the oppressed class, their conditions and circumstances, the writer brings out a new facet of post-colonial fiction. Anand is a social reformist and so in his novel he projects the problem and also brings

solution to it. If the poor are treated humanely, most of the social problems can be solved easily. Humanism is the only solution to all these problems.

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“Plurality of Influences:” Australian Poetry of the Twentieth Century

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“The marginal status of poetry pretty much everywhere, is its great strength. That poetry is not so popular, Auden said should be a cause for pride rather than regret, it is the one form that doesn’t have to degrade itself because of market pressure, Poetry can be just about quality”(*Poetry of Robert Gray*). But it is unfortunate that this art of quality is often negated with an everincreasing focus on the divergent prose genres. Poetry underwent an upheaval in several continents with the publication of a plethora of anthologies and their heightened attentiveness to the pursuit of the quotidian. Poetry became a vehicle to express themes of man’s delight and distress. This is especially true of Australian poetry of the contemporary era. The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics states: “As poetry of Australia moves into the 21st century, a sense of capacious pluralism reflects the increasingly multicultural nature of the society.” The paper titled “Plurality of Influences:” Australian Poetry of the Twentieth Century is an attempt to investigate the influence of the east on western writers particularly how Zen Buddhism has influenced Australian poets like Robert Gray. His short poem “North Coast Town is selected for the analysis. It reveals how Australia remains open to a “multitude and plurality of influences”(Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics). Transvall poets, poets of South African heritage, aboriginal poets and othersthrough their dynamic poetic modes sketch Australia as a nation with its own culture interspersed with a multitude of constituents from the very beginning rather than as a penal colony.

Robert Gray was born in Port Macquaire and grew up in Coffs Harbour. His training in journalism, reviewing and editorship endowed him with language skills. His haiku style free verse endorse this as well as his interest in East Asian cultures and the different varieties of Buddhism. Though critical of certain concepts in Buddhism like being reborn and always being in a state of suffering caused by desire, Gray had a fascination for Zen Buddhism. The

world of Zen Buddhism was opened to him through Alan Watt's book *Psychotherapy of East and West*. His response to nature had its foundations in Buddhism which sees man as within nature and not as an agent removed from it. More intensely Zen Buddhism propagated this aim of attaining "a degree of absorption in the world or self-forgetfulness through intense involvement." (The Land I Came Through Last 219). Perhaps this might have shaped him to follow the Keatsian tradition of being a poet of the senses. It was also in keeping with his own belief that bad art is always justified with theory and good art with its immediate sensory appeal. This conferred on him the title of the poet with the finest eye in Australia. His poems and his own life can be considered as "a hymn to the optic nerve" (Catlano 54). Sonic, olfactory, tactile and visual imagery combine in this Australia's highly awarded poet whose *Creekwater Journal* published in 1974 brought him to the front line of Australia's finest poets.

The history of Buddhism which is credited with the birth of Goutama Buddha- Siddhartha dates back to 580 B.C. A life of self-denial, discipline and meditation led to his enlightenment and nirvana, freeing him from the cycle of rebirth. Following this, Buddhist civilizations flourished, its practices had a profound influence on history, culture and institutions in all regions to where it had been carried to. Over the years countless countries were influenced by its teachings and this has also resulted in a gradual erosion of the basic principles and fragmentation of the traditional school. The most important factor remained the colonial rule. The efforts to modernize Buddhism began in the 19th century under the initiative of Western orientalist scholars like David L. McMahan while Asian reformers did a modern reinterpretation of their traditions. Zen Buddhism was an offshoot.

Zen Buddhism which is a mosaic of Indian Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism has as its quintessence the achievement of enlightenment by being able to see one's own mind without the intellect coming into play. Zen Buddhism believes and upholds that all life forms are Buddha and their aim is to discover this. Control of the mind through meditation is the key to attain this form of enlightenment, Words are deemed as spiders' web to ensnare man into the realm of logical thinking. Zen Buddhism was brought to China by the Indian monk Bodhidharma and was called Chan in China. Japan initiated the modernist forms of Zen to purge it of all elements that were considered to be corrupt. The objective was a retreat to the original teachings of Buddha. Among the major propagators of Zen in Japan were Daizō Teitaro Suzuki who used the Idealist, Transcendentalist and romantic thinking to clear the circuitous leitmotif of Zen. In the words of McMahan:

...he also drew upon the Romantic conception of nature as an all pervasive spirit that can be accessed by individual probing into the deeper interior of the mind as against the mechanistic Enlightenment view of the natural world as a giant machine. He also aligned the spirit of Zen with Romanticism's notion of spontaneity and the transcendence of rational, calculative thinking. The irrationality of Zen koans indicated a pure experience beyond conceptualization emanating from a radical intuitive grasp of the oneness of the human being and nature. (166)

It was this dichotomy of the east as "intuitive, aesthetic and spiritual" and the west as "technological, rational and material" (166) that was the gradient behind what the white man believed as their burden. Suzuki effected a volt-face of this by placing the trans-rational practitioner of Zen as superior to the western technocrat. This formulation of Suzuki brought Buddhism and Zen into connection with artists, musicians and writers who looked upon meditation as cardinal to their art. The beat Poets of America is a clear case in point.

The expression of Zen in poetry originated in China. It was mainly the expression of doctrine and faith. In Japan, it led to the moulding of a form of poetry called haiku. (It is a form of Japanese verse having a single impression of a natural object or scene. It consists of three lines with five, seven and five syllables). Chang- Heoun Ryu classifies Zen poetry into two: Zen-idea poetry expressing Zen ideas directly and Zen -taste poetry which indirectly expresses Zen ideas. The second category falls under the enigmatic, imagist type and is predominated by nature imagery. The quotidian assumes significance in these poems. But it can trigger an emotional and intellectual response which is often based on a discovery that can be transformative. These discoveries may prove disquieting, but they provide a greater understanding of reality. The poem "Deer Fence" by Wang Wei is an example:

Empty mountain, no one visible
Only echoes of voices can be heard
The setting sun's rays entering the deep woods
Reflect back upon the green moss. (1-4)

Change and ultimate emptiness is hinted at in these lines. The light of the sun reveals the truth of emptiness. It is in keeping with this tradition that Gray offers a sensory view of the world to provide a heightened understanding of the impact of progress upon people and places. Such images are presented so that man is capable of a self-discovery in order to effect a

reappraisal of his value system. “ Enlightenment “ according to Stephen Batchelor “is not some mystical state where visions of unearthly bliss unfold but a series of responses to the question how am I to live in this world” (Martine Batchelor ix).

Buddhist poetry in Australia is comparatively of recent origin. Its initial propagator Harold Stewart relied more on Asian settings rather than Australian. In Gray, east meets west in a predominantly western landscape. In his poems, Australian landscape dominated. According to Hart, Gray’s poems effect a switching from other worldly thought to direct perception of nature. Gray presents new symbolic permutations instead of confining him to the canonical symbols of Buddhism. It is an understanding of the natural world through Buddhist symbolic structures through the art of poetry. The poem “North Coast Town” can thus be analyzed through this framework.

The poem is description of the coast of NSW where Robert Gray grew up. But the aim of the poem is to take the readers on a journey of realization. Journeys can be mental or physical. Buddhism demands a mental journey for the realization of the self. Gray takes the readers on a journey to the realization that everything has changed in Australia.

Out beside the highway, first thing in the morning

Nothing much in my pockets but sand from the beach (1-2)

The emptiness of life is brought forth through the phrase “nothing much in my pockets”. Emptiness or sunyata is a central concept in Buddhism. It signifies impermanence. It also signifies instability. Zen Buddhism aims at attaining Buddhahood through meditation or the realization of one’s inherent self. Gray, a practitioner of Zen is directing his reader to look into the self and that might be seen as a call to rebuild the cosmivision of the people of the world. “As one internalizes the emptiness teaching and becomes more proficient at recognizing attachments, one’s perception of the world will become increasingly less distorted... when one’s perception of the world has been changed by the emptiness teaching, one does not just see a different world, one acts differently too” (James 38). In “The Garden Shed” he says:

Nothing belongs to any

separate thing. It was there I began

to understand: the less we think we are

the more we bear; and someone who sees

he is nothing, lightly will bear it all. (Gray, *New Selected* 169)

The next line “A Shell station (either their men’s locked)/ a closed hamburger stand” further emphasizes this line. Shell stations or petrol stations hint at modernity’s advance into human life and signify the fast depletion of resources while in Buddhism the conch shell is used as a symbol to signify the wish to spread Buddha’s teachings. Mushrooming petrol stations/ shell stations convey the message that unless human beings adopt the middle path or madhyama mārga, the future is bleak. The complexity of man’s auxiliary organs have been increased. One does not see the beauty of the beach but finds only the locked hamburger stand and shell station. The idea that William Blake conveys in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that energy is eternal delight is conveyed here. Energy becomes equated with fossil fuels. Eternal delight in Buddhist thinking means deep enlightenment. Realizing man’s exploitation of nature around awakens him to be compassionate towards all things in nature. This in turn enables one to attain enlightenment and eternal delight.

The imagist in Gray moves from the visual to the olfactory wherein he speaks of “smell of vandal’s lavatory / and an automatic chill flushing the urinal”. Buddhism speaks of purity of motive and fairness of conduct. Universal responsibility is advocated by Mahayana Buddhism. A pollution free society is what Gray is advocating and maybe a reference to Freud’s idea that cleanliness is on the same plane of importance as other technological innovations. Mindfulness as advocated by Zen fuels man’s ability to maintain radical acceptance of himself and his actions. “Zen monk Thich Naht Hahn advances mindfulness as a core practice for healthy individuals and a healthy planet” (Bein, 50). Ethical and skillful behavior flows from mindfulness. Here the concepts in Buddhism is similar to the ethical theory developed in the fourth century BCE by Aristotle. Thus the final end of life as desired by man is eudaimonia that is “a good life.” It consists of acting courageously, justly. In Buddhism the eight fold path is the key to enlightenment which subsists on acting wisely, truthfully, compassionately etc. The idea that an awakened individual is above conventional norms – seeing things as they really are- endowed with an insight into reality and the practical wisdom of being in the world (prajna) is similar to Aristotle’s Sophia which enables one to perceive situations clearly and act appropriately. Gray seems to suggest a developing of these two for a practical philosophy of protecting or saving the environment. As a poet in contemporary times, Gray believed that one should have a sense of the place he is living in. In Zen, six senses should come into play if this is to be achieved. The visual, auditory, olfactory, tangible, taste and along with that the mental faculty.

Gray further describes the reality of the landscape-”car after carow-its like a boxer/ warming up with the heavy bag, spitting air.” Heavy traffic polluting the air is the consequence of shell stations providing fuel. It is an example of exploitation leading to pollution. It is followed by “plastic pennants on the distilled morning everywhere.” The aesthetic-cum- holistic concern for the biotic community advocated by writers like Aldo Leopold and the concern for the environment espoused by Zen practitioners like Gray seem to be similar in certain contexts. Zen environmental ethics can be said to be a form of ethical holism. According to C. Rockfeller the fundamental principal for environmental protection now is a variation of the theme of ahimsa or no harming. Zen maintains the Buddha nature of all beings. Such a view of the Buddha nature of the world would lead to a reverential treatment of the totality.

Zen practitioners sometimes choose to emphasize the value of the most repellent natural phenomena- Gray’s “ a dog trotting down someone hoses down a pavement’ is in keeping with Basho’s haiku:

Fleas, lice

The horse pissing

near my pillow (1-3)

They are not depictions of unrealistic environmental utopias but the reality of the world. Gray hits the last nail when he says;”We pass bulldozed acres. The place is becoming chrome/ tile-facing and plate glass: they are making California.” This is the ultimate reality that Gray presents of his country. And this is in stark contrast to how the aboriginal people treated Australia as sacred. Progress and developments have made it sterile, artificial and glossy. This is a sense of disgust which may be termed palpable disgust with the present condition of his land and he may be longing for an escape from this modernization which has transformed the natural face of Australia which colludes with the Buddhist teachings of the insubstantiality of the self. Thus it can be argued that the way one approaches and experiences the world can be used to modify the world. This is in tune with Scott Stroud’s concept of “orientational meliorism” supplemented by the practices of Zen Buddhism to bring attentiveness to one’s experience of activity. This includes the alteration of one’s orientation toward self, world, and activity with the goal of improving the quality of one’s future experience. It is this attentiveness, mindfulness or awareness that engenders poetry in him and encourages him to live a life of equanimity and care. “Gray prepares his readers for the lessons of contemplation that are to come, as well as the fruits of that contemplation in his awareness of the transience

and insubstantiality of the world around him”(Jones 125). The interweaving of the physical particulars surrounding him with the study of the natural world is the consequence of the “attention to the meaning and detail of one’s present situation.” It “is key to one’s activity having moral value”(Stroud 197). Ethical orientation or reorientation must take place in the present. It is here that Gray’s desire to connect the East and the West is witnessed- a meeting of Eastern philosophy and the antipodean landscape.

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South Asian Environmental Concerns: An Eco-Critical Reading of Anita Desai's and Intizar Hussain's Fiction

Bhumika Sharma

With the increasing degradation of environment and its serious repercussion seen on ecology has given birth to a new critical idiom called 'ecocriticism'. The term has gained momentum over the last two decades and challenges the inherited modes of thought and analysis. Being defined as a new mode of enquiry it:

... explore(s) some of the connections that have been made in recent years between literary studies and the sciences- and between literary studies and geography, a social science that deals fundamentally with the relationship between the natural and social world- in relation to new understandings of space, nature and the physical world... ecocriticism as a field that merges those of literary and cultural criticism, geography and the natural sciences, with its fundamental premise that human culture is inextricably connected to nature... investigate(s) the efforts of some scientists to use of evolutionary theory and developments in neuroscience to interpret literary and cultural texts.

Initiated with such interdisciplinary premise, eco-criticism has evolved as a methodology to investigate certain fundamental questions related to human existence and its close connections with the biological and ecological surroundings. Addressing a wide range of questions, it has generated a multidisciplinary discourse. One may be curious to know how does the creative imagination, which produces a literary text, perceives the human-nature contact employing it against an artistic backdrop? Does such perception have any role to play in creating the sensitivity required for attaining an ecological equilibrium? What does one understand by the holistic approach of development? How it is closely connected to our civilizational expedition? Is the development of eco-critical readings as a theoretical approach an endeavour to create an eco-sensitive cultural consciousness?

These queries, enhancing the scope of literary criticism and relating the imaginative literary world to the lived ecosphere, brings theory to experiential practices. It is an interesting overture to realise how textual world created by literary artists facilitate a landscape mapping that connects the interiority of human consciousness to the exteriority of environmental surrounding. Placing the vital environmental issues at the centre in the historic-cultural contexts, eco-criticism illustrates a more eco-concerned reading of various literary texts. Present paper explores the South Asian eco-critical concerns through a comparative analysis of Anita Desai's and Intizar Hussain's fictional works. While placed in a comparative paradigm, Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) and Intizar Hussain's *A Chronicle of the Peacocks* (2004) bring out the dynamics of relational delicacy in the backdrop of human liaison with the natural world.

South Asian fiction, within the global marketplace of literature, represents a geographical region which accounts a distinct socio-political history. It includes a range of writers whose fictional world narrates the formation of a new subcontinental identity evolved over its tangential trajectory. In the words of Sanga:

The South Asian experience imagined in English rehearses numerous salient characteristics. Many works call attention to the idea of Empire and interrogate the colonial moments of the subcontinent's vertiginous history. The struggle for independence, the contentious saga of the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947... The ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka... A brutal civil war fought for independence from Pakistan (has) figured in the Bangladeshi literary imagination... The vulgar atrocities prompted by the caste system, the rampant communalism that continues to thwart secularism, and the growing sensitivity to the rights of women and disenfranchised minorities are vital issues that are consistently and systematically represented in the literature (2).

While pitted against its unique historical backdrop, one can see the points of socio-political collision which shape the South Asian collective consciousness. But, apart from ethnic, class and gender based dissonances; there lies a humanist perspective that assumes an identity, as explained by Sanga, 'that is built on tolerance, suspicious of undue past veneration, and embodied in the perspectives of an enlightened humanism.'

Does such identity give a distinct sensibility to South Asian writing? It is, indeed, notable to view how South Asian fiction maps the landscape through its varied narrative settings.

These settings, while seen through eco-critical lens, constitute an ideologue. Simultaneously, its emotive expression evinces a resistance to the colonial cartographic construction that leads to an ecological sensitivity exhibited in sensing the association between nature and culture. The review of politically constructed boundaries which find their validation on the global map inspires a close reading of locale that affects human life. It initiates a subconscious re-churning, whether it is *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh wondering the absence of the expected “the long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other... in a school atlas.” Or Salman Rushdie’s *Shame* that, although set in Pakistan yet seems to express narrator’s pain in the fictitious nature of its reality. The settings in South Asian fiction also vary in their range of experiential space. On the one hand, it extends across the borders like Hari Kunzru’s *The Impressionist* that stretches from the Rajasthan desert, Agra, Fatehpur, and Bombay to London, Oxford, and finally to the remote West African landscape whereas on the other hand they narrow down to focus on the self-sustaining ecology of local site as in lush tropical spaces of Southern India in David Davidar’s *The House of Blue Mangoes*.

Reading the landscape recuperates history. Colonial attempt to delineate regions goes back to the cognitive mapping of the world through western imagination. As stated by Moran:

The process of ‘discovering’ land in colonization was supported by cartography, which became a way of textually appropriating spaces and renaming them, naturalising politically and culturally created boundaries and power arrangements (4).

The South Asian response to western cartography breeds a counter imagination in which the geographical boundaries float. Space is not occupied but sensed with an imaginative intimacy. Nature is not consumed but lived within the cultural periphery in harmony. As a critical response to the current capitalist industrial society rooted in the western definition of progressive humanity, South Asian consciousness constitutes an alternative mode of mapping spatial geography. The fictional endeavour of South Asian writers to configure regional expanse represents a subtle subversion of colonial cartography. It does not remain confined to South Asian attempt to assume a geographical identity but facilitates a delicate culturally experienced rendering of nature.

It brings a range of questions into ambit of eco-critical literary and cultural debate. How does the ‘other’ than the western sites of critical enquiry see the world as a geographical region? Does it give a new perspective to see the surroundings? How do the fictional settings

in literary texts convert the neutral category of geographical space into a culturally lived experience? Does it evince a literary concern for decoding the nature-culture bond? If this bond is bound to be culturally variegated, how does South Asian fiction address the contemporary environmental issues from different positioning? It is, indeed, interesting to see how South Asian literary rendering endeavour to reason the region through the imaginative spectrum of the locale in their fictional settings.

The American scholar Carl O. Sauer is largely credited with initiating the new cultural geography in works such as *Man in Nature* (1939) and *Land and Life* (1963), which sought to show that landscapes were not natural but culturally produced, by forging links between geography and other subjects such as anthropology, sociology, archaeology and history. It endorses the initial interdisciplinary conception that conceives 'space' as a created category:

... not as a neutral category but as something that is culturally produced, lived and represented in various ways... In other words, since space is never neutral,... it is produced by a whole range of different agents and practices and requires the insights of other disciplines to understand and discuss it (5).

Following the dictum one may enquire the South Asian geographical site from a more localised perspective other than as produced by western imagination. It also calls for the anthropological, sociological, archaeological and historical understanding of the region to bring out its distinctive ecology and its intricate connection with the tracked civilizational progress.

The fictional rendering of South Asian landscape appears as a new way to free indigenous imagination. It perceives surroundings more in connection to culturally-rooted innate people and their concentrated sensibilities than a detached impersonal outlook issuing guidelines at global stage. The fictional portrayal of the landscapes in South Asian writers like Intizar Hussain and Anita Desai epitomise this approach. Their reading of landscape exemplifies a liberated consciousness that attempts to grasp the micro-ecological concerns. It stands in contrast to the western models of environmental concern produced at macro level. Their regional mapping is not charted out in universal framework. On the contrary, the settings in their fiction are culturally lived spaces by distinct individuals in a distinct geographical region that relate them to the surroundings. Its inhabitants are an integral part of it. They stand within that intricately woven network of the region and are unescapably hitched to the other constituents of the given ecological chain. What do the South Asian writers view through the depiction of such

culturally constructed regions? In fact, what they seem to measure is, in what connection nature stands to the cultural inventory of the lived experience of its occupants. To quote Keith Sagar:

By 'nature' I understand not only the physical environment, the earth with its climate and landscapes, its flora and fauna; not only the power and processes, systems and relationships, which we now call the ecosystem; but also those psychological, moral and spiritual conditions which might be spoken of as consonant with or expressive of nature (6).

It is, indeed, a more holistic approach which may rightly lead to understand the prime source of nature-culture disequilibrium.

As a creative overture, South Asian fiction navigates the entire gamut of corporeal dominion through its literary imagination. It includes not only the physical environment but also, as stated by Keith Sagar, the 'psychological, moral and spiritual conditions' associated with it. It is an artistic attempt on the part of these writers to read the cultural geography of the region. For example, Desai's fiction features the exterior landscape through interior mapping of her female protagonists. Decoding the subtle relationship between exterior and interior world as lived by its human populace, it foregrounds the cultural reality of an individual's experiences. What author intends to unveil is how the exterior insensitivity leads to the trauma of insidious collapse and the inner chaos is bound to disrupt the outer orderliness what a rational mind may always be proud of. It is reflected in the imminent disequilibria omnipresent in the spatial surrounding amidst which her protagonists are placed. Unlike Desai, Hussain invokes the Indian mythology to bring out the history of man's increasingly devastating crimes against nature. But, both the authors read the ominous sign. It is echoed in the shriek of peacock whether heard by Maya in *Cry the Peacock* or scripted by Hussain's first person narrator in *A Chronicle of the Peacocks*. Here, peacocks seem to lament on the man's loss of the sensitivity which connects humanity with the beauty and fecundity of nature.

Describing the central theme of Anita Desai's maiden novel *Cry the Peacock* M. F. Patel states, it gives a:

...portrait of a highly sensitive, cultured, introvert, disturbed and childless neurotic woman Maya... The central image of the novel is the confrontation between life and death... Maya is pure instinct without the necessary accomplishment of wisdom (7).

It is the same wisdom which, in contrast, indubitably characterises her husband. What Desai acknowledges here is the 'misery and uniqueness of psyche of which it is ruling planet'⁸. According to Patel the 'cry' of the peacock heard by Maya suggests the 'ecstasy of love'⁹, but dooms to remain unheard by others, especially by her husband because of his completely different approach to life. Maya's craving for love also dies in the inevitable finality of ominous death predicted by the fortune teller. It makes the cry of peacock, simultaneously, the cry of death.

Desai reads the landscape through sensitive eyes of Maya to kindle affection, a bond with nature which could reduce the unrelieved pressure of ominous forecast but her attempt to ignite that sensitivity in her husband does not succeed. She fails to bridge the gap between human 'reason' and human 'emotion'. What Maya's growing craziness represents in *Cry, the Peacock* is a completely contrasting picture of exterior systematic world which boasts of its orderliness. But, while seen from Maya's perspective:

... this leads (you) to assume that organisation is an inherent property of the knowledge itself, and that disorder and chaos are simply irrelevant forces that threaten it from outside. In fact, it's exactly the opposite. Order is simply a thin, perilous condition we try to impose on the basic reality of chaos Gaddis, *JR*, 20.

Nature communicates the same in its wilderness with a signal to a more careful and sensitive handling of emotions. But it customarily remains unappreciated by human reason. It reflects the ecofeminist stand of the author that endorses the cultural havoc of patriarchy.

... there is an innate connection between the women and nature. By positing an inherent tendency of women to be attuned to nature- to care for it, to recognize their interrelationship with it- cultural ecofeminists recognize the value of actions and characteristics typically devalued by the dominant (patriarchal) culture.

Whereas Maya's pragmatic husband is oblivious of the nurturing power of nature making him insensitive to the beautiful surrounding and precarious emotional reality, Hussain's narrator senses the pain in the frightened looks of the peacock of Rajasthan which accidentally became witness to the Indian nuclear testing in a solitary corner of the vast Thar Desert. The unprecedented explosion made them to fly away screaming into sky and scatter in all directions. The horrifying sound prevailing in the background alarms all the traces of life around in nature and pronounces the disrupting harmonious relation between nature and culture. The episode instances simply the language of symbolism that evokes emotion drawing attention to

unheard and unattended voices of nature. What the artistic sensibility describes here is a violation of natural code, an ominous sign, an intimation of the due, a heavy toll to be paid by the future generation. It permeates the history from ancient chronicles to contemporary reality.

South Asian fiction brings out the history through art. It is the sub-continental history which has shaped the culture of the region. The art archives the cenotaphic residue of collective consciousness. It enters into the deep recess of human psyche to map the exterior landscapes and its relation to the interiority of human heart. It draws how the historical forces have shaped the political geography of the region.

Exploring the relationship between nature and art calls for, 'landscapes of memory'- whereby nature and history evoke memories of places and people. Simon Schama in her book *Landscape and Memory* terms it in a very terse form. 'Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is a work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.'¹² South Asian writers reveal it in their practice. One can notice how both the writers Anita Desai and Intizar Hussain explore memory and landscape in their fictional configurations. Hussain's anxious narrator's memory gets triggered with the mournful cry of the peacock. He says:

The sight of that dejected, bewildered peacock suddenly brings to mind another image of desolation that I had forgotten. On the far edge of a dark, oil-soaked sea, I see a forlorn duck covered with foul effluents, watching the waves in disbelief. Till yesterday, the sea was ambrosia, today it is poison. The wings of the duck are so heavy with slime that he can no longer fly. Poison flows through the vein in his body... It is sad to see a bird in so much pain. The poor duck seemed to have taken upon himself all the crimes human beings commit against each-other... The duck is symbolic of those prophets who, according to all religious texts, think of suffering as a sacred duty (13).

How far does the voice of Hussain's first person narrator represent the sensitive voice of the humanity? What does the saintly gesture of the 'forlorn duck' signify? Does the thin streak of memory lane produce flashes of historical wisdom? Does the author learn an imperative lesson from nature? With all these implicit questions, Intizar Hussain touches upon human conscience. In his world birds seem wiser than humans. They know that crime against nature begins with the crime against humanity. The history gives its account and literature makes it vivid and sensible through its art. Hussain's *A Chronicle of the Peacocks* draws upon

the significant chapters of South Asian history which triggers memory to comprehend the contemporary environmental predicament. It is attributed to the human sins committed in the past as a part of civilizational progress. The fictional configuration of Hussain strikes the contemporary reality in figurative mode. Using 'figural realism' he evinces what we need to learn from the history. His reading of the landscape serves as an example of eco-critical sensitivity that lies in decoding the human-nature interrelationship which gets reflected in the formation of cultural history. It links the author's artistic imagination to the physical reality of the world.

'Figural realism' within the mythification of history is a significant constituent of the novel as a social act. Art does not exist in a vacuum. It is a reflection on time and history wherein the larger movements of life are captured, envisaged and comprehended with 'an inward looking' in the sense F. R. Leavis meant, which makes literary artistic sensibility stand apart from other disciplines such as history, sociology and psychology (14).

An artist transcends the disciplinary decadence to offer a holistic image. S/he performs an integrational act to relate the present with the past, physical with spiritual, and indigenous with universal. South Asian writers too bring the cultural geography of the region to address global issues. They delineate their fictional landscapes with the historical reminiscences of the subcontinent which constitute its ecological terrain.

In fact, environmental concerns are rooted in Indian philosophy. It is a consciousness, a spiritual concern that transcends the materialistic desires and earthly objects for a more satisfying spiritual experience. Desai's fiction represents the same sentiment in its delineation of eco-critical sensitivity. Her novel *Fire on the Mountain* illustrates the eco-feminist and bio-centric stand taken by her. To quote Knapp:

Nanda Kaul, an earthly replica of certain Hindu deities, is archetypal in literature: a complex of opposites, both mortal and immortal, individual and universal... In the manner of *Shakti*, that vital energy which moves throughout Nature, Nanda Kaul's inner currents course through her, in nuanced and violent tempos. Identifiable also with Kali, her destructive/dark side sometimes predominates, when circumstances require a balancing of irregularities (15).

What Knapp refers to as 'balancing of irregularities' is nothing but diverting 'eco-sensitivity' towards 'cultural sustainability'. It is simply to restore that lost 'ecological' balance

between material and spiritual, physical and abstract, present and future, and of course, theory and practice. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain*, Raka emerges as a strong force to move into that direction. She becomes instrumental to restore that lost human touch that connects human culture with the nourishing power of nature. The contemporary environmental concerns need to accommodate that sensitivity too in their deliberation of 'Go Green'. Being lost in the virtual reality created by technological mediation, it perhaps requires more attention than the environmental politics of developed and developing world. The character of Raka symbolises that highly required interactive human touch which is in complete harmony with nature instead of exhibiting the discord present in contemporary cultural development.

As Raka enters Nanda's house, she palpates, touches, senses, *feels* every object. The visceral and not the rational is her approach. Everything she investigates within and outside of the house, as we shall see, she does with hands and feet-appendages which allow her to relate to the living world in silence, through body language (16).

Knapp further states:

What part of nature attracts Raka most? Not the garden and its flowers. They are too tame. As representatives of society and social consciousness, they are overly ordered. Structured ways have little allure for her. Cliffs and gorges, nature's dangerous features, hypnotize her. The wild, dishevelled, frenetic powers beyond her reach lure her on (17).

What Raka demonstrates, is that the nature is to be accepted, both in its beauty and terror, since notwithstanding the extant form, it always represents life force. 'Magnetized by the beauty of the Himalayan hills, nature, for Raka, is a sign of her rapturous love for all that sprouts, grows, and generates life¹⁸.' Desai's fictional landscape is a close reading of this sensitive human-nature relationship measured through the psychic odyssey of the figures. She invents various symbols and metaphor to articulate the human sentiments. It connects psychic interiority of her characters to the exterior spaces. Her fiction evinces what Lefebvre proposes as a concern with 'the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias¹⁹'

Talking in practical terms, today environmental discourse has spread across the academic disciplines with its focus on ever-widening ecological imbalance. Mounting concerns over

climate change have been added to an already growing list of problems- salinization, air and water pollution, biodiversity loss and so on. These concerns are often strongly focussed on Asia, whose states' burgeoning economies and industries, increasing populations and energy needs are heightening both resource demands and anxieties about the ability of the planet to sustain its human population. But how far, these concerns genuinely address the regional disparity and indigenous wisdom being practiced at grass root level. The economic development is measured from the parameters laid down by the western models of growth. Neither the regional historiography nor the conventional mode of living is given due place while charting out the norms for planning. While talking about the sustainable growth model for a specific geographic region, To quote Beattie:

Such anxieties, however, can mask the complex, historically contingent ways in which the people of this region and elsewhere have interacted with, and thought about, the environment around them (20).

The cry of peacock in Desai and Hussain's fictional space is an alarming call for an imminent catastrophe not much different from the plagues of ancient Thebes or the contemporary dumping of nuclear waste, but how far they, especially in terms of cultural consciousness, corroborate each other? The emerging phenomenon of environmental degradation, being rooted in diverse cultural contexts could not be judiciously explicated in the same framework. The human plight may be same but the sources of the plight may be different. The dreadful Ashwatthama, who was cursed by Krishna to wander with pus-filled wounds for 3000 years after releasing his Brahmastra for destruction which still haunts Hussain's fictional landscape in the nuclear testing of Rajasthan, does not identify with the havoc of genetic engineering in the figure of Tiresias. It is indeed the evil spirit of human sins that disperses the divine spirit of nature disrupting the sacred human-nature relationship, but roots of the evil need to be searched in the specific cultural contexts.

Sagar calls the defile of holistic nature a 'crime' bifurcating it into two domains namely internal and external. Since the outer violation germinates from inner misdoings, it first needs to be investigated from within before being examined from without. The troubled nature-culture equipoise reflects the ecological imbalance which calls for a complete cultural review. Speaking in the western context, Keith Sagar explains it in terms of western mythology. In his words:

The inner crime, the crime against our own nature, must precede any crimes against the environment... Thus the oldest myths, stories and poems are always relevant to the most specific and urgent problems of any age. The story of Trojan War is about any and every war; the Prometheus myth is about nuclear energy; the Tiresias myth is about genetic engineering, the Oedipus myth is about the disposal of toxic wastes (21)...

He may seem correct to some extent, but how come and to what extent a civilizational experience, rooted in a different cultural experience, relates itself to an alien mythology? What Sagar explains in terms of western imagination, South Asian fiction writers like Desai and Hussain explicate in terms of indigenous cultures with their distinct socio-political and mythological premises.

One cannot elude the extension of global patterns of interaction and the growing knowledge of spaces and people, yet an examination of the ways in which humans has identified themselves with or against particular environments in a specific cultural contexts need to be given due space in environmental discourses. In its historiographic evolution, South Asia has been a variegated site ranging from the sites of colonisation to the sites of spirituality and medical experimentation. It gives an overview of European interactions with the remoter areas of Asia with its peculiar geographical features. Although Asia appeared in European representations in a variety of media yet, despite the expansion in knowledge, its environment and people continued to be represented as wild and dangerous. Do the modals, presented in South Asian writing, give new dimension to eco-critical sensitivity which evinces the literary contribution to the environmental movements in this region? While Desai symbolises the varied voices of sensitive souls, which are futile in the city of death and despair, like Calcutta in the *Voices in the City*, does she expose the mechanical life in a metropolis. The squalid, dreary existence of city life in the novel, gives a view of Calcutta trams crowded with people down whose dusty cheeks, sweat and oil mixed together flow, emit a foul smell, which serves as an exemplar of the western model of 'Growth'. In the words of M. F. Patel, Desai's all novels:

... strike a note of warning without appearing didactic or moralistic; her works clearly suggest that the modern life with all its spectacular achievements and progress, is doomed to disorder and destruction unless it considers and nourishes the tender feelings (whether of the woman or the figurative nature in relation to human civilisation) (22).

Mapping the interior landscape and psychic odyssey of the figures, Desai maps the exterior landscape which reflects a strong human-nature liaison. Nature is present as an element not to be consumed but to be lived with as illustrated in *Fire on the Mountain*. It exemplifies the Indian Vedic sentiment of co-existence. Unlike the fictional rendering of the western economic models in which nature is seen simply as a resource to be exploited and consumed, the Indian Vedic scriptures pronounce it as a nurturing force to be sought shelter in. Creating the alternative paradigm, South Asian writers like Desai and Hussain, somewhere, reinstates the Indian mode of thinking. Colonial cognitive mapping is replaced by emotional and sensitive mapping through the female protagonists like Nanda Kaul, Raka or Maya in Desai's novels or by the bio-centric view of the narrator in writing a chronicle of the peacocks. Whether talk of environment conservation organisations like *Himalaya Vahini* or mass movements against dam construction like *Narmada Bacho Andolan*, it is the enterprise of redefining human civilisation in relation to natural environment that serves as the foundational ethics of an inclusive and sustainable growth.

The South Asian fiction manifests the layers of foundational sensibilities that stir the growing concern for an ecological balance. The bio-human interrelationship invokes both horror and tenderness suggesting the tenacity and delicacy of human connection with natural and cultural geography. The fictional works of Desai and Hussain exhibit how South Asian stand comes close to the ecofeminist and biocentric interpretation of surrounding. While placed against the western eco-critical concern, that traces its origin in the old and new romantic traditions of the 19th century, the present paradigm evinces how South Asian historiography also embeds it as an undercurrent. It is, indeed, required to review these literary sensibilities for a comprehensive understanding of emergence of South Asia as an ecological region with Himalaya at the centre.

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“The Back of Beyond”: Gender and Genre Intersections in Angela Carter’s *Tales from the East*

Vrinda R. Chanth

The history of travel is as old as the history of appearance of human beings on this planet. Pre-historic man led a nomadic life and for him, to wander meant to survive. It was only after the ice ages that human beings began to settle in small groups along river coasts and valleys where most of the ancient civilizations developed. Though, man began to lead a settled life, the pre-historic wanderlust remained, and from time to time, people moved in search of hitherto unexplored territories. As time progressed, human race evolved and they began to narrate as well as record their expeditions. As Jolanta Sztachelska states in the introduction to *Metamorphoses of Travel Writing: Across Theories, Genres, Centuries and Literary Tradition* our early myths, legends and epics are replete with travel motifs and wandering heroes—Gilgamesh, Odysseus and Herodotus, to name a few.

In the history of travel, Enlightenment is considered a watershed. Prior to Enlightenment, to travel meant “to labour” and it signified the perilous nature of the journeys which exposed the travellers to a variety of hardships.¹ With the advent of Enlightenment ideas and the accompanying progress in science and technology, travelling became less arduous and hence, a pursuit in itself. As Inderpal Grewal states in *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel*, “the rhetoric and discourse of European travel” came to be viewed as “an eighteenth century construct that began with the Grand Tour that the young men of the English aristocracy undertook as part of their education”. Travel, once understood as a means to get from one place to another out of necessity, came to signify expeditions that were a means of instruction. With the expansion of the empire, travelling to far off colonies, and documenting life in the colonies for the general readership as well as for the colonial administrators became a regular practice. Thus, travel writing became part of the colonial

mission to expand power and knowledge. It was mostly undertaken by those who travelled as part of the colonial administration, geographic expeditions, military deployments or missionary work.

During the nineteenth century, the “travel bug” bit Europe and as a result mass tourism was born (Sztachelska 4). Ventures of exploratory, colonial and missionary nature were superseded by travel for leisure. Travel came to be accepted as an evolutionary necessity—social, philosophical and cultural. Artists and writers travelled in search of new experiences and inspiration.

They [nineteenth century European middle class] wanted to be taken out of themselves, you understand, but *not for long*. So tourism was born[. . .]. [T]hey soon realized they could hire their artists to do their travelling for them, and so need not hazard the flies, the heat, the diarrhoea and so forth. The European middle class drank deep of the savage splendours of the East [...] without stirring a step from their drawing-rooms. (Carter, 44)

This led to a profusion of fictional and non-fictional writings with travel as its cause of production or its main theme.²² Though the debate on the definition of travel writing is still prevalent in literary circles, throughout this article travel writing will be considered as a “varied body of writing which, whether its principal purpose is practical or fictional, takes travel as an essential element for its production.” See Joan-Pau Rubies as quoted by Grzegorz Moroz in *Travellers, Novelists and Gentlemen: Constructing Male Narrative Personae in British Travel Books, from the Beginnings to the Second World War*.

Travel writings of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries were divided into the ones written by those who travelled to expel boredom, and the ones written by those who travelled for passion and gain (Sztachelska 5). However, travel and travel writings brought people of different geographical, cultural and ethnic backgrounds in close contact with one another, opening up possibilities of exchange, encounter, and amalgamation. This encounter with otherness and the baggage of stereotypes carried by travellers became important once travel writing was initiated into the academia. This happened as late as the 1970s and is often attributed to the turn from literary criticism to theory. The increasing appeal of postcolonial and feminist theories generated wide spread interest in travel writings, which were regarded as a tool of the imperialist discourse as well as a vehicle of patriarchy. Postmodernism and its

interest in marginalized writers and literatures also added to the renewed interest in travel writings.

In the field of postcolonial studies, travel and travel writings became important for their role in the grand project of creation and maintenance of European imperialism. Edward Said's *Orientalism* considered travel writings as one of the best sites to locate the Orient/Occident dichotomy. He states:

The increasing influence of travel literature, imaginary utopias, moral voyages, and scientific reporting brought the Orient into sharper and more extended focus [. . .]. But all such widening horizons had Europe firmly in the privileged center, as main observer[. . .] even as Europe moved itself outwards, its sense of cultural strength was fortified. From travelers' tales, and not only from great institutions like various India companies, colonies were created and ethnocentric perspectives secured. (117)

According to him the power "to represent what is beyond metropolitan borders derives from the power of an imperial society" (*Culture and Imperialism* 99). Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) examines how travel writings contributed towards the creation of the Eurocentric notion of a progressive West as over and above the rest. For Pratt, travellers who demonize as well as romanticize the distant colonies see the world through an imperial eye. Pratt was not alone in exploring the role of travel and travel writings in the discursive creation of a superior West. David Spurr classified travel narratives as part of "the rhetoric of the empire," which helped in the constitution of identities. James Clifford, in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, delineated travel as "a range of material, spatial practices that produce knowledges, stories, traditions, compartments, musics, books, diaries, and other cultural expressions," a traveller as "someone who has the security and privilege to move about in relatively unconstrained ways," and travel writing as inextricably implicated in "a history of European, literary, male, bourgeois, scientific, heroic, recreational meanings and practices" (33-35). Thus, postcolonial travel writers considered travel writing as a "cultural site for the expression of identity politics" and hence, a tool "for previously marginalised groups to articulate their claims for recognition within wider cultural and political communities" (Lisle 70).

Once the study of travel writing became part of the academia, travel writers encountered the daunting task of steering clear of charges of residual imperialism and colonialism in their writings. The poststructuralist loss of narrative authority and the advent of fluid categories

added to the woes. How travel writers negotiate the anxieties of a postmodern globalized world constitute most of the contemporary discussions on travel writing. Before embarking on such discussions, it is necessary to delineate the features of travel writing as a literary genre. Many critics consider travel writing a hybrid genre or as a writing across genres. As Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan state in *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*, “travel narratives run from picaresque adventure to philosophical treatise, political commentary, ecological parable, and spiritual quest. They borrow freely from history, geography, anthropology, and social science, often demonstrating great erudition, but without seeing fit to respect the rules that govern conventional scholarship” (8-9). Travel writing is considered to be a juxtaposition of fact and fiction. This in-between-ness and the ability to write across genres are what contribute to the transgressive quality of travel writing as a literary genre. Many critics consider travel writing to be primarily about journeys and about negotiating difference. Journey, as Debbie Lisle explicates in *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, “can include a mixture of leaving home, finding oneself, going through a rite of passage, seeking one’s fortune, experiencing a dangerous adventure or simply getting away from it all” (35).

With the advent of poststructuralism, the questions of representation, representing and being represented began to be foregrounded in discussions on travel writing. The violence inherent in trying to impose order on the sights and experiences of something as disorderly as travel also came under the scanner. Contemporary travel writing is seen as either continuing the imperial project by assuming an air of superiority and authority or as using self-reflexive narratives or humour or self-depreciation to avoid charges of imperialism and chauvinism (Lisle 69-70). The former are termed travel writings with colonial visions marked by loyalty and homogeneity and the latter, travel writings with cosmopolitan visions marked by “tolerance, multiculturalism and respect for cultural difference” (Lisle 260). The poststructuralist decentring of the subject and the idea of an always-changing discursively constituted subject have put to question the ability of travel narratives to speak for marginalized groups—in terms of race and gender. This brings us to the topics of contemporary postcolonial travel writing and women in travel writing. If travel writing was nurtured by and in its turn, nurtured imperialism, and was considered the prerogative of men, the role of travel writing in a post-imperial, postcolonial age and of women in travel writing is of manifold significance and is worth careful consideration.³

In the history of travel writing, women occupy a marginal space. Very few women took to travelling—deemed inappropriate and dangerous—and fewer still documented their travel. Early women travel writers were mostly upper class, white and privileged, who struggled to keep their narratives exciting as well as acceptable—tethered within the conventions of femininity. As Sara Mills states in *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, they occupied an uneasy position

[. . .] caught between the conflicting demands of the discourse of femininity and that of imperialism. The discourses of colonialism demand action and intrepid, fearless behaviour from the narrator, and yet the discourses of femininity demand passivity from the narrator and a concern with relationships. (21)

The social background of the woman traveller and her attempts to comply with the gender expectations of the society went a long way in shaping the style and content of early travel writing by women. Their writings were in the form of letters or diary entries about things traditionally associated with the domestic sphere and as Kristi Siegel states in her introduction to *Gender, Genre and Identity in Women's Travel Writing*:

Most early travel writing began with an apology (e.g., for writing in the first person, for engaging in such inappropriate activity, for bothering the reader with their trivial endeavors, and so forth) that, again, affirmed their status as ladies and also served to reassure readers they would not be competing with men. (3)

This resulted in many of the early women travel writers reiterating the opinions of their male counterparts. Though women wrote about their travels as early as the 1430s (*The Book of Margery Kempe*, 1436) it was only as late as the 1900s that women's travel narratives moved from apology to affirmation. Mary Kingsley published *Travels in West Africa* in 1897. Kingsley was the first woman travel writer to venture into the masculine terrain by producing scientific research instead of domestic reports. Nevertheless, being acutely aware of the social expectations from a lady, she laced her writings with humour that undermined her observations and ensured her acceptance.

During the colonial times, discourses of women as symbols of home and purity as against women as active participants in public life were circulated (Mills 3). Women were also associated with the passivity of the land that was to be explored and conquered by the masculine adventurers. Women travel writers of the period concentrated on descriptions of individuals—their physical descriptions, mannerisms, and domestic lives rather than on general

statements about the people and politics of the region because they were denied a strong, assertive narrative voice. Moreover, women's writings of the period were prone to charges of exaggeration and falsehood, as women were considered too emotional to be objective and scientific. The general scepticism about women's writing forced women travel writers to adopt techniques such as self-depreciation and humour that further strengthened the charges of irrelevance levelled against women's travel accounts. Early studies on travel writing by women often considered women travellers as aberrations—odd, freakish, eccentric—travelling to overcome boredom and repression, and analysed their texts as autobiographies which were “an extension of” their “adolescent tomboyishness” (Mills 31-35).

As Linda Kraus Worley sums up:

Since men were assumed to possess such characteristics as activity, energy, independence and intellectual prowess to be used in public life and the wide world, their travel and any writing based on these travels were fully in harmony with society's expectations. The situation was quite different from women for whom travel meant leaving the postulated 'female' sphere, a sphere limited to the interior realm and domestic life. Women travellers would thus most likely have felt conflict between their need to fulfill cultural expectations which viewed them as the weak, passive 'other,' and their deliberate entrance, perhaps even escape, into a world of danger and difficulty, a world of travel to faraway places. Women's travel narratives reflect these tensions, tensions missing in men's narratives. (40)

Thus, women travel writers of the time constructed their texts within the conflict and convergence of the power of patriarchy, the discourses of femininity and the power of colonialism which acted on them (Mills 18).

Traditionally accepted as a male discursive practice, travel writings by women are often juxtaposed with travel narratives by men and its conventions. Though women experience travel differently, the social stigma and the “rhetoric of peril” associated with women's travel forced early women travellers to adopt an androcentric gaze and a hermaphrodite identity.⁵ Women, depicting their travel experiences as women and as different from their male counterparts is a relatively new phenomenon. It has aligned women's travel writings with two important facets in the construction of identity, namely, the depiction of women as subjects and the movement of women from the private to the public sphere. Contemporary women's travel writing defies the set conventions of the genre by presenting women as wandering

women and their travels as gendered journeys. The genre is employed as a subversive tool to write back from the margins and redefine the borders that once confined and defined them, and expose the function of language as a sexist/imperial tool.

The problems with using women's travel writing as a subversive tool include assuming a coherent identity for the writer and assuming that the accounts of travel are a faithful transcription of the experiences of the writer. Recent studies on women's travel writing do not consider travel writings by women as essentially different from men's writing, but focus on the constraints that restricted women from producing narratives that explored certain kinds of experiences or employed particular types of language. Women, by convention, were forbidden from writing about sexual experiences, adventures, scientific facts, and politics as they belonged to the masculine territory. Femininities and masculinities as socially constructed discursive frameworks that lay out a range of behaviour patterns concerning morality and sexuality for each gender occupy the forefront of this analysis (Mills 94). The discourses that mediate the experiences as well as their representations by women travel writers have increasingly become the focus of analysis. The subversion of the discursive frameworks, which contributed to women's travel writing being different from men's, is a site of potential in the exploration of the role of gender and genre in travel writing.

Angela Carter travelled to Japan in the late 1960s and negotiated the alien culture for over two years. Carter's interactions with Japan and Japanese people endowed her with fresh perspectives on imperialism and feminism.⁶ Carter's short stories "A Souvenir of Japan," "The Smile of Winter," "Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest," "Flesh and the Mirror," and "Reflections" collected in *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* and her journalistic writings collected in *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings* can be read as discussions on the conventions of travel and travel writing by women. Moreover, Carter's writings occupy an ambivalent position in the age-old debate regarding the construction of the West and the rest, or Europe and its others.

In "A Souvenir of Japan" Carter's narrator openly challenges the conventions of accepted feminine dress code and behaviour adhered to by early women travel writers. She unabashedly states, "I wore men's sandals because they were the only kind that fitted me and, even so, I had to take the largest size" (31). The hermaphrodite identity that women travellers used to assume is substituted by a woman who is unapologetic about her needs and desires. She lives in an alien land with a lover who is younger to her, much to the chagrin of her neighbourhood.

The story begins with the description of a train journey the narrator and her lover undertake in order to watch the public display of fireworks in the suburbs of the city. It is revealed to be one of the rare occasions when the narrator's lover has taken her out. She is normally expected to stay at home and wait for his return concurring with the meaning of the Japanese word for wife *okusan* –the “person who occupies the inner room and rarely, if ever, comes out of it” (28). She states, “Once I was at home, however, it was as if I occupied the inner room and he did not expect me to go out of it, although it was I who paid the rent” but, “[h]e and his friends spent their nights in a desultory progression from coffee shop to bar to *pachinko* parlour to coffee shop, again, with the radiant aimlessness of the pure existential hero” (31-32). The image of the woman as the one left behind and as the one waiting (for the return of the male quester or adventurer, or traveller), as in traditional travel narratives, is presented as something the narrator rebelled against. The construction of the private sphere as the feminine realm and the public sphere as the masculine realm is challenged by the narrator who defied the conventions of her own land to travel to a strange land and take a lover from there. However, she still complies with the rules of the alien land by staying at home.

“Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” narrates the experiences of Dubois, an explorer and a botanist travelling in search of hitherto unexplored terrains and species of plants, and his twin children—Emile and Madeline. The story, which also narrates the beginning of an incestuous relationship between the twins, is told in a language replete with sexual metaphors. The description of the unexplored terrain as the untrodden depths of virginal space, the sudden awakening of Emile to the sexuality of Madeline, the eating of the forbidden fruit and the concluding kiss are set against a journey undertaken by the twins to the heart of the forest. The story juxtaposes exploration and conquest of the forest with the exploration and conquest of the female body. The male, once again, dons the shoes of the explorer and the female is the one bleeding, being bit by a carnivorous wild lily. What sets Carter's tale apart, is that, the female accompanies the male adventurer in his quest and insists on continuing the adventure despite the reluctance of her male companion. However, the first half of the story has an entirely different approach to women, where Dubois is described as having settled down for the sake of his wife. The idea of *Homo silvester*, men of woods, as against *Homo sapiens* also figures in the story, which seems to caution against the wish to conquer and tame as opposed to the wish to explore and know (“Penetrating to the Heart” 61).

“The Smile of Winter” set in a Japanese coast also deals with the representation of femininities and masculinities in the writings of Western travellers to Asia. The narrator of the

story hints at the clear division of labour between the men and the women folk of the fishing village where she resides. The women lay out the fish on the beach, dry them, pack them and sell them while the men go out to the sea. The description of the women folk, their attire, their appearance as well as the way they carry their babies on their backs are given by the narrative voice in an attempt to throw light on femininity as a social construct. She states that the women folk of the fishing village alerted her to some deficit in femininity—either in her or in them. She concludes that it must be in her because the majority of them had “an organic lump of baby on their backs” (55). Femininity as related to reproduction and childcare is introduced to the discussion. The story alludes to different stereotypical constructions of femininity but never dwells on them.

Carter’s writings from Japan are preoccupied with ways of seeing as exemplified by the mirror metaphor that recurs. Mirror and mirroring are elaborately discussed in the short story “Reflections,” where the mirror is described as “the symbolic matrix of this and that, hither and thither, outside and inside” (88). The mirror acts as a boundary and a passage between the world outside the mirror and the inverted world in the mirror. It is a porous boundary and hence the two worlds are interconnected. “Reflections” has a male narrator who is captured by Anna, a woman with a palindromic name and is taken to her aunt/uncle who is androgynous. The androgynous figure, though possessing breasts and a phallus, is clad in a women’s garment and so the narrator refers to her as “she.” The narrator describes ‘her’ as knitting continuously and holding together the world in the mirror through her stitches. He states that she knitted both in the room and in the mirror, “her yarn emanated from inside the mirror, and the ball of wool existed only in the medium of reflection” (88). Here, knitting can be considered as representative of the weaving of tales and of femininities and masculinities. Anna and her aunt controlled the narrator using the power of the gun that Anna possessed. The narrator is forced to embrace his reflection in the mirror and hence, enter into the world of the mirror—the Sea of Fertility, where everything appears its reverse. Anna too enters the world of the mirror and guides the narrator through it. The narrator proceeds to describe how Anna, in the world of the mirror, rapes him:

She raped me; perhaps her gun, in this system, gave her the power to do so.

I shouted and swore but the shell grotto in which she ravished me did not reverberate and I only emitted gobs of light. Her rape, her violation of me, caused me atrocious physical and mental pain. My being leaked away from me under the visitation of her

aggressive flesh. . . . I felt such outrage I beat in the air behind my head with my helpless fists as she pumped away indefatigably at my sex, and to my surprise, I saw her face cloud and bruises appear on it, although my hands were nowhere near her. She was a brave girl; she only fucked the harder. . . . Her gun lay propped against the shells beside us. I reached the other way and seized it. I shot at the black sky while she straddled me. . . . She tumbled backwards and twitched a little. (93)

This description of rape, which ends with the murder of Anna, is important in the investigation of gender equations in the story. If everything in the mirror world appears in reverse, the act of rape should also appear in reverse. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude whether it is Anna who rapes the narrator or the other way round. If the narrator's and Anna's journey in the world in the mirror is a reflection of what happens in the outside world, the power to rape inevitably rests with the male. The rape, the subsequent murder, the return to the room, which housed the mirror and the androgynous figure, and the destruction of the androgynous figure culminate in the final exclamation of victory by the narrator: "I was undefeated. Had I not killed her? Proud as a man, I once again advanced to meet my image in the mirror" (95). The construction of masculinity as a source of power and phallic symbols such as the gun as emblematic of power play an important role in throwing light on the gender codes embedded in our culture and literature. The above lines also reflect the pressure to live up to the masculine and feminine images or standards set by the society. The stories "A Souvenir of Japan," "The Smile of Winter," and "Flesh and the Mirror," with Japan as the backdrop, have female narrators narrating their encounters in the alien land in an autobiographical tone. Hence, these stories present masculinities as constructed from a feminine perspective. Taro in "A Souvenir of Japan," the perpetually absent fishermen in "The Smile of Winter," the lover who deserts the protagonist in "Flesh and the Mirror" and the stranger who befriends her are all objects "created in the mode of fantasy" ("Flesh and the Mirror" 72). As the female narrative voice states:

His image was already present somewhere in my head and I was seeking to discover it in actuality . . . the face which corresponded to my notion of the unseen face of the one I should love, a face created parthenogenetically by the rage to love which consumed me. So his self, and, by his self, I mean the thing he was to himself, was quite unknown to me. I created him solely in relation to myself, like a work of romantic art, an object corresponding to the ghost inside me. ("Flesh and the Mirror" 72)

Moreover, the narrative voice recognizes her own actions as attempts to conform to a script of femininity. Once, she spends the night with a stranger and is perplexed by the fact that she did not feel guilty for her transgression but later felt guilty for not feeling guilty. She wonders whether she was in character when she felt guilty or when she did not feel guilty. According to her, her script was scrambled behind her back, her camera operator was drunk, her director had suffered an anxiety attack and was taken to the sanatorium, and her co-star—whom she was dissecting in an attempt to understand him—had cobbled himself up on the operating table, that too according to his own design (“Flesh and the Mirror” 73). All this happened while she was looking at the mirror and hence, she is outraged by the occurrences. The performative nature of agency and identity, and its relation to the fluid categories of gender and genre are highlighted. Here, the feminist use of the conventions of travel writing as threatened and influenced by the masculinist constructions it seeks to undermine is also hinted at.

The narrator-protagonist of “Flesh and the Mirror” travels to be at the “mercy of events” and “for the insecurity” accompanying the chance or purposeful misreading of train or flight schedules, and for getting lost at least for the time being (72). This attack on the “rhetoric of peril” that was used to caution the women travellers against travelling to far off places, unattended, clearly highlights how travel writings have transformed. These stories with Japan as the backdrop employ the conventions of travel writing to offer a critique of gender and race, and alternatively, analyse the feminist use of gender and genre.

Carter’s writings from Japan exhibit a commitment to the feminist politics but their Eurocentric tendencies are unmistakable. In “People as Pictures” Carter talks about the art of Japanese tattooing—*irezumi*—which is described as “one of the most exquisitely refined and skilful forms of sado-masochism the mind of man ever divined” (*SLJ* 292). She views such practices as the foothold of a culture that is repressive and where essence is often appearance. Carter’s description of the evolution of *irezumi* down the ages and the Japanese attitude towards naked body is interesting. She states that the Japanese harbour a revulsion of the naked human body—especially the male body, and tattooing frees them from the shame of being helplessly nude, whereas, the nude female body has gained acceptance among modern Japanese men. These descriptions about the intricacies of the indigenous culture are stained with imperial hues. Moreover, she perceives Japan as a country that has elevated hypocrisy to a new level, “[t]o look at a samurai, you would not know him for a murderer, or a geisha for a whore” (“A Souvenir of Japan” 33). Japan, as a country obsessed with appearances and as bereft of vigour,

conforms to the imperial notion of a country in need of the better wisdom of the colonizer or the imperial power. The reductionism at work in considering a samurai, a skilled warrior whose contributions to the much-revered Japanese martial arts are innumerable, to be a cold blooded murderer, and a geisha, a hostess who dedicates her life to the classical arts of Japan, to be a whore is alarming. Whether Carter, like many of her predecessors from the West, feels that Japan is better off for having being exposed to the West or is she trying to foreground Eurocentrism in the writings of Western travellers to Japan is contentious.

In “Mishima’s Toy Sword” (1971) she writes:

Many do feel that prolonged contact with the West has deculturalised Japan. . . . But it is easy for the comfortably off (and for the European) to mourn the passing of the folkways of a peasantry who contrived to put the most respectable face in the world on their misery. . . . The price of deculturisation may prove to be, for the majority, three square meals a day, a flush toilet and a ferro-concrete home which, if unpicturesque, at least does not let the wind through. There is, besides, the intellectual freedom of a country which has transcended its own cultural boundaries. It seems a fair bargain. Nevertheless, there remain these complaints of a confusion of identity—the loss of a sense of self, rooted in a glorious past that everybody accepts as glorious. Japan’s past is, on the whole, as inglorious as that of any other nation. (*SLJ* 296)

These descriptions undoubtedly favour the Eurocentric and imperialistic impulses. Similarly, Carter’s commentaries on Japanese comic books, the bar-hostesses in Japan, and the writings of Jun’ichirō Tanizaki are also tinted with remnants of Eurocentrism. However, it is undecidable if she is subverting the Eurocentric practices inherent in travel writing or unconsciously reiterating them. She describes the comic books as “the most stunning harvest of sadism, masochism, nervous agitation, disquiet and dread” where “human relations either have the stark anonymity of rape or else are essentially tragic” (*SLJ* 302-03). The women in the comic books—from the school girls in their middy blouses, pleated skirts and black stockings to the baby-faced heroines of Tanaka comics—are made to suffer and they are subjected to every possible indignity such as forced sex and group sex whereas the male genitalia is totally absent from the picture. Carter further elaborates the status of women in the Japanese society: “True femininity is denied an expression and women, in general, have the choice of becoming either slaves [wives] or toys [bar hostesses]” (*SLJ* 305). The slave will occupy the inner quarters of the house whereas the master will spend his time with the toy—

the ideal blueprint of which [the bar hostess in Japan] will be a girl/woman possessing a large pair of breasts which she can hardly claim as her own during her interaction with the customers, two well-manicured hands to pour the drinks, sensitive ears to listen to the customers and cheerful laughter to maintain the illusion of having a nice time—perhaps befitting “the universal male notion of the perfect woman” (*SLJ* 306-07).

Carter’s description of Jun’ichirō Tanizaki’s *Naomi*—a comic depiction of Japanese fascination with the West and the irony of sexual and cultural conquest during Japan’s transition into the modern period— shows the society as well as the relation between sexes in Japanese society in a state of flux. The world of sexuality is juxtaposed with a society wallowing in a profound sense of loss and alienation. Naomi stands for the “allure” of the exotic. The hero of the story falls in love with Naomi because she looks like a Eurasian and has a foreign sounding name. He takes it upon himself to make her completely occidental. Carter considers this as an eroticisation of the power and strangeness of the West—”to possess the foreign woman would be to eat of the very fruit of the tree of knowledge” (*SLJ* 328). However, the reversal that is at work in this context, i.e., occidental woman being seen as exotic by the men in the colonies also becomes a topic of discussion in Carter’s writings. The hostesses in the bars in Japan too alert Carter to the counter-gaze that is at work. She states:

Such bars will employ Caucasian girls as exotic extras, like a kind of cabaret. A black girl would be far more exotic and could probably command any price she liked for such work. A curious double standard prevails among the clients; a man whose cigarette has just been lit by a Japanese girl will often produce his lighter to light the cigarette of a foreign hostess. Foreign girls also get more pay and exercise far greater job mobility. . . . (*SLJ* 308)

Nevertheless, this recognition is marred by the conjecture that black girls will be more exotic than Caucasian ones. In “A Souvenir of Japan” which paints the narrator protagonist as a complete other, she states:

I had never been so absolutely the mysterious other. I had become a kind of phoenix, a fabulous beast; I was an outlandish jewel. He found me, I think, inexpressibly exotic. . . . My pink cheeks, blue eyes and blatant yellow hair made of me, in the visual orchestration of this city in which all heads were dark, eyes brown and skin monotone, an instrument which played upon an alien scale. (31)

The self-reflexive tendencies in Carter's short stories are further highlighted in "The Smile of Winter" in which the narrative voice insists that she realizes what she is trying to do—"making a composition" using different elements such as "the winter beach, the winter moon, the ocean, the driftwood, the refuse, the shells, the pine trees, the women, the riders, the shapes of darkness and of water" (57). Thus, Carter's writings, with their intermingling of fictional and autobiographical narratives, deliberately oscillate between the poles of Eurocentrism and a critique of Eurocentrism. The commentaries on distortions and exclusions accompanying the autobiographical tone also point to the feminist usurpation of the genre intending to "write back" to the patriarchal systems that has denied it a voice and the danger inherent in such attempts. The depiction of other Eastern provinces in the writings of Carter also negotiates this ambivalent position.

Angela Carter, in her fiction, non-fiction and journalistic writings describe various Eastern provinces. Her journalistic pieces, collected in *Shaking a Leg*, include Carter's description of her travels through Europe, Russia, Japan, Australia and America. As she states in "My Maugham Award" Carter considers herself a connoisseur of American, Asian and European cities (*SLJ* 250). Apart from Japan and Russia, Anatolia in Asian Turkey, Hong Kong and Bangkok are the other Asiatic places that find mention in Angela Carter's journalistic pieces. "The Back of Beyond" describes Anatolia—its colours, smells and sights. Carter's description of Anatolia begins with a distinction between Third World time and global time. Third World time, writes Carter, is the time of yesterday and tomorrow, and not today, not yet (*SLJ* 252). According to Carter, the colour of Anatolia is purple, its texture that of soiled velvet and its smell—a mixture of the unmistakable stench of horse urine, of almost rotten peaches, of cologne, of unwashed flesh, of goat and of wood smoke reminiscent of socks which has not been washed for long. Carter classifies this as the "authentic smell of the Third World" and proceeds to enumerate out-of-order telephones, cafes run by small boys, and frenzied encounters with bureaucracy as specific indicators of the Third World. These descriptions and generalizations point to remnants of Eurocentrism in Carter's writings. The description of the tea houses, the attire of men and women, and the limited participation of women in social life and their major participation in labour force especially in the agricultural fields all point to Carter's alertness to the gender codes embedded in Turkish culture. Carter visits different parts of the country and, in her own words, takes romantic "'snapshots' of Third World life" (*SLJ* 255). The awareness about romanticizing the images of Turkish life and landscape exhibits a certain degree of self-consciousness though, not completely bereft of orientalising tendencies.

Unlike other women travel writers, Carter does not shy away from describing the history of Turkish struggle for emancipation under the leadership of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk. She narrates the events with such conviction that the questions of authenticity, fictionalization and narrative authority are relegated to the background. Here, Carter comes across as a writer determined to provide a factual description of the land she has visited.

However, on returning home, Carter realizes that her view of Bangkok as “an unholy blend of Edmund Dulac’s illustration to the *Arabian Nights* and Crawley New Town” and the waters of Hong Kong harbour as impossibly green are nothing but barrages of imagery which she has to organize into coherent writings (*SLJ* 252). This realization and the accompanying struggle concur with the struggles of travel writers in general. The inclusions and exclusions cater to and are often determined by the conscious or unconscious interests and ideologies of the writer, forcing the fact/fiction debate back to the forefront. In “Constructing an Australia” as suggested by the title, Carter retraces the path of self-reflexivity and hence, the questions of representation and distortion occupy the centre stage. Rather than describing the people and the landscape of Australia, Carter concentrates on expounding the methods used in constructing an Australia. For instance, she elaborates her experience of attending a writers’ conference in Melbourne, where the phrase “British diaspora” gets her thinking about the strangeness of British Empire, which has now been abandoned by the places once it occupied. The angst of a post-colonial, post-imperial Britain resonates in Carter’s words. She writes, “Australians don’t care that Britain is in an even greater state of post-colonial anguish than they are; why should they? They can more easily face the future without us than we can without them (*SLJ*282). Here, Carter vacillates between fact and fiction, and Eurocentrism and a critique of Eurocentrism.

Travel as a motif and metaphor occurs in most of the novels of Angela Carter. In *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984) travel forms an important part of the narrative. *The Magic Toyshop* begins with the recently orphaned Melanie and her siblings, Jonathon and Victoria, moving to London to stay with their Uncle Philips and family. This journey marks Melanie’s journey from childhood to adolescence and from the security of her home to the dangers of the outside world.

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman recounts the adventures of a young Desiderio, now an old man and the narrator of tale, in pursuit of Doctor Hoffman. Desiderio

as a young man had killed Doctor Hoffman, the omnipotent scientist and professor of metaphysics who had created a machine that could bring to life any desire. The doctor, using his desire machine, had filled the city with mirages that drove many people mad. As Desiderio proved immune to the images and apparitions conjured up by Doctor Hoffman, he was sent to vanquish the doctor and set right his distortion of space and time. In an introduction to the novel, Desiderio states that he “made a journey through space and time, up the river, across a mountain, over the sea, through a forest. Until I[he] came to a certain castle. . . . Expect a tale of picturesque adventure or even heroic adventure. . . .” (13-14). The novel narrates Desiderio’s pursuit of Doctor Hoffman and his first stop in this quest is a seaside village where the mayor has gone missing. In this village, Desiderio is wrongly charged with murder and is arrested. He escapes from the police custody and finds refuge among a tribe of Indians who live by the river. Later Desiderio escapes the river people, who plan to eat him in order to absorb his knowledge, and joins a travelling carnival that is eventually killed in a landslide. Desiderio then meets the Count of Lithuania and his assistant with whom he boards a ship to Europe. The ship is attacked by a group of pirates, and the three of them end up in an African coast where they are captured by a tribe of Amazonian women. During the tortures of the tribe, Desiderio meets his love Albertina and escapes with her. Desiderio and Albertina travel through landscapes that defy imagination, are eventually rescued by Doctor Hoffman’s military and are taken to Doctor Hoffman’s castle that houses the desire machine. Desiderio, in the end, kills Doctor Hoffman and in the process Albertina—as she was a desire brought to life by the doctor’s desire machine, and escapes from the castle. Here, the fabric of the novel is woven with the threads of travel and the accompanying adventures. Desiderio’s encounter with desire is constructed in tandem with his encounters in strange lands with strange people.

Similarly, *The Passion of New Eve* begins with Evelyn, an Englishman, taking up a job in a dystopian New York. In New York, he embarks on a sexual adventure with Leilah—a woman of colour, gets her pregnant, pays for an abortion which goes horribly wrong, abandons her and escapes to the desert. While travelling through the desert, he is captured by a female sect and is taken to the all-female city of Beulah, where, he is surgically castrated and is psychologically programmed to be a woman—Eve. Eve escapes from Beulah, to avoid her impregnation by her/his sperm collected before castration. She is then captured by the one-legged poet Zero, is initiated into his harem, and is included in his search party for Tristessa—a Hollywood icon he holds responsible for his impotence. After their adventures through the desert, Eve escapes from Zero’s captivity, and travels back to the city laden with the horrors

of civil war. Eve, at the end of the novel, travels to a seaside cave occupied by the Mother of Beulah who has now retired and finally, leaves the continent by water. Evelyn's journey to Eve and her/his union with Tristessa, a female impersonator, investigate various theories of gender and sexuality. These investigations are carried out against the background of the travels of Evelyn/Eve. Evelyn, throughout his journeys, uses and abuses women—whether it be the unnamed girl in a theatre in London or Leilah in the city of New York. His castration and the subsequent change to Eve exposes Evelyn to rape and abuse. He becomes the victim of the crimes of which he was once a perpetrator. Evelyn/Eve's experiences in Beulah, a feminist utopia, also exposes the dangers of certain strands of feminism that seek to redress the violence meted out to women by inverting the balance of power associated with the male/female dichotomy. The idea of gender as performance is also investigated during the course of the novel.

In *Nights at the Circus*, travel is integrated into the structure of the novel. The novel is divided into three sections: London, Petersburg and Siberia. Though the novel begins in London, Fevvers—the half-woman, half-bird aerialiste and protagonist of the novel, intends to embark on a 'Grand Imperial Tour' of Russia and Japan from where she plans to take a ship to Seattle and embark on a 'Grand Democratic Tour' of the United States of America. Fevvers' childhood is set in London where she achieves theatrical fame, followed by her travel to Petersburg with Colonel Kearney's circus on its 'Grand Imperial Tour' and the final section of the novel takes place in Siberia where the train in which the circus is travelling is attacked and destroyed by a band of convicts. This journey from Asia to Europe acts as an exposition of the fantastic, the grotesque, the gothic and the carnivalesque in Carter's writings and serves to expose gender in its myriad manifestations. It also exposes European imperialism and its construction of other people and other places. The above-mentioned novels of Carter use the trope of travel to propel the narrative as well as demarcate various stages in the development of the protagonist in each of the novels.

Thus, we see that travel writing, both as literature about travel and as literature with travel as a motif or metaphor, has a significant place in Angela Carter's oeuvre. She employs travel and travel writing to investigate the codes of gender and race embedded in the constructions of the East, and at the same time investigates feminist use of the conventions of travel writing. These investigations and the resultant ambivalence bring out the problems inherent in the representation of femininities and masculinities in travel writings from the "back of beyond." Carter's tales from Japan, both in the form of short stories and journal

articles highlight the mixing of genres and the fluidity of boundaries. The feminist use of travel writing to re-write the conventions of the genre and expose its role in the construction of femininities and masculinities is the focus of Carter's writings. Women's travel writing and its attempts to subvert conventions such as "the rhetoric of peril" sometimes result in a reiteration of rigid boundaries between the private and the public spheres, and fact and fiction that postmodern theorists for long have endeavoured to dismantle. Carter's writings, straddling feminism and postmodernism, offer an alternative by exploring the processes that constructs as well as critiques gender, race, agency and subjectivity. These explorations contribute to the ambivalence in Carter's writings, which seem to prescribe as well as proscribe feminist/anti-feminist, essentialist/anti-essentialist, and Orientalist/reverse-Orientalist tendencies.

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The Freudian Triad at Work in Karnad's *Naga-Mandala*

Ambily Mohan

Sigmund Freud has been accepted as the father of psychoanalysis as he was the most influential physiologist and psychologist of the twentieth century. Freudian theory elaborates that the human mind is a complex system. His works are based on the development and working of the concepts of unconscious, infantile sexuality, repression and on the tripartite structure of human mind. Freudian analysis points out that the human mind is a system of energy. Psychology investigates the modifications, transmissions and conversion of energy within the personality which shape and structure and determine it.

The most significant contribution that Freud has brought about is his concept about the unconscious. The concept of the unconscious has been highly significant; it says that awareness existed in many layers. The pre-conscious, a layer between conscious and unconscious thought is the part of mind that represents ordinary memory. The conscious mind provides everything that we are aware of. It includes rationality. The unconscious is the reservoir of thoughts, memories, feelings and urges that reside outside our unconscious mind. Most of its contents include feelings of pain, anxiety or conflict that are mostly unacceptable or unpleasant. Mind is unaware of the underlying influences that the unconscious puts upon us. The unconscious operates according to repressed memories which are banished from consciousness. Freud explains the working of the unconscious by proposing the tripartite structure of the unconscious: id, ego and super-ego.

Girish Karnad makes use of folklores and myths as a base for his plays. *Naga-Mandala* which is based on pure folk lore brings about a cobra into the life of a married couple. This play is influenced by myths that form a strong part of Indian life. Naga-mandala is a religious ritual invoking naga, the snake god of Hindu religion who grants the wishes of his devotees, especially the wishes for fertility. Naga is believed to be a creator as well as the destroyer of energy.

Naga-Mandala is about Rani, her husband Appanna, an old lady Kurudavva and a Naga who gets enchanted under the influence of a magical potion. Naga is a foil to Appanna who denies Rani everything a woman would look for in a married life. Naga confronts Rani with a happy life which she has always dreamt of providing her with emotional care, attachment and protection. He gives her a blissful life. The play presents a lot of preternatural events and one such is occurred by the presence of magical roots that can enchant anyone. Rani accepts them believing Kurudavva's advice. Kurudavva promises her that Appanna will blindly be in love with her from the moment he sips the magical mixture. As the first root makes Appanna faint, Rani pours the mixture into the ant hill which makes the King Cobra fall in love with her.

Freudian theory propounds that there are dozens of explicit or overt symbolic equations in folklore and a readily available one such illustrative instance is the alleged phallic symbolism in snakes. Psychoanalysis puts that the snake dreams represents sexual desires; snakes are icons of repressed sexual desire. The fear of snakes, mice and other animals in male is a converted castration anxiety and this anxiety is based upon an innate primal phantasy which in turn is supposed to have been evolved during phylogeny as a result of actual castration in primeval people. Ian Buchanan in his *Dictionary of Critical Theory* states: "The id is a reservoir of energy that the other parts of the psychological apparatus draw on, but must also contain if they are not to be overwhelmed by it. The id does not understand 'no'; it is the pleasure principle unconstrained by the reality principle" (242).

Naga is the id in the play; it depicts the working of libidinal energy. Naga depicts an explicit form of sexual desire. Freud explains that id is the reservoir of libido, the primary source of all psychic energy. It functions to fulfill the primordial life principle, which Freud considers to be the pleasure principle. The id is characterized by a tremendous and amorphous vitality without consciousness or semblance of rational order. Guerin in his *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* defines id as:

...a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement[with]no organization and no confined will only an impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs, in accordance with the pleasure principle. Freud further stresses that the laws of logic above all the law contradiction do not hold for processes of the id. Contradictory impulses exert side by side without neutralizing each other or drawing apart. . . Naturally, the id knows no values, no good and evil, no morality. (157)

Naga is worshipped in India as a fertility symbol, a creator and a destroyer. Freudian theory states snake dreams as the unconscious image of a feared male sexual organ thereby snake itself becomes the manifestation of sexual desire, an explicit symbol of libido. The id is in short the root of all aggression and desires, which is lawless, savage and amoral. Its concern refers for pure instinctual gratification. Id stands against social conventions, moral restraints and may lead to self-destruction in pursuit of satisfying pleasure instincts.

In the play Naga plays a pivotal role. The magic root evokes undiminishing love in King Cobra urging him to masquerade as Naga. Rani never detects that the man beside her is a snake who has fallen in love with her. His soothing words and presence changes Rani, her liveliness comes back. Naga affirms her with care and protection that Appanna has denied her. He even engages in a fight with the dog and gets seriously injured while trying to meet Rani during the night. The moment they meet he forgets the pain and anguish. Naga assures her that he is not a figment of her imagination. He wants her to reciprocate his love. Naga even promises that he would not let her cry again. He gives her the promise to let her visit her parents so that she would be happy in life. Naga pays attention to the minute details regarding her life. Unlike the Appanna, he shows attachment, care and nurtures a bond towards Rani. She feels that her life has come to be a meaningful one. She gets satisfied in her married life because of Naga.

Naga is blindly in love with Rani, his desire for Rani is a form of sexual affinity; also he does not want her to get hurt. He saves Rani before the Village Elders; he makes Rani take the snake ordeal. The play has three endings and in the second one Naga arrives at Rani's house after the ordeal but he cannot bear to see Rani and Appanna together, he cannot face the scene where Rani is living a happy life with Appanna. The presence of another man beside Rani evokes hatred in him and commits suicide within her long tresses. In the third ending Rani allows the snake to enter her tresses. Here the hair has become the symbol of their wedded bliss. Naga symbolizes the libidinal force which is part of id. Id is against moral restraints and in the play Naga does not value any morality and that is why he changes himself as Appanna and approaches Rani. For Naga, his desire for Rani is like obsession. He craves for her and is not bothered about anything else. His method of saving Rani ultimately makes her a goddess before others. Id makes one do whatever feels good at the time, without any consideration for the reality of situation. His urge makes him fight with the dog, the mongoose and all other hurdles which create a distraction in their relationship. His love for Rani makes him save Rani during the ordeal. Naga helps her to prove herself innocent before the village elder which in

turn makes her status elevated. After the snake ordeal Rani is presumed to be a goddess incarnation and the whole village takes her as a divine figure. The life with Appanna can be taken as a gift from Naga.

In India Cobra is the fertility symbol. Naga is a form of pure nature, untamed nature. Most household, groves and temples worship snake as god. People believe that a snake is powerful enough to grant them any wish, it forms a powerful presence in the Hindu religion. The play presents Naga as a pure revelation of pleasure principle. Naga's aim is to gratify his desire and he stands up against every impediment in his way to reach Rani. Compared with Appanna who is the ego, Naga is wild and free. Appanna is modulated by the society and values. As time demands Appanna varies in his approaches towards Rani. In the beginning Appanna was cold in his perspective towards Rani whereas by the end his life becomes inferior. Rani becomes the prime factor in his life. Naga has only one thing supreme in his life and that is Rani.

Appanna represents the ego, the reality principle. It is that part of id which has been modified by the world outside. Ego brings up the influence of the external world; it is the seat of anxiety threatened by dangers from outside. Celine Suprenant defines: "The ego is that portion of the id which was modified by the proximity and influence of the external world which has become the decisive factor the ego, it has taken on the task of representing the external world to the id. In that account the ego accomplishes the task of reality-testing, distinguishing what comes from the inside and the outside. The ego dethrones the pleasure principle and replaces it by the reality principle" (117-18).

Appanna approaches Rani coldly showing no sign of love towards her. He never pays attention towards her. Keeping her under strict rule whenever allows her to ask questions. Rani is made to cook for him and he goes away locking her after he finishes his food. When Rani says that she is afraid of being alone at night Appanna retorts, "What is there to be scared of? Just keep to yourself. No one will bother you" (28). This shows that he wants her to obey him, without challenging him. Appanna becomes the symbol of an arrogant male who dislikes being questioned by his wife. Appanna wants nobody near Rani. His reply to Kurudavva shows his hatred towards others, "She won't talk to anyone. And no one needs talk to her" (34). In *Dictionary of Critical Theory*, Buchanan points out:

The ego is that part of the psychological apparatus which acts as an agent of the self. However, it is only one part of the psychological apparatus and cannot be fully understood in isolation

from the other components, namely id and the super-ego. It is the product of a gradual process of differentiation in early childhood between the internal impulses of desire rising up from the id and the equally powerful pressures of external reality [whose avatar is the super-ego]. . . . Freud described the ego as being like a rider sitting on a horse, the horse being the id; like a rider, the ego draws on the energy of the forces it sits astride [namely the instincts], but it must also take care to defend itself against those very same forces, which have the power to unseat it. Symptoms like anxiety and hysteria are the ego's pathological response to the pressures of the id. (146)

Appanna fits into fury when Rani becomes pregnant. He was quite confused over the fact that she got pregnant even when she was locked inside the house and he being out with the prostitute. When he gets to know that Rani is five months pregnant he becomes morally indignant. Appanna demands to know the truth and makes her appear before the village elders for judgement. He behaves according to the situation. He wants to know the truth and is eager to do so. He knows that Rani has cheated him. Even the village Elders believes what Appanna tells them. Second Elder says, "It brings no credit to the village to have a husband publically question his wife's chastity. But Appanna here says: Since the day of our wedding, I have not once touched my wife or slept by her side .And yet she is pregnant. He has registered the complaint, so we must judge its merit" (55).

The consciousness is attached to the ego; it is the mental agency which supervises all its own constituent processes. Appanna is such a character who is governed by ego consciousness, and is in a conflicted position. It is charged with perception, reality testing and satisfying one's desires under the constraints of accurate beliefs about the world. As Peter Gay points out: "From the point of view of instinctual control of morality, it may be aid of id that it is totally non moral, of the ego that it strives to be moral, and of the super ego that it can be super moral and then become as cruel as only the id can be" (655).

There are two sides to Appanna: the one before the snake ordeal and the one after the ordeal. After the snake ordeal he is baffled. When Rani swears by taking the snake in her hands that, except for her husband and the King Cobra she has not touched anyone of the male sex, the Cobra slides up her shoulders and forms like a garland around her neck. People lift Appanna when she is taken to be goddess incarnate. The Elders tell him that he is chosen as an instrument for revealing her divinity. Unable to comprehend a thing, he realizes that everything has changed and he accepts Rani and apologizes to her for his follies. Appanna becomes

perplexed by Rani's behaviour. Even though he knows that the baby is not his, he is forced to accept her and the baby. M.H Abrams points out the ego as " which tries as best it can to negotiate the conflicts between the insatiable demands of the id, the impossibly stringent requirements of the super-ego, and the limited possibilities of gratification offered by reality" (249).

The alternate endings also portray the ego consciousness in his behaviour. The second ending has got the Cobra planning to kill Rani; instead it gets into Rani's hair and dies in there. When Appanna takes out the dead snake from her hair he is mortified. Even he accepts her plea to ritually cremate the Cobra with their son performing the rituals. Appanna changes according to the world outside. He is manipulated by the surroundings. Once he was full of hatred for Rani but now when the society accepts her as a goddess he also admires her. It is he himself who is deprived of the rights to question Rani. He follows her orders now. In the third ending the live snake falls out of Rani's hair and when Appanna goes to fetch the stick Rani lets Naga climb up her hair again. She remarks the hair as the symbol of her wedded bliss. Hence Appanna is not even made aware of the presence of Cobra.

Appanna takes society as important; he accepts what others consider as important. He knows the value of life that is to follow after Rani is being elevated to the level of a goddess. He cares only for the position, even though he knows that Rani has cheated him he gives prominence to the position that he is about to get. He is baffled by everything else. He never questions her further. Appanna becomes attached to the rigid social form. Appanna becomes loyal to his wife; he starts respecting Rani and never goes to visit the prostitute.

Rani acquires a powerful position in his life and Appanna becomes bound to follow her like a shadow because society makes him do so. He adapts according to the society around him and tries to be a decent husband after the ordeal. He adapts to the environment and takes into consideration the judgement of the people. The play puts forward the changes in Appanna from a cruel and arrogant husband to a loyal figure. The ego consciousness of Appanna is well evident in the play. He is modified by the world outside; he cares about his image and tries to keep up the rules and norms of society when he realizes that there is nothing he could do.

He wants the opinion and respect of others. He wants to portray himself as a well behaved man irrespective of the fact that he has committed adultery. For him Rani's pregnancy is unacceptable since he cannot afford to believe that she has found a lover. His self tries to portray her as the adulterous woman who has betrayed her husband. Appanna tries hard to

win the opinion of elders to prove her sinful but in turn fails because of the snake ordeal where Rani revives herself unaffected by the King Cobra.

As it is said ego becomes our identity, its role is to move through what is real and what is not real via organization of our thoughts to make sense of them and how they become relative to the world we live in. Freud theorized that ego is constantly under the strain and pulse of causing discontent on the two sides of id and super-ego. Freud pointed out that ego is to be more loyal to id; we can see that in the play too Appanna is moving from the position of id to ego. He is mended by the world out and he undergoes certain process of character evolution whereby he becomes part of ego and gradually becomes a faithful husband.

Rani represents super-ego in the play. She is a naive and faithful girl who has had a good life at her home, is now left alone at her husband's house. On the first day after their marriage Appanna leaves her in the house all alone during the night. Rani is made to sit alone and weep. In her marital life Appanna never reciprocates her love. Appanna is all about giving commands. He says "Look, I don't like idle chatter. Do as you are told, you understand?" (28). She obeys each command. Her life turns topsy-turvy the moment she comes to Appanna's house. She depicts a simple girl married off to a husband chosen by her parents. Rani is raised as a queen by her parents, but Appanna treats her as a slave. The way she is brought up by her parents and the way Appanna treats her as a wife are entirely different, but Rani is bound to follow him as she accepts the norms of the society. She accepts that her life is to be with Appanna; he is an authority figure for her.

Freud states that super-ego stays at the highest position. Moral section dominates in persons who project super-ego, it is perfection incarnated. Peter Gay points out:

Super-ego operates in accordance with social conformity and appropriateness. Super-ego regulates our sense of right and wrong. It helps assimilate into social structure around us via making us act in socially acceptable ways. It acts as our conscience, maintaining our sense of morality and perception from taboos. (62)

Rani is a tender girl, a symbol, a symbol of typical Indian village girl, she is not wicked. Rani is simple and virtuous. Her action, behaviour, speech and manners are all appropriate and symbolize a well brought up girl. Rani is ruled by society and family. She longs to join her parents and also yearns for affection that is not superficial. Whenever she tries to be near Appanna he shows great aversion to her presence. Rani's marital life fulfills when Naga comes to her life. She believes that it is her husband who visits her during the night. Naga fulfills her

expectations. Naga's words fill her life with happiness. Naga says "I know, you want to see your parents, don't you? All right. I'll arrange that. Truly. Now smile. Just a bit. Look, I'll send you to them only if you smile now" (40).

Naga's care makes her sensitive; she gives herself up on his shoulders. When Appanna comes during day time she is confused to see the scorn on his face. The furious Appanna makes Rani believe that she was having a dream the earlier night. She says, "His visit last night- I assumed I must have dreamt that. I am certainly not dreaming now. Which means I am going mad. Spending the whole day by myself is rotting my brain" (42).

For her, Appanna's presence during the night as if it is a dream itself is consoling. She is happy to see him during night and quite shocked to see the scorn on his face the next day. Society, tradition, elders and norms produce a big effect on her life. Her life is being shaped by these factors. Rani keeps herself as an obedient wife.

Freud describes that super-ego stays in the highest position in the personal structure. And the subject lives in the social forms and revives social culture and promotes social morality, which gradually constructs super-ego. Suprenant says:

The super-ego is unconscious. It has three functions of self-observation, moral conscience and is the site of the formation of ideals. There are conflicts between the ego and the super-ego, which result in the feeling of guilt or the feeling of inferiority on the part of the ego. The id and the super-ego are in conflict. In seeking instinctual satisfaction, the ego attempts to push aside the 'voice' of the super-ego, together with the id, is an heir to the influence of the past, in that it is a precipitate of paternal influence and of that of other authority figures, whereas the id goes back to an immemorial past. It is with reference to its relation between the ego and the super ego that the ego can be said to be 'precipitate' of earlier identifications. (118)

Super-ego is the agency that tries to enforce the striving for perfection as it holds out to the ego ideal standards and moralistic goals. Rani also strives for perfection in her life. She wants her husband to lead a normal life. Rani protests against Appanna insulting her parents but never asks Naga about his departure during day time.

Rani is compassionate, weak and a little gullible. She is calm and serene and lives in the social forms according to social morals. Super-ego has two parts, one is ego ideal and the other is conscience. The ego ideal includes the real standards for good behaviour. These

behaviours include those which are approved of by parental and other authority figures. The conscience includes information about things that are viewed as bad by parents and society. These behaviours are often forbidden and lead to bad consequences, punishments, feelings of guilt or remorse. These ideals that contribute to the formation of the super-ego include not just the morals and values that we have learned from our parents, but also the ideas about right and wrong that we acquire from society and the culture in which we live.

Rani cannot understand why Appanna is behaving strangely during the daytime and so comforting during the night. She feels left alone when she is made to face the judgment of the Elders. Even though Naga comforts her, she says "... give me poison instead. Kill me right here. At least I'll be spared the humiliation. Won't the cobra bite me the moment I touch it? I'll die like your dog and your mongoose" (53). She is furious with Naga taking two sides "What truth? Shall I say my husband forgets his nights by next morning? Shall I say my husband brought a dog and a mongoose to kill this cobra, and yet suddenly seems to know all about what the cobra will do or not do?" (54).

Rani loves her husband but is unable to follow his ways. He behaves weary sometimes and at times furious. The snake ordeal proves Rani innocent and she is elevated to the level of a goddess. The first ending gives a very short glimpse of their life where Rani and Appanna live happily. In this part Rani has accepted the morals of the society and followed the life her parents show her. The super-ego is the aspect of personality that holds the internalized morals of standards and ideals that are acquired from both parents and society. Rani expects her husband to lead a family life and care for her intimately.

Rani believes blindly in traditions and superstitions. She believes that taking a Cobra's name itself will invite cobra to the house. She is afraid of the calamity it will bring. Rani is blindly following the norms of society. She is accepting whatever the elders tell her. First she follows her parents and later she is obliged to be a loyal wife. She believes that a husband has the right to do anything with his wife and she tries to bring back her husband from the clutches of the prostitute. The super-ego is not concerned with reality. It seeks the ideal answer to a situation of how practical it may be. This ideal is determined by the society.

Rani also depicts the village girl blinded by traditional morality. She bears in mind the beautiful memories of her childhood where her parents doted on her, she urges for a blissful life with Appanna. The harsh nature of Appanna fills her with anguish. Rani expects her husband to be trustworthy and loving. Rani is obedient to him always; she nurtures a bond of

love and respect towards Appanna irrespective of his unemotional nature towards her. She never questions him and accepts whatever he says. Rani fails to realise that the man she slept with was not her husband but a snake. Her life comes to be meaningful after the snake ordeal where Appanna accepts her. Rani never gets to know that Naga is the father of her child. She believes that the snake has protected and saved her child. She begins to worship the snake as a saviour. She never gets the illusion that the magic root has made so many complications in her life. Rani loves her husband as she did earlier and gives due respect to him. She remains a faithful and obedient wife throughout the play.

Girish Karnad is one among the nineteenth century writers who has let a breath of fresh air incorporating myth and local culture into his thought provoking plays. Karnad's plays are compact with allusions, references and images. He treats myths and history incorporating his artistic craft. The author's enigma is vibrant throughout the acts. He creates and re-creates myths to synchronize the past and presence to put contemporaneity side by side with history.

Naga-Mandala infuses myth and folklore into the context. The title itself implies a deeper level of meaning associated with the play. The play presents the life of rural India incorporating superstitions, magic and traditional believes. The play depicts the socialization process together with man-woman relationship; it shows the transition from childhood into adolescence and the very different stages and psychological as well as cultural relationships. The Cobra becomes the central force in the play. Myths and folklores are interpreted as symbols that are culturally constructed to shape the individual according to the moral and traditional codes. Karnad treats them as a device to look back into the age bygone as well as to analyze the present. The energy of folk theatre lies in the fact that they holds up traditional values and questions these values.

Focusing on a psychoanalytic level *Naga-Mandala* brings forth numerous levels of implied meanings. Rani's dreams are symbolic of her wishes to be fulfilled. Appanna becomes a common man who is ruled by the society and Naga is the true symbol of energy that is vibrant and sexual. Naga represents the id; he is driven by sexual desire. He is very passionate and is impulsive. Appanna is the ego in the play. He is driven by the reality principle. He acts according to the situation. He is bound by the society and accepts Rani even though he knows that the child is not his. He becomes a caring and protective husband after the ordeal. Rani is the super-ego figure in the play. Rani is an ardent follower of the traditions and values. She believes in rule bound living and pronouncement. She is a virtuous girl. The super-ego aspect

of her personality holds the internalized morals and standards acquired from both parents and society. She is blindly following traditions and is superstitious in certain aspects.

This study unravels how the three major characters reflect and represent Freud's id, ego and super-ego and how their life projects the traits of the triad. The play is not just a part of folklore; it has its implications even in the recent years socio-culturally.

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Theorizing Feminism: A Reading of Thaslima Nasrin's *French Lover*

Lynda Stanley

Taslima Nasrin is a born Muslim from Bangladesh, who became an atheist and radical feminist over a period of time. She started her career as a medical practitioner and examined many ladies who had suffered physical or sexual abuse. All these experiences turned her into a completely different human being. She quit her full time job when she felt it was time to express her anguish towards the society using her writings. She published half a dozen poems, prose, essays and novels in the early nineties with focus on the oppression of women by patriarchal society. However, her initial works were very generic in nature. Taslima Nasrin, an award-winning writer, secular humanist and human rights activist, is known for her powerful writings on women oppression and unflinching criticism of religion, despite forced exile and multiple fatwa calling for her death. Not many have risked their life to tell the truth. In India, Bangladesh and abroad, Nasrin's fiction, poetry and memoir have topped the best-seller's list.

As a radical feminist writer, Taslima sees men as oppressive, chauvinistic, self-obsessed, and commoditizing women. Her interviews and social media posts are even more expressive about these traits as she opens up her experiences about men. Let us see what Taslima Nasrin believes about male mind-set and behavior. *French Lover* (translated from Bangala by Sreejata Guha) describes the heroic struggle of a simple, Bengali girl, Nila who comes face to face with the harsh realities of life. She has to pay a very heavy price for leading her life according to her own wishes. She finds the male patriarchal society highly suffocating and does not wish to succumb to it. Throughout the novel, she strives to achieve emotional and financial independence.

Nila, the daughter of Dr. Anirban Mondol and Mrs. Molina Mondol gets married to Kishenlal, who own a restaurant in Paris. There is a sharp contrast in the age of Nila and Kishenlal. After the marriage, she settles down in Paris, one of the most romantic cities of the

world. But it comes as an irony on her part that there is no romance in their marital relationship. Kishenlal leaves for restaurant in the early morning and returns late in the night. Nile has nothing to do here except to take care of the domestic duties. She finds her life very tedious and full of drudgery. She wants to roam around France, wants to see the beauty of this city. But her husband does not have any time for her. Surprisingly and shockingly, he does not allow Nile to go out alone. He promises her to take her out, whenever he will get time. But it seldom happens. Whenever Kishenlal takes her out, their visits are limited to the preference of Kishenlal.

Gradually Nile starts feeling her own home as a prison. No luxury could comfort her disturbed mind. She keeps on dragging this relationship in order to keep her relatives and parents happy. Her parents are in fact very happy that their daughter does not have to carry any financial burden, and there are no other family members to take care of. Eventually, Nile finds a dark secret of her husband. He keeps an extra marital affair with a girl, named, Imanuelle. This reality shatters down Nile but somehow she could maintain her inner composure. Bruised and humiliated, she manages to find a job in the box-packing factory with the help of Sunil, her brother's friend. This is strongly resented by Kishenlal. Here she comes in contact with two girls, named Catherine and Danielle- who prove to be oasis in such an arid land. They provide them the emotional support. The frequent humiliation on the part of Kishenlal made her stay in the apartment of Danielle. It proves to be a blessing in disguise for Kishenlal who never takes pain to call her back.

She realizes the futility of human relationship when she visits India after the demise of her mother. Her own father and brother insist her to go back to Paris after few days of staying in India. She is dishevelled to find that she does not have any right over her parental home. She returns to France. In the flight, She comes into contact with Benoit Dupont, a fellow passenger. His sympathy and warm attitude comforted her disturbed soul and she finds herself attracted to him and vice versa. Benoit is so much fascinated by her that he deserts his own wife and 3 year old Jaqueline. Nile, who inherits a sum of 20 lacs, buys a luxurious apartment in Paris and moves with Benoit.

This relationship also does not last long and Nile finds herself completely disillusioned. She intends to abort the baby she carries in her womb. Benoit pleads her not to do so and promises to marry her. But she rejects his proposal and makes up her mind to abort the child. She buys a flat in the cheap locality and decides to live her life on her own terms.

French Lover begins with the description of Nila alighting at the Charles de Gaulle “draped in a red silk sari with gold on her ears, nose and hands smudged bindi on her forehead and sindoor smeared in her hair”. She has dressed in this manner simply because her father had insisted her to do so and it was meant to please her husband, Kishanlal, on her arrival in France to spend the rest of her life with him. The novel also throws light upon Indians attachment to the yellow metal. A ceremony like the wedding would be incomplete without gold and the status of a family is often measured in terms of the amount of sovereigns gifted to the bride by her parents. She had agreed to this marriage simply because her „high caste lover; Sushanta had ditched her and since it was improper in her society for a lady of marriageable age to stay alone. Kishan had known all about Nila’s affair before their marriage whereas she did not know much about him including his previous marriage with a French woman. During the Couple’s fight with each other, Nila is often blamed for her previous relationship whereas Kishan takes some sort of pride in announcing that his relationship with the French lady was necessary and it is just because of this that Nila is even enjoying her French citizenship.

Initially, the identity of the protagonist is not revealed to the readers, instead the author simply says, - “Red Sari had come from her father’s hotel to her husband’s. Life would pass between one hotel and the other.” (2) This is the case with most women in the sub- continent: as a child, a girl is forced to identify with her father, as a wife she is tagged along with her husband and as a mother she is forced to be identified with her son. Nila, waiting in the airport, surrounded by walls of steel is symbolic of her own caged existence which she experiences throughout her life. The moment Nila steps out of the airport, her husband eyes her as a “red, juicy piece of meat” (11), something for him to savour and to be enjoyed. On the day of her arrival in France, Kishan displays his “catch” before his friends who make comments on her bodily features.

After all his friends leave the house Kishan dictates to Nila the duties that are expected to be done by her, just because she happens to be a woman. She will have to cook wonderfully for her husband, keep his house clean and will have to yield to his sexual advances also. He also makes it a point to say that she could compromise on her tastes and likings since she is a woman, and also because it would be difficult to cater to two different kinds of habits in the same house.

When Nila confides in him that she is not a good cook, he confronts her with the question: “how can you be a woman and not know how to cook” (24) and gifts her later with books on cooking so that she can prepare food items of his choice and he also asks her to take tips from Sahana and Chaitali who are “accomplished cooks”. When they visit Sunil’s house, Kishan reprimands his wife openly for reading books and that too with her legs up on the sofa and asks her to help Chaitali in the kitchen. According to him there were certain etiquettes to be followed by Indian women. Nila’s husband also did not want to discuss about his business with her since he felt that women were insipid and ignorant. Nila had been conditioned in such a manner that she considers it wrong to strip before a male doctor, without seeking permission from her husband. After having stitches on the forehead Kishan remarks that her beauty was lost. Nila was his “property” and if she was all right all credit was due him. Nila was not allowed to venture out of the house alone, she could only see the city when Kishan can spare the time for her. Moreover, she has little choice when it comes to buying things even with the money earned by her. He expects her to behave like a typical “Indian wife”, who does not answer back and question him. In fact Kishan expected from his wife not just qualities, but beauty as well— so Nila had to take a bath, do her face and wear a nice sari before he came home every evening after his job. She had to run a household without pay. She had just one identity, that of Mrs. Kishanlal. She had to gratify her husband’s wishes since she had no money of her own. A wife is expected to respect her husband; and when Nila did not put her leg down on seeing him, he grows impatient at her and shouts at her, that he has given her all sorts of luxuries to live with.

He cannot understand what “independence” means to Nila; why she needs money and job of her own. Sunil, the match- maker was called to say that Nila was disobeying her husband so that her family and friends could give her “good advice”. Kishan also becomes furious when she cooks her traditional Bengali delicacies like fish and meat for her European friends although he expects her to cook dishes whenever his friends were visiting them. He thinks that Nila was making use of every opportunity to insult him, since she has got a job of her own and money in her hands.

In their initial days of marriage, Nila had to ask him for money whenever she was in need and although Kishan considered that looking after his wife was part of his duty, for Nila, it came with a price. She says to Kishan: “I have to live according to your wishes because you are the master; you are the boss; without you my life is pointless and I am a mere servant who’ll clean your house, cook, serve and provide sexual gratification at night.... I have to

give you an heir. I have to because you want it, as if it has nothing to do with me, and everything to do with you. this I, who has evolved over so many years, has to give up her habits, her language, her culture, her nature and fit herself into your mould”(79,80). This attitude of Kishan towards his wife is apparently due to his upbringing- he was taught right from the age of six not to indulge in the whims and fancies of the women folk. Often, Nila is forced to remember her childhood days, when Sunil, her brother’s friend would laugh at her for reading books enthusiastically. He used to make fun of her constantly by reminding her that she would end up finally doing household chores, however educated she may be.

At social gatherings and parties, while men talks of politics, industries, cricket and so on women are expected to discuss about “trivia”l issues like cooking, children and so on. Nila often remembers her mother, Molina, and compares her life with Kishan to Molina’s who has been a perfect homemaker”. Her mother; although belonging to a rich family, is forced to make a lot of sacrifices to fit into the role of an ideal housewife”, and that too in the wake of her knowledge about her husband’s illegal affair. Her father was never satisfied with whatever her mother did and always complained and although Molina tries hard to please her husband, she fails miserably. She had to stick on to the role of an “ideal housewife” or else she would be called a “misfit” by her family and the society at large. Nila also remembers that whenever she came back home after college, she would search for her mother in the bedroom, kitchen, puja or vegetable garden on the terrace. These are some of the places meant for the women folk in most Indian households. Her father and her brother are not concerned about Molina even when she is critically ill. No one spoke about this because that’s how “women often are in their husband’s house” (142). Even when Molina was twitching in pain, they did not want to spare time for her although Anirban was a doctor himself. This was to be her destiny, even though “she’d never looked after herself, paid any heed to her own pleasure or health”.(142) Even as Molina takes her last breath, Nikhil and Anirban, ignoring her painful wailing are sleeping soundly in the room next to hers.

French Lover underlines the necessity of rational thinking and disinterested self-analysis which in turn enable a person to see the truth. Nasrin says with conviction that when men would start reviewing their actions and thoughts rationally, many evils and wrongs being done to women will disappear from the society automatically. She uses the character of Anirban, (father to Nila and husband to Molina) to reassert the fact that men are generally reluctant to be rational particularly in a matter that appertains women. Nila exposes this aspect of a man’s personality through Anirban. Readers are seized with shock when Nila unmask the vain

aristocracy and snobbishness of Anirban whose wife (Monila) embraced death only due to his own purposeful negligence. Nila, in an exasperated state, reminds Anirban:

When you sit here alone, don't you ever feel sorry, feel that you could have prevented this disease (Monila's cancer) if you had treated her instead of ignoring it. You were a professor of gastroenterology, and still are. Don't you feel sorry that although you are a doctor and Ma relied on you, she's dying without treatment because you never spared her a second glance. (Nasrin 2002:144)

Nasrin points to the pathetic death of Nila's mother and holds Anirban responsible for the death as he neither paid attention to her sickness nor even treated her despite being a professor of gastroenterology. Monila knew that Anirban turned a deaf ear to her and that he would do nothing for her treatment. She also knew that her death is imminent. Psychologically, she was ready for her journey to the other world because she had already resigned herself to her lot. But Monila's was an inexplicably aching heart and what caused the pain was Anirban's indifference to her and absence of love in his heart for his wife. Anirban was not bothered about his wife's death because he had Swathi Sen to cater to his needs. Such cruelty is not uncommon in patriarchal society.

Nasrin draws a parallelism between Kishan and Anirban's behavior and explicitly shows that Kishan's behavior with Nila is no different from Anirban's with Monila. Nila was in a world of boredom when her husband used to be away who never took interest in Nila's wishes and desires. He did not like spending time outside with Nila and therefore, Nila had to keep herself confined to 'the gilded cage' of Kishanlal. Nila's happiness knows no bound when she is taken outside by Danielle. The novelist shows Nila's ecstasy, "She had never felt so happy, so free in Paris." (Nasrin, 2002:81)

A few days after her mother's death Nila is asked to leave her house in Calcutta since married women "come to their father's house for a short while, not to stay"(155). She is also advised to "behave properly"; so that everyone approves of her and that her father and brother can hold their head high in society. Evidently one can see that, tradition; which insists on values like love and devotion from women towards their families has crippled the growth and development of their personality.

After her escape from Kishan, Nila meets her French lover, and she becomes quite intimate with him. She feels his love for her with her body and soul and she gets the feeling that after all her life was worth living. But later, the relationship becomes complicated, for Benoit Dupont was a married man with a daughter and he cared for his legal wife, Pascale and his daughter. Finally Nila realizes that her French lover's intimacy towards her was also "performance oriented" rather than "process oriented". He too was not much different from Kishan, her Indian husband who dominated her. Sunil, her brother's friend also misunderstands her longing for love, care and protection and assaults her sexually. He raped Nila in a foreign country where she was helpless and approached him for help mistakenly believing that he was the only one who could help her out in Paris. Sunil takes advantage of her helplessness and rapes her and she does not have a language to express the psychological injury Sunil has caused to her shattering all her trust on Sunil. Thus one can see that in the three stages of Nila's life, patriarchy plays a role in conditioning her to accept the roles defined for a female by tradition.

There is also a notion in our society that fair skin is superior to dark skin, especially with regard to women which is of course generated and maintained by the billion dollar cosmetic and beauty industry. Mithu, Nila's cousin remains unmarried since no boy is willing to marry her because of her dark skin. Finally, she is forced to commit suicide so that she would not be a burden to her family. Mithu's suicide is an important happening in the novel through which Taslima Nasrin exposes the dangerous internalization of patriarchic norms even by people victimized by such norms. Taslima refers to the reaction of the members of her family to Mithu's suicide, "Nila saw Mithu's mother wailing. She wailed, but there was a tinge of relief in it. But her suicide brought even greater relief for her parents, her brother, who could now marry a suitable girl for a huge dowry." (154) Nila's brother, Nikhil too was in search of a fair girl, although he was dark in colour and when Nila questions this, he says "it doesn't matter if a man is dark". (272) Thus male dominated society ostracises women who are dark in colour. Psychological wounds that Mithu was carrying about all along remained confined to herself. Her bleeding heart remained closed as no patriarch was ready to pay attention to her. Mithu's own father, brother, and mother accepted her death as a relief from the insult and humiliation the society and its beliefs heaped on them. Thus, Taslima Nasrin uses pathos in her novels as a vehicle for generating feelings for the suppressed section of the society.

Thus, the case of women in Taslima Nasrin's fiction is archetypal case of exploitation and suffering. Her heroines rarely submit to their antagonists. They revolt against patriarchy

and assert their identity in the best possible way. Nila of *French Lover* asserts herself in the matters of sexuality and economic freedom. Thaslima Nasrin's writings reflect over-riding feminist concerns. Her women protagonists' who have been traditionally and perpetually victims of a nexus between religion and patriarchy exhibit a rare courage to come out and voice their protest against injustice and assert their identity in terms of their physical, emotional and intellectual journeys. Thus, on the one hand Thaslima Nasrin reflects through her women characters the various mechanizations through which society victimizes them, on the other hand, she also sympathizes with them and delineates them in a manner, where they, using the weapons of education and economic freedom, emerge victorious.

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Resistance and Resilience in Growing up Dalit: A Study of Laxman Mane's *Upara*

Elizabeth John & Asha Susan Jacob

Dalit literature, which has emerged as one of the most powerful streams of Indian literature, sprouted out of the angst of generations of an ill-fated lot. It is the voice of the subaltern, a considerable section of the Indian society which has been marginalized or ostracized, namely, the Dalits. It is the expression of the pain and agony of these oppressed masses and their longing for a casteless society. It is a struggle for reinventing identity.

The thematic concerns, vocabulary and vision of Dalit literature stand distinct, asserting an independence of its own, even challenging the established notions of what constitutes literature and how we read it. The ardent spirit, the strong commitment and the purpose which enkindled these writings induced the translation of several of these works from their various regional languages into other languages within and beyond the nation, and has thus ascertained their niche in the international arena of literature.

Dalit literature may be analysed as protest literature, revolting against and resisting exploitation, cultural hegemony and dominant ideology, and fighting for social and economic emancipation. Through self-sustained efforts, Dalit writers have been able to raise themselves up from their former servility and assert themselves into proud, respectable positions.

Amongst Dalit writings, autobiography stands foremost, challenging all other literary structures through their enunciation of “hidden histories of hurt and humiliation”(Rao 3). Not only has there been a preponderance of Dalit autobiographies, but fictional writing too has incorporated the biographical or autobiographical form to narrate the Dalit experience. According to Devy “. . . autobiography is the most potent and often exercised form of fiction produced in Dalit literature” since they focus on issues “. . . of otherness, difference, marginality, canon and the categories of aesthetics . . .” and the writers voice their protest following “. . . the subversive historiographic path of personalizing history” (272).

A study of Dalit autobiographies discloses the abysmal experiences that the Dalits went through. They give readers a direct familiarity of how the community lived, their struggle for survival, and the hardships and humiliation they faced, and thereby raise questions of propriety and denied justice.

There has been both assent as well as dissent among Dalit scholars over the matter of Dalits writing autobiographies. While a few strongly condemn the effort, for reawakening the unkind, ugly, ulcerous past, others have been encouraging, and acknowledge the significance – historical, cultural and political – and relevance of promoting the genre. Repudiating the criticism that Dalit autobiographies call in reeking reminiscences, they maintain that the autobiographies should be endorsed, since, through them, the silence and themisrepresentation that the Dalits endured hitherto would be countered. The narratives seek to capture the authentic Dalit experience through a minute chronicling of the smallest detail of daily life. According to E.V. Ramakrishnan, each life narrative basically “addresses the very hegemonic structure of the caste system”(67). In doing so, these writers re-script the conceptions of Indian society and history and also challenge prevailing literary conventions.

Jacques Ranciere speaks about the “politics of literature” (Abraham and Judith 41). What he refers by this is neither the politics of the writers, the personal engagements of writers in the social or political struggles of their times, nor the way writers represent social structures, political movements or various political identities in their books. What is implied is that “literature ‘does’ politics simply by being literature” (Abraham and Judith 41). The subtle nuances of the writer’s deft pen portrays life in its true colours, points out wrongs and injustices of the society and makes the reader aware of his/ her role towards the betterment of the world.

Dalit literature is the articulation of life at the margins of Indian society. In its forceful and staggering revelations of the historical injustice and unfair treatment meted out to the Dalits for thousands of years, it comes as a shock to readers and is considered as “not simply literature” but “a movement to bring about change” (Dangle liii), intensely political in nature.

This paper explores the discourses of subjectivity, cruelty and deprivation that the Dalits were exposed to, as depicted in the Dalit autobiography *Upara*, and how the Dalits survived and resisted the uppercaste hegemony. The study has been attempted not merely to view residues of memory as ‘flat’ documentaries – borrowing the term from E.M. Forster’s description of characters – but to unravel and construct, to give a new reckoning on the old,

and to examine the dynamics of the text as “political” in its power to inform and transform its readers.

Upara, which can be translated as “*An Outsider*” and which is evocative of the intense grief of the protagonist at belonging nowhere, is the autobiography of Lakshman Bapu Mane, a well-known Dalit writer in Marathi. The work, which won him several awards including the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981 and the Ford Foundation Award, stands along with Daya Pawar’s *Baluta* among the first and finest of writings in the category of protest literature.

Upara is Mane’s life story as a member of a nomadic tribe, the *kaikadis*, considered by the Hindus to be even below the lowest rung in the caste hierarchy, and hence looked down upon by them as untouchables, whose touch or very presence would defile and pollute the caste Hindus. The life of the *kaikadis* was a hand-to-mouth existence that could almost be likened to a battle for life. Steeped in ignorance and filth, without the least bit of sophistication and culture, the *kaikadis* wandered from place to place, hardly better than the beasts of burden which bore them and eked out a living by weaving baskets, beating the drum on festive occasions and carrying out other menial tasks.

Mane is initiated into the world of learning by his father, who cherishes high hopes of acquiring better living conditions through his son’s education. However, the nomadic way of life bound by grinding poverty and hardships turn out to be stumbling blocks to the realization of their dreams. Mane, nonetheless, proves himself to be a determined student, braving all oppression and difficulties stoically. Opposition from even the members of his own family does not hold him down from achieving what he aspires for.

Jean-Paul Sartre has stated:

. . . it is necessary to reverse the common opinion and knowledge that it is not the harshness of a situation or the sufferings it imposes which lead people to conceive of another state of affairs in which things would be better for everybody. It is on the day when we are able to conceive of another state of affairs, that a new light is cast on our trouble and our suffering and we *decide* that they are unbearable (qtd. in Scott 331).

Education opens to Mane the portals of knowledge and leads him out of the stagnant mire of ignorance and rusticity. Urban life in places like Phaltan where he has his education, opens out to him new vistas, the consciousness of healthy and clean living hitherto unknown to him and makes him rue his hateful past. He is made painfully aware of the multitudes

around him, going through the ordeal of humiliation and drudgery for no fault of their own, the “hundreds of thousands . . . suffering in miserable conditions” with “neither work nor opportunities, neither facilities nor support, neither shelter nor protection. They [did] not have even two meals a day!”(Mane 9).

Education bestows to Mane the key to the basic amenities of life and instils in him the longing to work and strive for better living conditions for his people. He writes in *Upara*, “The bees from the bee-hives of hopes and desires of the tribals in settlements . . . sting me” (Mane 10). The welfare of his people becomes a mission of prime urgency to him and he rivets all his energies towards this project.

Recounting childhood experiences, Mane remembers how he initially went to school unwillingly. Nobody was friendly to him there. His classmates would not touch him and were united against him. He had neither a slate nor a pencil. The day he entered school was Mane’s first bitter realization of being an outcaste in society. He recalls, “All the other schoolchildren sat inside the classroom whereas I sat outside, in the verandah, while the lesson was on. Father begged the schoolmaster to admit me, but he refused saying, “You funny guy! Do nomadic beggars go to school? . . . Nothing doing! You want to study, huh?” The schoolmaster scoffed (36).

James Scott in his study on peasant resistance writes about everyday forms of resistance, “the prosaic but constant struggle . . . the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups” (29). He elaborates on how victimisation is countered by the poor and the helpless who are unable to defy openly and directly. Well aware that it would not be prudent for them to retaliate explicitly, they nevertheless succeed in doing so in a thousand artful ways, taking advantage of the anonymity of a crowd or of an ambiguous accident. Mane, who is a victim to the schoolmaster’s bullying and even more distressed at his father’s tears on hearing the callous words of the schoolmaster, realizes his utter helplessness and is infuriated. The taunts and provocations of the schoolmaster add grit to Mane’s determination to do well in life, to get the better of the schoolmaster.

E.V. Ramakrishnan quotes from Freud that childhood memories are “consolidated” only at a later period, and “this involves a complicated process of remodelling, analogous in every way to the process by which a nation constructs legends about its own history.” He elaborates that “[t]he self that narrates its own story is the knowing self which re-cognises what it has gone through” (72). As in most Dalit autobiographies, in *Upara* too, there are

poignant moments when Mane realizes that he is an outsider who does not belong to the general society. It is a moment of self-awareness when he wakes up to the implications of being a member of a low caste. “He is jolted into self-consciousness about the collective suffering of his community, which becomes a fundamental mode of perceiving reality and defining oneself (Ramakrishnan 72). The anguish of social stigmatisation and humiliation which triggers belligerency is seen to be impressed upon every Dalit heart. It is an indispensable characteristic of Dalit writing and forms a crucial theme and the very basis underlying Dalit writing.

Upara recalls many traumatic childhood memories of physical violence, occasions when Mane is kicked and battered by the upper caste children of the village, his mouth filling with mud as the blows and kicks rain down on his back, the horrifying sight of his parents being abused and beaten: “Father was being pushed ahead by a small crowd. Mother was behind him. She had no blouse on. She was wearing father’s shirt. Her sari was torn. Father had only his dhoti on. One could see black and blue lashes over his body. . . We children were terrified” (Mane 61). The whiplashes that rained on Mane’s parents were the agonising consequences of their attempts to keep hunger at bay. These and many more experiences leave the protagonist humiliated, agonized and insecure.

Upara is the faithful portrayal of the travails of a man struggling to hold ground in the face of adversities and caste-based animosities. Oft and again caste raises its ugly hydra-head against Mane, shattering valued friendships, foiling his plans to win the girl he loved, curbing his chances for a comfortable life and even estranging him from his own community.

In his foreword to *Upara*, Mane recalls that while writing the book, he had re-lived the tortures he had seen and suffered in the past and that his intention in writing the book was to acquaint society of the sufferings of homeless people and thus motivate them to do something substantial and constructive in the struggle of human liberation. Mane’s message through his autobiography is apparent. It is a plea for liberation from the shackles of the caste system which holds certain communities in bondage and servitude, bringing them nothing but negation, rejection, and denial wherever they turn to.

The text delineates the protagonist/author’s incessant efforts to rise upwards in society. He consciously imitates high caste middleclass men and it is with this intention too that he takes to writing out his autobiography. He recalls painfully that when people came to know of his caste, they turned their back on him. However, his brave, zealous efforts to gain an identity and recognition eventually bear fruit.

A good deal of Mane's suffering and social ostracization spring from his divided loyalties between two entirely different cultural traditions. He finds himself in a dilemma, torn between his longing for a decent way of living and his loyalties towards his own people, traditions and culture. He realizes that the past has to be abandoned to ring in the new. Thus the text resurrects the history of experience to reflect and to contemplate upon and thereby use the experience radically to annihilate the structures which renew and underlie this experience.

What pervades the book all throughout is Mane's intense desire to leave behind memories of a hateful caste-ridden past and his yearning to be considered on equal terms with the people of other castes he came across. He cherishes hopes of becoming a teacher and runs away from home leaving everything behind. Later he dreams of becoming "the proprietor of the restaurant . . . sitting at the cash counter" (Mane 130). He moves from one tentative role to another, trying to cast off earlier parts of his identity which the new roles could not accommodate.

James Scott opines that in rural societies such as in India, where the system of rigid caste stratification is reinforced by religious sanctions, the lower castes accept their fate in the Hindu hierarchy in the hope of being rewarded in the next life. Open expression of discontent, or thoughts of leading a revolution against the established system therefore becomes virtually impossible. As such, the exploited group, because of the hegemonic religious or social ideology, actually accepts its situation as a normal, even justifiable part of the social order. The *kaikadi* community had deep-rooted beliefs in their deities and religious traditions. The few and far-between occasions like annual fairs, visits to the family deity and obligatory food-offerings, marriages, etc. brought a welcome relief to a life otherwise afflicted by miseries and sufferings. Reflecting on the ageless traditions observed by his community, Mane doubts whether they would ever change their ways. "Will they change from within? Will they accept the new way of life? Will they lead a life as partners of a new culture?" (12), he wonders.

In such a situation where protest was rarely openly manifested, Mane's hopes fly high as he recalls a certain "awakening": that of the "Association of Removal of Suspected Crime," in Aurangabad (13). Mane remembers vividly how a bonfire had been made of handcuffs, the symbols of crime. And they had burnt their begging bowls as well, the symbols of mendicancy. An oath was administered on the occasion proclaiming that they were born as humans, not as criminals, beggars or mendicants. It was society that had branded them as criminals and beggars and they refused to comply with the dictates of such a society (Mane 13). Mane also recalls with pride the processions that had been conducted and the demand of his people for

resettlement that had continued each year since then.” “Animals get justice, what about men?” was the slogan that had been raised. Mane is also mindful of and deeply grateful for the contributions made by a trail of blazing personages like Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar, Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj and Karmveer Bhaurao Patil towards the uplift of the downtrodden lot.

Back in 1980, Mane told his story to the people, as a conscious act of protest, giving vent to his innermost suffering on account of the caste bane. 36 years since then, the present day sees no great difference in the treatment being meted out to the Dalits, solely on account of their “low” birth.

The tragic death of the late Rohith Vemula, the Dalit research scholar at the University of Hyderabad, who, battered and bruised by casteist and communal prejudices, eventually took his own life on 17 January 2016, is an instance which endorses the argument. Vemula’s words in his heart-breaking suicide note, alluding to his birth as his fatal accident, speak volumes and are clear indicators of the virulently hostile treatment Dalit students suffer at the hands of the caste Hindus. They are a searing critique of what capitalist and casteist democracies have reduced people to and the suicide is a tragic testimony to the feudal passions of caste that defile India’s institutions of higher education.

Vemula’s is just one among the many instances wherein we find students and other sections of the lower castes being humiliated and ill-treated purely on account of their low status. The media abounds with reports on homicides, dispute and dissent related to issues on caste, insidious and cunning forms that the new contours of discrimination take in Indian society, both in personal lives as well as in public institutions.

The most debilitating experience that almost all Dalits have to go through is the rejection by civil society in general. There have been several occurrences when even after attaining the highest offices Dalits have to face humiliation in personal lives. Subhadra Channa recalls a certain news item which brought to light the case of a high court judge of upper caste who, before taking up office, had his office rooms purified with Ganga water because the previous incumbent on the same post was a Dalit. Channa maintains that even in a liberal campus like that of the University of Delhi, hostels are clearly divided on caste lines (xv).

The fact that a good percentage of positions reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes remain vacant demonstrates the sad plight of these sections. It has been observed that mostly children of the SCs, the STs, the OBCs and the minorities study in

government schools today. The functioning of these institutions and the quality of education are in serious jeopardy, thanks to the ruling elite's indifference to the oppressed sections and their patronage to private educational institutions.

While the reservation policy has played a pivotal role in the educational and economic empowerment of Dalits, their social status still leaves a lot to be desired. Unless there is a favourable attitudinal shift towards the marginalised sections, there will hardly be a discernible improvement in their social status; the desolation enshrouding the "Upara" can never be expelled and the democracy that India envisions will remain ever a mirage.

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Sarita as the Voiceless Woman in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*

M. Subbiah

The Post-Colonial English Writing in India has become a phenomenal truth in taking up various issues and problems. Particularly the writings of Shashi Deshpande established herself as a powerful writer because she identified the issues of women of tradition bound as well as modernity. Most of her women characters deal with the problems they face in their domestic life. Her heroines are sensitive to the changing times and situations who could revolt against the traditions and conventions just for their identify crisis. They accomplish in achieving self-identity and independence and choose their partners to lead a family life. They represent themselves as women of freedom and independence and ultimately this conceptualisation leads them face umpteen number of problems and cultural disintegrations and social taboos.

Saru the protagonist, in '*The Dark Holds No Terror*' is a different type of woman who faces the challenges in the society and starts leading her own life with a chosen husband Manu. Deshpande depicts woman's world by reading Sarita's relationship with her husband and presents her relationship of rival nature with her mother. Her position in the family has been that of subservient; others look at her as a toy; her husband treats and handles her only for his lust and pleasure. But Deshpande, with a difference, brings about the inner emotional feelings and longings of a woman who suffers a lot in the hands of the male dominated society. This paper brings out the emotions, feelings and longings of every Indian woman to emerge out from the so called social taboos and man-made regulations, formulations and restrictions.

One can read the mind of Deshpande who explores the world of Indian woman, in the context of work spots, marital life and so on. Her family institution, which is expected of upbringing a child neglects the women children and prefers to have male children.

Hence this novel focuses upon the issues of disparity between a female child and a male child, marital disintegration, partiality of parents towards women child and identity crisis. This study reveals around the man made patriarchal traditions and conservatist

approaches. Deshpande replicates the middle class women in the modern Indian society being caught in the series of incidents of everyday life. K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger affirms that *The Dark Holds No Terror* as,

Shashi Deshpande's first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), presents an unusual character, Sarita, who defies her mother to become a doctor, defies her caste to marry outside, and defies social conventions by using Boozie to advance her career. Sarita and Manu had made a love marriage, but something soon went wrong. He is a failure, and she has to earn both bread and butter for the family..... she escapes for a while to her parental home, and her mother's curse echoes skill, and the ghosts of the past will not leave her in peace. (*IWE* 758)

Gender discrimination is a very serious issue which affects the development of our country and in one way or other that disturbs everybody's everyday life. It is true that in India, discrimination between man and woman has been existing for many centuries.

Sarita, the heroine, undergoes a lot of trauma in this study. The life experience of this character is definitely the replica of several thousand women in India. This study exhibits the sufferings of a girl child who is not given due care and attention by her mother and father. Simultaneously, her brother is given too much of love and care for being the only son of the family. Saru grows as a victim to society's gender based bias and discrimination on various society based issues. The parents, deliberately, fail to shower upon her, their love and affection and as a consequence, she joins medicine course, which is against the will of her mother and ultimately elopes with another boy, Manu, who is a lower caste man.

The evolutionary development in this novel exhibits the Indian society's preference of male child to female child. Though Indian mothers prefer to have male children will not be cent per-cent against their daughters. But Saru's mother, a typical Indian conservative woman's preference to her son, is very strong that makes Saru feel loneliness and alienation from the society. Her sense of reasoning develops and is unable to tolerate the preference shown towards male children. The crystal clear difference of treatment between a male and a female child is evident in the mother daughter relationship.

Don't go out in the sun. You 'll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get

you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't

And Dhuruva?

He's different. He's a boy. (45)

In the eyes of her mother, Dhuruva seems to be very important and there is a negation towards Saru. This taboo of indifferent treatment towards female child is an age old concept.

Sara claims equality by all means, but rejected. Her inner mind longs for the attainment of equality and freedom on par with Dhuruva. During festival seasons, rituals and other annual ceremonies, the gender discrimination is very vital and almost daring. She is able to recall one such event in her childhood at the time of her brother's birthday ceremony. Saru:

Birthdays were not then the tremendous occasions they are made out to be now: but the excitement of having one, of being the centre of attraction never palled. It was always a fascinating thought.... I was, born. But of my birth, my mother had said to me once.... "It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible". And somehow it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains. (169)

This kind of ill-treatment brings out a sort of hatred feeling against her brother and more naturally she does not confine herself within the socially permitted boundaries and ultimately turns to be rebellious. Saru's mother records her hat redness against her daughter throughout the novel, that too strongly after Dhuruva's death. Her mother avers:

"....Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless". (196)

Even after such humiliation Saru needs the love of her mother and longs for it. She wants to stay permanently with her mother. When Saru opines this, there is a dissent voice from her mother. Her mother says:

You can't. But your brother Dhuruva can stay. He is different. He is a boy". (40)

The gender discrimination encouraged by Saru's mother against her daughter enrages her and loses her faith over her mother. It is so sarcastic that her father, quite against the

existing patriarchal love towards the daughter in an Indian situation, too does not have any care towards his daughter, Saru. Her mother's indifferent attitude towards Saru has become an indelible mark in her heart and forces her to the world of restlessness and alienation.

Saru's mother, like other typical Indian mothers, does not grant permission for Saru's higher studies in Mumbai. It is her fortune that her father says 'yes'. Her mother's feelings and expression exhibit her protest against her higher studies, that too, in medicine. Her mother avers:

..... medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both? Make yourself a pauper, and will she look after you in your old age? Medicine! Five, Six, Seven... god knows how many years. Let her go for a B.Sc..... you can get her married in two years and our responsibilities will be over. Is that all I am, a responsibility?. (144)

Saru is very much pained of the words of her mother and clearly the concept of mother is shattered into pieces. As a matter of her own decision, she leaves the house to marry her classmate Manu. Her first bold step taken against the will of the family and the directions of her mother, Saru stands as a pillar of 'New Woman' with all her cherished ideals. Saru's mother enrages to hear this and goes to the level of blaming and cursing her.

"I know all these love marriages'. It's love for a few days, then quarrels all the time. Don't come crying to us then". (69)

Further her mother curses Saru and utters:

"You won't be happy with him. I know you won't. A man of a different caste, different community..... what will you two have in common?". (98)

This reluctant relationship with her mother does not permit Saru to attend even her mother's death. Even though the earthly fight between them comes to an end, Saru as an obstinate girl does not forget her past incidents, insults and other ill treatments bestowed upon her and at last rejects her mother for many reasons.

Saru tries to prove her innocence but in vain. She is haunted by the thought that her ignorant attitude and carelessness are the main reasons for the death of Dhurva. Her mother's words are still ringing in her ears.

You killed you brother. I didn't. Truly I didn't. It was an accident. I loved him, my little brother. I tried to save him: Truly I tried. But I couldn't. And I ran away. Yes,

I ran away, I admit that. But I didn't kill him. How do you know you didn't kill him? How do you know?" (146)

Though she is uncared by everybody in the family, her haunting memories regarding the death of her brother tortures her. Hence, the sense of rejection by her mother fills Saru's mind with disgust towards her mother.

Saru's inner emotions and feelings record her longingness for true love from her mother and father. But she does not enjoy such emotional attachment towards them: When she understands that she is a burden to the family, her inner heart is deeply wounded. Saru says:

Nobody likes me. Nobody cares for me. Nobody wants me...' She had written down these words in a notebook once. And she had written them, not in English, which she scarcely knew then, but in Marathi, so that it had come out as.... 'I am not liked by anyone'. 'I am not wanted by anyone'. With the stress on the 'I'. But surely, it should be different now?. (83)

The grief expressed by Saru and the dejection she developed in her mind speak of her weaknesses and feeble mind that she has. Dr. D. Ebine Cordelia is perfect in observing the reason for the struggle of Saru as:

Saru feels frustrated and when she hears about her mother's death through her childhood friend she feels an urge to go back to her parent's home. When she returns home she wants her father to listen to her, but instead of listening to her as a father he listens to her as a man. In this circumstance she blames her parents for her failure. She tells them that if they had prevented her from going against them she would have had a happy married life". (*ASIFE*, 1986)

Saru's relationship, with her mother, father and husband, is complex and more stained. It is not at all cordial. A girl child may have problems outside the world other than the family. But it is a typical case where in which a girl of a family rejected and refused by the members. It is quite ironical against all the existing norms and practice in the society.

Shashi Deshpande's views on marriage are noteworthy and real. She pictures the truth and exposes the reality. She depicts how people lose their conjugal rights just because of being egotists and uncompromising. In this modern world, women are dominated by their husbands and do not have independence, freedom and other rights in their life. The significant reason behind the collapse of many families is misunderstanding between the couples,

unsecured complexes they have in their minds, crave for identity and lack of enough exchange of ideas and feelings.

Deshpande focuses her attention on all those women who are bound to suffer silently by their husbands and the model character which represents the concept of suffering is Saru, the protagonist. Saru marries Manu ignoring the biases of the caste ridden society and her spouse's status. She is a very popular doctor, but a caged bird during night hours in the hands of her husband, a lecturer in a local college. In the initial state, their relationship was fine and lovely. During the course of time, the love between them started diminishing. Once Manu says:

When we were together, its heaven, wherever we are, he said. It was silly, it was absurd, it was ridiculous, I thought. I felt humble, sometimes a fraud. It was impossible that I could mean as much to any human being. It was impossible that such things could happen to me. They happened only to girls like me. And yet, I could not doubt his love. He cared for my feelings as no one ever done. (38-39)

Saru knows well that her marriage is an illusion. The love marriage of them does not have the charms as she expected of. But she is very much content with the reception and respect that she receives from her patients. This is not tolerated by her husband, and he becomes quite unhappy and develops a sort of jealousy again Saru. Saru says:

"... the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches so taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter". (42)

The professional respect Saru gets from the public makes Manu unhappy and the situation changes. Till now, "he had been the young man and his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband". (42)

From now onwards he changes himself from a loving husband into a sadist. Though he is a loving father and caring husband during the day, turns into a monster in bed abusing and bruising her at night hours. She is made to be a love slave, every night.

"... It was a monstrous invasion of my body. I tried to move, twisting my body, wriggling under the weight that pained it down. It was impossible. I was pinioned to a position of an abject surrender of myself". (11-12)

Saru records her dissent voice against the forced sex she had undergone with her husband. There is no sex freedom for a girl in the society. She finds it difficult to free herself from Manu. This confounds her bitterly.

“The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horrible familiar body. And above me a face I could not recognize. Total non-comprehension, complete bewilderment, paralysed me for a while. Then I began to struggle. But my body, hurt and painful, I could do nothing against the fearful strength which overwhelmed me”. (1-2)

Saru’s representation about her husband to her father becomes stone dead. She gets no consolation from her father. Though, she is a successful doctor, in reality, she is a tortured woman. At her father’s house, Saru tries to objectively analyse her share to be blamed in the failure of her married life. She starts hating the man – woman relationship which is based on body attraction and physical need and not love. As a consequence she remains in her married life for the sake of her children.

Saru confess that

My husband is a sadist

..... How is Manohar?

Your Manohar?

He is a wreck, a ruin, a sadist. (97)

Her husband’s other side has been beautifully confessed by Saru to Prof. Kulkarni. Saru again records the brutality and expresses her helplessness. She says:

“He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his body”.

“.... I could do nothing against him. I could not fight back. I couldn’t shout or by I could do nothing. I do never do anything. I just endure” (201)

A poor woman’s humble submission of her body, mind, soul, what if and what not, before her husband is so cruel, and helpless.

Saru’s illicit relationship starts growing with her friends. Boozie and Padmaker, as a revenge by her. Boozies’ financial assistance opens up a new posn consulting room for Saru can be a part of her sacrifice of her body. Their compulsion of having more deep relationship

with her forces Saru to dissuade from them. Her relationship does not last long and want to continue. She feels for her immoral attitudes and gives up her flirtatious relationship. To her love is to be perennial, spontaneous and mutual. But in reality she met people who have the physical the urges. As a consequence she becomes a philosopher, at one stage, and admits the realities and follies of her own.

She has no splendid opinion for either love or romance. She says:

And I? Now, I know it was not just the consequences I feared and hated, but the thing itself. What had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfillment happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And me sex was now a dirty word (133)

Saru's contemptuous opinion against the man made rules is remarkable. "Everything in a girl's life.... was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male". (163)

Saru's poetic observation about the combination between a man and a woman is superb.

That's important, very important because its' symbolic of the truth. A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A., you should be a B.A.; if he's 5'4 tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3 tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. (137)

On some other occasion, Saru expresses the same opinion:

Don't ever try to reverse the doctor – nurse, executive – secretary, Principal – teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it isn't worth it". "He'll suffer, you'll suffer and so will the children. Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense, rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal but take care that its unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales till in your favour. God help, both of you. (137)

Saru insists upon the women not to be negative but submissive to their husbands. She advocates that women must pretend to be smart, competent, rational and strong. Woman can rag, complain, henpeck, suffer and moan, but should show themselves as very strong

personalities. “Don’t struggle, don’t swim against the tide. Go along with it; and if you drown nevertheless, well that’s an earlier death after all”. (137) This is a confession of Saru from her real life.

Yet another issue in this study is search for identity. Women are caught and cornered well in between the traditional and modernised world. As they are psychologically and physically affected, that leads to their mental derangement.

Sarita is a successful doctor but not a daughter and a wife. She is rebellious who never accepts the domination of others. For Saru, love making is a process of mutual understanding of the partners. But Saru doesn’t find any love and care from her husband in their later life. She finds something missing, which seems to be a great loss for her. Though their marriage is a love-marriage, the love that they enjoyed previously could not be in the later years. Her stay in her father’s residence does not give any recognition; fails to review her relations with her husband. Finally Saru wishes to become a free woman and wants to have an identity for her that too for the purpose of life.

Saru compares her house to hell and ironically says:

.... I’m going to get away from this house, this paradise of matching curtains and handloom bedspreads. This hell of savagery and submission. But what if I carry my own hell within me? Then there is no hope for me at all. But that too I have to know. And therefore I am going home to my father. (28)

Staying at her father’s house, Saru is quite unhappy and recollects her earlier happy days with her husband which turns to be a nightmare. Her stay at her father’s residence is totally meaningless and tries to gain her self-respect and overcome her psychological fears.

The dark holds no terrors; the terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them within us and like traitors they spring out; when we least expect them, to scratch and maul. (85)

Saru doesn’t heed attention to the words of her mother, Kamala, and goes for higher studies. A lower cast, Manu becomes Saru’s husband which is ultimately rejected by Saru’s mother. Saru is restless and tired to locate her position in the society. Her identity is missing totally. No relationship with husband; no relationship with parents.

After a long self analysis and introspection, Saru realises: “If I have been puppet it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage

whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving my mother right” (220)

It is a admission of the reality against identity.

Saru is courageous with determination and wisdom and develops compromises and maturity to strengthen her family life. Sanjay A. Diwekar highlights:

Saru in ‘*The Dark Holds No Terror*’ also adopts a compromising attitude. Initially determined not to meet Manohar, finally she tells her father that if Manu comes he should ask him wait. She wishes to tell him frankly what has really gone wrong in their marital relations and also wishes to sort out the differences with him boldly and courageously. Feminism is at the core of her novels. She deals with a women’s psyche and the way she is made to feel an inferior being, an unwanted child, a burden on the family (ISRJ 3)

Saru wants to have a peaceful life after staying for a brief period at her mother’s house. Her inclination towards her life partner becomes meaningful. If one analyses, the relationship of Saru with her parents, her husband and her brother, it could be inferred and felt to some extent that she is a woman with courage to face any situation. Simply speaking, she is compelled by the giants of the circumstances to become a “New Woman”.

The major issues faced by Saru are prevailing in the society like gender discrimination, the complexities of man-woman relationship especially in the context of marriage and trauma faced by her for the search for identity. The domestic life and its issues are skillfully handled by the novelist. The major ultimately Saru becomes a modern Indian woman who is ‘reformed’ and ‘free’. The decision which Saru makes to go back to her husband is a bold act. It is infect a matured task generated due to her patience, scarifying attitude, daring approach to life. Saru perfectly and honestly admits all her faults and ready to lead a happy life. This is life in an Indian situation.

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Muduvan Folklore: Treatment of the Theme of Love

Jerome K. Jose

The tribal people who live mostly in hills and forests do not interact much with the mainstream society and hence they preserve their culture and tradition without much alteration. Muduvans are one of the ancient and prominent tribal communities of South India who reside on the summits of Western Ghats. They have several literatures of their own in oral form which are related to their life, history, experiences, imagination and are part of their folklore. These oratures include songs, tales, riddles, proverbs and different other genres and sub genres which are performed in various situations and contexts of daily life and activities. This paper takes into account only one predominant genre, love songs (‘Áúippámmu’ in their dialect) to discourse upon and hence they form the primary data which are collected from the field and translated into English. Muduvans converse in a language which has many similarities to both Tamil and Malayalam. But many unique and subtle words need to be clarified from the Muduvans themselves. With the aid of selected love songs of Muduvans, this paper attempts to examine the treatment of the theme of love in their folklore and thereby a study of their culture and life.

A brief discussion on the term ‘folklore’ is relevant here, as the primary texts selected are oral in form, performed at various contexts. Diverse views concerning folklore are available and widely used at present and many of them try to define folklore by using words like ‘tradition’, ‘spoken’, ‘verbal’, ‘communal’, ‘transmission’, ‘oral’, ‘preserved’ and so on. Many such ideas of folklore by experts are mentioned in the article “Definitions of Folklore” in *Journal of Folklore Research*, reprinted from *Funk and Wagnall’s Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* by Maria Leach. Here Stith Thompson is of the view that “The common idea present in all folklore is that of tradition, something handed down from one person to another and preserved either by memory or practice rather than written record” (263). Archer Taylor states that “Folklore consists of materials that are handed on traditionally

from generation to generation without a reliable ascription to an inventor or author” (263). Richard A. Waterman comments that “Folklore is that art form, comprising various types of stories, proverbs, sayings, spells, songs, incantations, and other formulas, which employs spoken language as its medium” (264). Another expert, William R. Bascom’s view is that “folklore can be defined as verbal art” (256).

Jan Harold Brunvand remarks that “folklore may be defined as those materials in culture that circulate traditionally among members of any group in different versions, whether in oral form or by means of customary example” (4). He associates five qualities with folklore. The first point is that folklore is oral; that is, it passes by word of mouth from one person to another and from one generation to another. The second point is that folklore is traditional; it is passed on repeatedly in a relatively fixed or standard form and it circulates among members of a particular group. The third point associated with folklore is that it exists in different forms; oral transmission creates different versions of the same text. The fourth point is that folklore is usually anonymous; the author’s names are never part of the texts that are orally transmitted. The fifth point is that most folklore tends to become formularized; it is expressed partly in clichés that may range from simple set phrases and patterns of repetition to elaborate opening and closing devices or whole passages of traditional verbal stereotypes (4-6).

In the course of time, the different meanings attributed to the word ‘folklore’ have changed because it has been accepted nowadays as more contextual and hence based on performance. Performance is considered as the practical side of folklore. Richard Bauman’s focus is on folklore as performance: “the real integration between people and lore on the empirical level. This is to conceptualize the social base of folklore, in terms of the actual place of the lore in social relationship and its use in communicative interaction”(33). Further, Roger D. Abrahams states that “Folklore is a collective term for those traditional items of knowledge that arise in recurring performances. The concept of folklore is unthinkable without those compositions, for they are the channels of wisdom and entertainment, but for folklore to exist it must be enacted” (195).

The cultural heritage of the Muduvans is transmitted mainly through their songs which play a vital role in their folk oral literature. Their songs are more contextual. They sing songs on many occasions, especially at the time of marriage, while performing religious rituals, at working place, and at occasions of death. Songs, mainly ‘Áúai’ (‘áúai’ means desire and ‘pámmu’ means song in Malayalam) are sung chiefly at marriage ceremonies and leisure

time, which cover every aspect of life. The songs form the basis of learning of their community. It captures their joys, sorrows, hopes and anguish. The songs play a fundamental role in their lives touching on aspects of love, romance and passion. A typical *âuaippâmmu* by the bridegroom at the time of marriage starts like this:

Oh pretty, precious lady
You, with the 'pukari' on your tresses, a beauty
You are the beats of my heart
And the colours of my dream, no doubt.

Here the bridegroom addresses the girl as the most pretty woman in her traditional attire. 'Pukari', a cultural symbol, is a bamboo comb and the bridegroom presents it to his bride when he first sees her. In contrast to the general Indian marriage concept of 'tying the knot', married Muduvan women wear 'Pukari' as a symbol of marriage and to express their honesty and fidelity to their life partners. Men, too, express their love and loyalty by presenting such a 'gift' to women and the above song is the manifestation of this in which the man assures her that she is so dear to him and his dreams are all for her and it is unchangeable.

The predominant theme of Muduvan's *âuaippâmmu* is 'love', though numerous other aspects of human life and emotions are expressed directly or indirectly. The oral transmission of these songs is a clear evidence of the psychological outpourings of their simple yet powerful emotions. As the name suggests, *âuaippâmmu* deals with the love and desire of Muduvans; love towards girls, desire to have a good husband or a fine wife, desire to have a good life, desire to have many children etc. Human life cannot be imagined without love. In fact, the very sustenance of human beings is based on their ability to love. In fact, one should note that, human love is not oriented towards sex alone. Personal, familial and social interactions of various types survive because of 'love' and one may identify such interactions and developments as culture, tradition, civilization etc.

Compared to other creatures, man has more emotional response and love is one such emotional response which will help him to overcome any sort of hindrances in life. On the other side, sex- oriented love is not devoid of criticisms and restrictions in many societies. Physical love along with the emotional response of the same, paves the way for human existence and hence the best form of love is a good combination of physical and emotional relationship. This is what we see in most of the love songs of Muduvans. For example:

Cut the trees from the dark,
Put the logs off, it's the work.
Loved and life is this girl,
Moved my mind in a whirl

These lines show the male's intense love for the girl. His work is to cut woods from the thick forest. 'Dark' indicates the forest and also the 'void' in the mind. But his mind fills with her thoughts when he starts loving her and he says that she is his life. The love songs exhibit the different aspects of man-woman relationship not only in happiness or merry-making but also in their sorrows, agonies, grievances, despair etc. The boy sings a song:

Eve in the sandalwood,
I walked up and down.
You came not today,
Where you are my lady?

The despair and sorrow of the boy for not being able to see her in the sandalwood is mentioned here. He asks the girl why she went away making him feel the pain of loneliness.

The Muduvan tribe gives a great deal of freedom to its unmarried adolescents to meet and voice their feelings for each other. Thus these moments of emotional exchange became excellent contexts for the expressions of love, longing and distress. The spontaneous and simplistic manner in which the universal theme of love emerges in these lyrics is distilled of poetic extravagance but expressive of nuanced feelings. The social freedom enjoyed by the courting adolescents gives them the simultaneous freedom to draw upon suggestive, erotic images in their lyrics. These lyrics are generally traditional, though like all other genres, improvised from time to time. Damiana L. Eugenio, in *Philippine Folk Literature: An Anthology*, remarks about courtship songs:

These songs express the whole range of feelings and attitudes that the lover and the loved one can have for each other, from comments on the appearance and virtues of the loved one to near-despairing laments of the rejected suitor. Between these extremes and forming the greatest number are songs that contain appeals and pleadings of the lover to the loved one (438).

The same holds true of Muduvan culture too in which the romantic feelings are expressed in songs before they get married, usually with the consent of both family and community. In Muduvan culture, *âuippâmmu* are mainly sung by the male to woo a girl even though at times, girls too participate in the process of singing to express their feelings. The mood of the songs changes according to the various themes interpolating the songs. In one song, the man expresses his desire to see her. He sings:

The tamarind trees around town,
Will rattle noisily if shaken.
So shall I call your name,
Come here, you female beauty.

In this song the man addresses his beloved as *Penna;aki* (female beauty) and expresses his desire to see his beloved. He says that he calls her by name, as a way of promising his feelings for her, even though Muduvans do not call the 'other' by name on such occasions. Different ways of expressing man's desire are seen in Muduvan's love songs. In one song, the man sings:

I wish to reap the
Semba paddy of *Ânakâl pammi*
And take it to *Koppatâkumi*
My beautiful lass.

It is clear in the song that the man is from the settlement or place called *Koppatâkumi* and has come to marry a beautiful woman from *Ânakâl pammi*. *Semba* refers to a particular kind of rice crop. The reference that he gives is that he wishes to reap *semba* paddy from *Ânakâl pammi*. Here the man indirectly compares the women to *Alakusemba* ('Alaku' means beautiful or pretty). Even while comparing the woman to paddy, the man addresses the woman as *peGmayile* (pea-hen). Likewise, in another song the man sings:

In the valley I saw
A dove roosting.
In a kite's disguise
Will I swoop down and pick you!

Here the man compares his beloved to a dove that is flying in the valley while he compares himself to a kite. He tells her that he will come in a kite's disguise to get hold of her. The women's consent is not asked here, but he asserts that he has seen her from a distance and is confident that he is strong enough to carry her.

Similar to the man expressing his desire for his beloved, the woman too explicitly expresses her desires through different songs at the time of courtship. The socio-cultural space accorded to Muduvan woman is remarkable in its liberalism. The visibility and speech of these women are brought to the fore when they too sing songs of courtship. The expression of desire, especially of the body is generally both in literature and society, a male prerogative. The social codes of urban communities and literate societies see the female enunciation of desire as lack of propriety. In one song, the woman sings:

Slicing the reed
And weaving a shining mat,
To the one who wields a bow,
I shall give the price-money.

The woman's desire to have a man of her choice is indicated in this song. Here she says that she makes a mat by cutting and slicing *kallñmma* (a type of bamboo) to value her man's hand that holds a bow which indicates that she wishes to be cared for and protected. Through the lines she says that her desire is to get a man of the above type. Weaving a mat for her lover signifies her willing self-surrender to the man she loves.

In another song the man is described directly as a dark one:

The man, the dark one
Best suited for the girl,
He longs for you.

In this song, the third person, possibly a friend or companion of the man, acts as a messenger and informs her that his friend longs for her. Hence the man is portrayed in front of her in a very simple manner. The man is said to be dark in colour but best suited for her according to the speaker. Here the third person's duty is to incite love and passion in her mind by giving a description of the man in limited words.

The images of nature serve a fine purpose to disclose the love of boy to girl and vice-versa. They form an indistinguishable part of their daily life. The images prove of an immense use to assure their love. Thus in Muduvan's folklore, the love songs or *âuippâmmu* stand apart as distinctive in its tone, remarkable in its use of powerful imagery to articulate their passion, notable for inculcating natural elements in their expression of love and thereby these songs which they treasure in their hearts bring man and nature more close.

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On their Feet and Looking Back: The Everyday Body as a Site of Protest

Priya V.

This article studies the Adivasi agitation against forced governmental evacuation from their lands in Keralam from the purview of three ‘texts’ of active resistance, the “Standing up Protest” of Adivasis (*Nilpusamaram*) before the government secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram that lasted for 162 days (9/July/ 2014- 18/ Dec/2014), an interactive art installation titled *Nilanilpu* (“*Stand-still*”) by G. Ajith Kumar simultaneously staged in the state capital and supported by the Adivasi Gothramahasabha and the orally narrated life-sketch of C. K. Janu, the stalwart of this largely invisibilized community. Triangulating between these three acts of resistance, this study attempts a self-reflexive reading drawn from my own experiential encounter and seeks to problematize the multiple and ceaseless dynamics of looking that underplay construction of collective identities and inflect the processes of othering. Drawing from the intersecting interests of the theories of performance and cultural anthropology, I seek to comprehend how the selected texts confound common representational parameters and subvert the assumed solidities of normative understanding of collective identities as they pose vital questions to the taken for granted nature of majoritarian democracy.

Keralam has had a particular history of massive migration of mostly upper caste Hindus and Christians to the forest areas of the eastern regions of the state from the 1920s onwards. In terms of cheap labour, illegal occupation of tribal lands, physical and sexual assaults, various tribal populations were grossly exploited by the settlers. Simultaneously, agricultural practices too tremendously changed; the massive spread of cash crops in the area had a direct impact on tribal populations (Ekbal 2013, Raman 2002). This situation is aggravated by the fact that these communities who have been inhabiting the forest land for centuries have rarely been considered citizens by successive colonial and post-colonial governments of the state. Tribal settlements in Keralam remember brutal stories of various kinds of exploitation from

governmental agents themselves which rarely find mention in our official histories (Ekbal 2013, Gothramahasabha2014). Many Adivasi groups have oral histories of forced evictions from their land for developmental projects, forest conservation and so on apart from stark everyday experiences of extreme impoverishment and institutional neglect leading to miserable circumstances of living. In Attappadi, a place in Palakkad district, around 66 infants died due to malnourishment and failure of healthcare services in 2013 itself (Manikandan 2014). The coalition governments of Kerala have been typically apathetic towards the problems that these communities have been living under.

The beginning of the Adivasis' struggle to implement their right to land can be traced at least as far back as the 1970s. In 1975, the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer and Restoration of Alienated Land) Act 1975 was passed by the state government following the recommendation of the Dhebar Commission to reclaim land belonging to various Adivasi communities and encroached by others; even as this was a historic move, the government failed to implement the act and rejected thousands of applications filed for this purpose and the proposed land reclamation on the applications that were considered did not take place. In 1996 and 1999, attempts were made by the state government to bypass the KST Act of 1975. As per the amendment passed in 1999, encroachment of less than five hectares was permitted by the left government in power; it was also suggested herein to revoke the 1975 Act. The amendment was passed and the 1975 Act was abolished with the support of both right and left parties of the state, the only politician to resist this move being K. R. GouriAmmu. The High court of the state, however, declared this move as unconstitutional and a number of Adivasi struggles for justice occurred in different parts of the state like Aaralam, Attapadi, Thuvepathi and Kundala to name a few. In October 2001, as a result of 48 days of continuous protests by several tribal organizations under the leadership of C. K. Janu and M. Geethanandan, the government had promised the Adivasis distribution of cultivable land and measures for protection of tribal land from encroachment. The promised package was 0.4 to two hectares of cultivable land as per land availability to all landless tribal people in each district. The government, however, failed to implement the package again and the Adivasis continued with their protests. In 2003, around 2,000 Adivasis occupied the Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary and started building huts there which led to the infamous "Muthanga Incident" in which one Adivasi and a policeman were killed and many other Adivasi people were brutally attacked. This incident, however, led to the emergence of the Adivasi struggle from local conflicted zones to the mainstream political arena. Following this struggle, the central government allotted 19,

600 acres of land for the rehabilitation of Adivasis and the 7500 acre Aaralam farm was proposed by the central government to be developed as a public sector company to benefit tribal communities. The state however, bypassed these instructions and the land allotted to them was given over to establish the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University and the Aaralam farm became a private sector company. The *Nilpusamaram* of 2014 emerged from this historical background to secure for the tribal populations, restoration of lands promised to them, rehabilitation of lands encroached by others, implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Rights Recognition) Act passed by the central government and bypassed by the state government as a mere issue of *pattayam* allocation, conservation of vulnerable tribal groups, extension of compensation to Mutthanga incident, proper implementation of healthcare and so on (Gothramahasabha 2014).

The three texts selected for study here need to be situated and read against this political past. Diana Taylor's writings that uncover how a range of social performances enable the forging of intelligible and 'acceptable' cultural identities in the social space become an extremely significant theoretical tool here. She reads Benedict Anderson's conceptualization of "imagined communities" alongside Judith Butler's theory of performativity, Lacan's concept of the othering gaze as well as Derrida's concepts of citationality to theorize the desiring machine at work in nation/community building as read through public spectacles which she deems as the locus for such imaginings. Employing a methodological shift from written texts to embodied practices, she posits performance as a system of learning, storing and transmitting what we understand as 'knowledge'. This shift from the discursive to the performatic facilitates a broader exploration of patterns of cultural expression beyond "texts" and "narratives" to include embodied practices otherwise considered as falling outside their purview. I quote at some length:

Using terms such as fantasy and desire...in the strictly individualistic sense often associated with psychoanalysis hides the contiguousness of the psychosocial. The radical separation of the psychoanalytic from the materiality of the social...stems from a misunderstanding of psychoanalysis, which is misconstrued as a psychology of the individual when in fact it undercuts the binary between the individual and society.

Individual and state formation take place, in part, in the visual sphere through a complicated play of looks: looking, being looked at, identification, recognition, mimicry. This internal network of looks takes place within the overarching structure of the Lacanian

gaze, what he calls the field of the 'Other', in which we are all objects, all part of the spectacle. But that external gaze cannot be understood as an ahistorical static 'given' The external register in which looking occurs undergoes modification because the 'screens' (e.g., of race, class and gender) change. The external image of the desirable is historicized and localized. Individual and national subjectivity, forged through mutual looking, reaffirm, produce, and reproduce each other in the scopic field (30-31).

Drawing from Taylor's extremely insightful treatment of embodied practices as an episteme and praxis, I proceed to consider how the above mentioned texts engage in possible re-semanticizations of collective identities and the spaces they occupy.

C. K. Janu's orally narrated memoirs end on a curious note; it may be read as a profound problematization of the ways in which in a specular culture looks produce and consolidate identities. The testimonial itself is remarkable for the way in which it opens up a seamlessly fluid engagement between her collective and individual selves; conceptualization of the self in narration takes place largely through the use of the collective pronouns 'we', 'us' and 'our' which can also contain in themselves the less conspicuous 'I', 'me' and 'mine'. I quote:

To really try and understand the needs of our people and to work for it, people must come from our community. The way mainstream perceive our society itself should change. The outsiders who come to us exploit our lack of knowledge regarding the rest of the society. The huts of the paniyar and others are decorated with *kolams* and drawings. Using mud and cow dung they make neat huts.... Now the huts have calendars with pictures of gods and goddesses. They buy them from here and there and stick them on the walls. The pictures of fine stars are also stuck on walls like this. Since the colony started, this kind of decoration has become popular. The language and ways of our children staying in the hostels for purposes of study have changed. Don't know if that is for their good or not.... However, if the tradition of working on the land is preserved the difficulties of our people would be removed. The right to live on the land, for claiming ownership of the land for its rightful owners, led to all the strikes and movements. The systems of land ownership in mainstream society, their ways and ideas and the systems necessary for our community are different. That is why, for our existence on earth, we had to fight the governmental powers.

When we were young, there was no mirror in our huts. I saw the mirror first when I went to work at Vellamunde, to look after the child. It was one with a wooden handle. Some

parts of it looked fungus covered. In that part I could not see my reflection. On returning from Vellamundu, in our hut, on the backwall, a piece of mirror was stuck with dung. A small piece of mirror. We stick seeds for future use like this on the walls of the hut. I do not know who had kept the mirror piece like seeds on the wall. Because the mirror was a small piece, I could not see myself completely in it, some parts alone were reflected. Must buy a whole mirror (143).

These closing words of her memoir remarkably articulate the tensions undergirding annihilation of collective selves under the siege of practices seeping in from the mainstream and the gradually dying customs that had earlier sustained tribal communities. They point to the inextricability of the terrain, the forest land, from their perception of their selves and such comprehension is contrasted with the anthropocentric attitudes of mainstream culture. In a way, this problematizes the very notion of culture itself, accustomed as it is, to see tribal communities as some anachronistic leftover from a pre-modern past and signifying the savage “other”. I take her closing words as a metonymic rumination of the problem of alterity and differentiation of collective identities as the self and the other, as I seek to undertake a performative reading of the other two texts.

The Standing up protest of the Adivasis in front of the power-centre at Thiruvananthapuram chose a novel form. Members of these communities simply occupied the pavement before the state secretariat where one usually sees people sloganeering or undertaking hunger-strikes. They chose to stand in protest, from morning to evening, under a scorching sun or a lashing rain, before banners that problematized the way in which successive democratically elected governments of Kerala, despite having a history of land-related struggles by subaltern communities under the leadership of left-wing parties, had failed them. One would spot them taking turns, as their feet occupied the ground, some reading a newspaper or chatting among themselves even as their bodies also performed the language of protest interrogating all over again the binds that link the human body to the terrain that it sees as its own. The absence of bodily kinetics in such a protest might at first seem like a total lack of active protest itself as it is possible to think of such behaviour of the limbs as conspicuously passive and a mere extension of ordinary standing. However, in a struggle that questions the normative justice machineries of the state and its much celebrated ‘Kerala model of development’, it may be seen that as the common sense of mainstream identification mechanisms itself gets interrogated, even ordinary, everyday behaviour of bodies can emerge

as a possible site for protest. The bodies simply occupy the ground, straddling it like a tree, its roots, running deep like remembered pasts that bind them together and resist forced extirpation.

But how does one represent a struggle that interrogates the representational parameters we are accustomed to? To answer this question we may move on to the layered and multi-dimensionally interactive installation by an artist named, G. Ajith Kumar held in Thiruvananthapuram for a week under the aegis of the Adivasi Gothramahasabha. The installation had two major acts. The first segment was an exhibition of his paintings wherein the white-washed walls of a familiar room at the VylopilliSamskruthiBhavanwas given a makeover through asombre use of a sooty black fabric. This pitch-black setting presented a splendid scenario for an exhibition intentionally titled “Stand-still” which in Malayalam when hyphenated connotes both the stationary posturing of the body and the experientially deeper notion of survival. The hyphenated words thus splice open multiple entry points for understanding the real struggle, the “Standing up Protest” organized before the state secretariat in the capital city.

The exhibition as such consisted of a series of 41 paintings, all except one in the middle, enigmatically positioned with a simple overhead light, being replicas of the same canvas. The replicas portray a single scene: the dark, hazy,nude figure of a woman on her feet and accompanied by a doe. Her hair is tied in a knot over the crown of her head and a single anklet is her only ornament. The curves of her body seem to be smudged out and around her knees there is a thin red line that seems to circumscribe her movements. A spectator who gazes at these 40 replicas experiences a surreal crowding out in the darkness as her eyes locate the centrally positioned odd one in the group. This painting again portrays the same pair, however, with some changes. The woman still stands as dark and enigmatic as in the other canvases, and yet, here her hair is let down and she holds in one of her palms a single flower and she is no longer confined within a red circle which only encompasses the doe, now a little removed from her body.

The second segment of the show was arranged in a nearby curtained off part of the same room. The darkness here beingthicker, the spectator literally gropes and is guided to a circle drawn on the floor and which marks her pre-determined vantage point to gaze upon the scene that awaits her. Slowly she gets to see a glass wall with a sticker that says “Do not touch”. Beyond the wall of glass stand four real-life Adivasi men, young and old, who stare back at her as a light from behind the spectator imprints on the glass screen a reflection of her

own viewing self, now seen against the four figures watching her watching them. And to their right side was a simple board that declared on that particular day “Standing up protest, 118th day”. The artist who was present there explained that day after day, all through that week, four Adivasis would abstain themselves from the protest before the government secretariat and join the exhibition. And as the faces behind and in front of the glass wall change, the number on the board too changes. This interactive installation spoke to me on multiple levels and seemed to actively float multiple narrations of the self. The repeated paintings call into question both the citationality involved in identity configuration mechanisms and how within mainstream representational common sense, tribal communities are repeatedly relegated to a pre-modern, almost bestial and perpetual past away from the heady roller-coaster rides of development discourses as museum pieces. They are claustrophobically caught within the thin red line of our own exoticization drives wherein beast and a tribal person supposedly share a similar bodily idiom. However, sometimes like a riddle that makes sense only when read back to front, the gaze of power is made to fall back on seeing self itself when the seen refuses to be that inert museum piece waiting to be interpreted. It forces the spectator to relinquish the assumed solidity of the relationship between spectator and art and reminds her of the various axes of power that cut across her own body- of caste, class and gender- and asks her to interrogate her own reflection against that of the four Adivasi bodies standing and breathing from behind the glass partition. Further, the stance of resistance here consists in that most basic human posture of standing upright, a posture that typically differentiates the human from the beast, thereby subverting the oft-repeated stereotype of the Adivasi as an atavistic remnant from a primitive past that the development discourse has helped the rest of society to shun. By employing replication, proliferation and mutual reflection of the self and the other conceptualizing each other through reciprocal looking, it reiterates the shared past of all humanity and its closeness both to the beast and the forest, and asks the spectator to re-think locations from where the gaze itself is facilitated. Within such mutually influencing representational templates the fetishized body pushes the fetish back into the eyes of the spectator now brought within the frame of the seen/scene itself. Reading these three texts against each other reminds us yet again that what we tend to otherwise understand as the seemingly separate categories of the ‘real’ and the ‘enacted’ also function as mutually sustaining acts within variously interconnected systems of representations. It is hence that alterity, as Michael Tausig has put it elsewhere, needs to be understood as less a thing in itself and more a relationship fluctuating and oscillating between the other and the seeing self (1993). Realizing

this perhaps, is the first step towards a redressive culture wherein differential thinking need not always already imply bread-crumbs of patronizing gratification accorded under the guise of ‘upliftment of the marginalized’.

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Popular Jokes and Political Space: A Reading of International Chalunion Jokes

Manu C. Skaria

Jokes and laughter are components of complex linguistic performances that differentiate human beings from other species on earth, from a human perspective ironically. The current paper ventures to map the culturally deployed subject positions and its dynamics in the laughter evoked by certain jokes that circulate in social media. It attempts to read especially the “so-called” political jokes of ‘International Chalunion’ (also known as and hereafter ICU) and explore the discourses transmitted to or induced in a reader. The political dimension and the culture specific (read Malayali middleclass) or slightly “esoteric” operation of laughter involved in it is surveyed to theorise the possible impact and significance of these jokes in popular culture.

Culture, here, is not cults and customs, but the structures of meaning through which men give shape to their experience; and politics is not coups and constitutions, but one of the principal arenas in which such structures publicly unfold. The two being thus reframed, determining the connection between them becomes a practicable enterprise... (Geertz 312)

The context of this assertion is the assessment of a study of certain cultural practices in Indonesia in connection with the nation’s politics. The current inspection finds it necessary to take a similar stance in its logic about culture and politics as it enables the identification and study of the interaction of “structures of meaning” and “the arenas in which such structures publicly unfold.”

Just as the name ICU incorporates elements of the local and the global or the ridiculous and the pompous; their jokes are also a mix of downright slapstick comedy and profound sarcasm. ‘Chalunion’ in Malayalam suggests a ‘PJ’ or poor joke that has retained its ability to evoke laughter, usually using self-reflexivity and linguistic pun or parody. ICU often

superimposes images/news items/events from the public sphere onto famous comedy scenes from Malayalam movies; it also uses images to convey sarcastically various cultural practices of the populace. Here are a few samples of ICU's political satire from its archives (chaluunion.com):



Picture 1



Picture 2

Picture 1 mocks the journalist's dramatic act and the politician's verbosity. Picture 2 superimposes an imagined statutory warning: "Buying or selling cattle without proper documents is prohibited" onto a popular scene from the Malayalam movie *Nadodikkaattu*. In doing so it reflects on a controversial statute on selling cattle and mocks the censorship and statutory warning culture that has flourished in recent years. The satire in these pictures is intense and the pictures are still open for reading and interpretation as these keep on circulating in social media.

These jokes are decoded naturally/culturally by common movie-going Malayali crowd with whom the sarcasm could resonate. For someone who is not equipped with the signifying patterns available through an awareness of the political scenario in Kerala/India and a basic knowledge of the history of comedy in Malayalam movies, these pictures often mean nothing. Thus, these ICU images entwine these two threads located in Malayali social life to form a modestly esoteric genre of cynical expression. Hence the location of the reader in the performance of these jokes becomes apparently simple and definite. Yet, is the location of the reader that simple and definite? Is it just/all Malayali and just/all cynicism? Can a staunch party supporter appreciate the sarcasm pointed against his/her party? Though a hypothetical

question, the position under question is justified by certain online outbursts against the ICU group and subsequent retaliation (Search Green Peace/Green peas and ICU).

Quite within the avowedly Malayali middleclass stance of ICU, it brings into play the divergent political and cultural positions into the jokes; hence the ambivalence of subject positions. A characteristic dislike or adoration towards any one of the particulars of the entwining threads of each joke could inform the dialectic operating in the appreciation of a joke by a reader. Yet generally, the superimposition of multiple elements within the joke often enables the negation of the possible dislike towards any one element, and promotes appreciation. The self reflexivity and re-assertion of the joke's identity as simply a joke renders the position of the reader to be one of harmless audience and the art form as harmless entertainment.

Can a political space and voice exist within harmless entertainment? Academic interests on such questions about popular culture have a tendency to polarise into two distinct camps. The high/low art differentiation of "Frankfurt school" – the view of popular media as culture industry – negates the possibility of effective political voice of such popular art forms and construes them as capitalist structures that cater for mass consumption. Meanwhile, the Birmingham school and its practitioners of cultural studies often tend to identify subversive mechanisms operating within the popular and deem them to be potent political tools. In the case of ICU jokes, the self-reflexivity that renders the harmless aura to the jokes suggests a sidelining of satiric content within and justifies the position of Frankfurt school while the content in isolation and its popularity points to politically subversive voices a la Birmingham school.

Ironically enough, populism represents a mirror image of elitism and this shows up its critical failings, for it is basically an overreaction to elitism. Whereas theories have often seen audiences as full of passive unthinking dupes, open to manipulation and ideological control by the mass media and the culture they spread, populism has turned this around, seeing audiences as self-conscious, active subversives, exploiting media culture for their own ends, and resisting and reinterpreting messages circulated by cultural producers. Whereas elitism has patronised the audience by calling it stupid, populism has patronised the audience by calling it subversive. Populism has still presumed to speak on behalf of, not to, audiences. If the elitist conception of the audience is wrong, then so is the populist one, and for similar reasons. They both operate in terms of

unfounded caricatures, and without an adequate empirical and historical appreciation of the social and cultural nature of audiences. (Strinati 243-44)

If that is true, the potential of the object under study and the question whether there could be a potent political space within should be analysed in the context of the social and cultural nature of the audience and the dynamics of production and consumption. Strinati asserts that inherent ideologies play a significant role in relationships between texts and audiences (252). Since the social and cultural nature of the audience could be vaguely tied to assumptions about Malayali middle class for convenience (which might still be inadequate), the ideology inherent in the production and consumption of these jokes could be studied. The available bits of that ideology could be read in terms of representation and narratives.

The process of representation involves choices. What to represent is a pertinent question and that choice works in relation with the creative urge as well as the target audience. “Representation raises questions of inclusion and exclusion” and the ideology within the representations often reveal the power dynamics operating in social and cultural structures (Barker 271). These jokes are crafted for online circulation and popularity could well be the aim; and the circulation vouches for the content. Could entertainment/laughter alone be the sole reason behind the appeal? The extremely satirical content could not be discounted and the idea of political activism comes to the fore. The activism here is linked to exposing the political naïveté of the public that elects the people’s representatives, and the representatives’ farcical behaviour and manipulation of political and social structures and practices, as is clear from the pictures depicted above. The choice of that exposal reveals an ideology of self-criticism not unlike the self-reflexivity of those jokes. Self-criticism is an essential tool for those who venture to better any system from within; the system under analysis in the jokes is democracy and as the archival material is consistent with the ideal of democracy, it could be said that the intention of the satire is not the replacement of the system with something new but the betterment of it. Hence the production and consumption of these jokes become sites of resistance, of those who have only an illusory voice once in five years, towards the mismanagement of democracy. Even though this sounds like cultural populism, the lack of direct involvement of hegemonic powers and profit motive in the production of these jokes reaffirm the ideology of self-appraisal behind it.

However, it is a different scenario when the mass consumption of these jokes and the underlying narratives/discourses in that cultural act of consumption is analysed. “In everyday

life and popular culture, we are continually engaged in narratives of one kind or another. They fill our days and form our lives. They link us together socially and allow us to bring past and present into relative coherence” (Pickering 6). The sheer number of ICU jokes in circulation and the exponential mechanical reproduction of it in social media could point to a homogenisation of content and function as sites of resistance. The question whether it could mobilise public opinion and result in constructive public action or policy making remains to be seen. Hence it is an ideology of self-appraisal dangling in a void. The narrative here is one of active acceptance and pessimism. The point of origin of the political jokes is the discontent with the breaking down and mismanagement of democracy; but the expression of it is stuck with the satirical representations and reproductions of the same, devoid of a tangible goal. In the pictures shown above, most of the major political parties in Kerala are satirised inculcating in the readers and circulators an acceptance of the breakdown of the system; and the subsequent action of resistance is merely the propagation of the absurdity of the situation. “...readers do their own symbolic work on a text and create their own relationships...There is a kind of cultural production all within consumption” (Willis 243). The process of mechanical reproduction of these jokes draw together a disdained populace united in the mockery at their predicament. A new collective identity defined by failure is created and propagated; helplessness is reaffirmed.

“Cultural practices [are] increasingly shaped in unforeseen ways by new social alignments that problematised most hitherto taken-for-granted assumptions about...culture” (Milner and Browitt 211). Academic ventures into the analysis of popular culture and its artefacts gain significance in this context. Paul Willis, in “Symbolic Creativity,” argues that symbolic texts or symbolic commodities as such are not end products or a destination of cultural affairs but stages in and catalysts of cultural affairs (242). The production and consumption of these jokes, as a cultural act, is not an endpoint. Academia should be able to decode these acts of cultural significance and appropriate the political space within to enhance suitable policy-making. For example, a literary study could strengthen the ideology of self-appraisal and counterbalance the narrative of doom and helplessness.

Discursive practices such as forwarding or sharing a joke do tell a tale or two of our times and our position in it.

Confronting textuality not just cognitively—as generalisable meaning—but experiencing the work/play of the signifier and to move secondarily to criticism and analysis may

disclose for the subject something of his or her own actual determinacy and situatedness. Historically determined structures of meaning read me rather than I them. (Easthope 180)

It is a poor joke anyways...

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Penning the Protest: Petitions by the Aborigines of Australia

Anusree R. Nair

Must we native Old Australians
In our own land rank as aliens?
Banish bans and conquer caste,
Then we'll win our own at last (Noonuccal, 664).

The first records of European mariners sailing to Australia, the land which they called *Terra Australis Incognita*, appear from around 1606. The onset of British colonization of Australia was marked by the arrival of the First Fleet led by Captain Arthur Philip in 1788 which led to the establishment of a penal colony. The indigenous people of Australia were called 'Aboriginals' by the White settlers. The term referred collectively to the people who were found already inhabiting the continent, and later to the descendants of those people.

Out shadowed by the colonizers, the indigenous Australians lived traumatic lives for several decades. They were not granted even fundamental human rights. Deprived of their tradition, the aboriginals were prevented from speaking their native languages. They were dispossessed of their lands and were forced to live on reserves and missions and work for rations. They were given minimal education and needed governmental permission even to marry or to visit relatives. The federal constitution considered them as non citizens. There was a time when they were not counted while computing the size of the population of the Commonwealth or any part of it. Thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from their families and were placed in institutions to be trained to work in menial-labour intensive occupations.

The lived experience of this oppression came to be inscribed in Aboriginal writings. As Ashcroft states in his introduction to *The Empire Writes Back*, marginality serves as a source

of creative energy. For the aboriginals, writing was an essentially 'political' act, a means for voicing their trauma. Poems, fiction, plays, autobiographies, memoirs all sprang from the wounds of being the colonised, the enslaved and the dispossessed. As Mudrooroo Narogin says, "Aboriginal literature begins as a cry from the heart directed at the white man. It is a cry for justice." Moreover, Aboriginal authorship manifested itself in letters and petitions that hold a prominent stature among the narratives of their lives.

Petitions are defined as "demands for a favour, or for the redressing of an injustice, directed to some established authority (Voss 1)." They were used by the masses in order to voice their demands. Andreas Wurgler discusses the potential contribution of collective and individual petitions and supplications for research on social conflicts. Petitions serve to record the voices of the masses which would have otherwise faded unheard.

Aboriginal people have been involved in the preparation and signing of petitions for many years and have presented those petitions to various prime ministers, members of parliament and royalty. Non-indigenous people also wrote petitions concerning Aboriginal affairs. Petitions were often concerned with citizenship rights and the ill treatment of the Aboriginal people at the hands of White settlers. They mark the growth of an aboriginal identity triggered by a political awareness about the extensive crusades towards decolonization.

This article seeks to examine the form, content and role of petitions by the aborigines of Australia. As Voss states, the very act of petitioning served as the crystallization point for other popular rights such as the right to assemble in order to draw up, discuss, and sign the petition. Aboriginal petitions shall be deemed as powerful historical sources since they bear the name of the ruler or ruling body the petition is addressed to, the names of the petitioners, the cause and so on.

As Mark McKenna and Garry Shead write, in Australia there had been a tension between the crown as the symbol of dispossession and the crown as the source of appeal for justice and land rights. There are many instances where the fight is not against the crown, but against individual colonisers. The reserves policy of the settlers too helped in creating a conviction among the indigenous people that they are directly connected with Crown. About from 1840s on, the aboriginals petitioned the crown in the standard rhetoric of British Constitutional practice. They believed that the Queen will protect their rights to the land. In February 1846, Aboriginal people of Flinders Island, a reserve for those dispossessed from Van Diemen's land, send a petition to Queen Victoria, seeking for a redressal of their troubles. In the petition

they stress their relationship with the Crown saying: ‘we Your Majesty’s Petitioners are your free Children that we were not taken prisoners but freely gave up our country’. The petition further posits strong charges against Superintendent Dr. Jeanneret who treated them meanly. The petitioners describe how the Superintendent was indifferent regarding matters of their welfare. “Our houses were let fall down & they were never cleaned but were covered with vermin & not white-washed. We were often without Clothes except a very little one & Dr. Jeanneret did not care to mind us when we were sick until we were very bad. Eleven of us died when he was here. He put many of us into Jail for talking to him because we would not be his slaves.” The petition ends with a strong faith in the Queen as their redeemer, as the supreme authority capable of relieving them of their fears and anxieties. In May 1863, the Kulin people from Coranderrk send several gifts to the Governor of Victoria and a petition to the Queen expressing their love for her. On 30 June the Governor gazetted a reserve for the Kulins. In October they were sent the word of the Queen’s interest in their welfare. This made the Kulins believe that they had been permanently given the land of Coranderrk and inspired other petitions (McKenna, 67).

Many of the petitions were entreaties, appealing with bent knees and bowed head to the controlling power to understand their agony and redeem their suffering. The authority is addressed to as the father and the Aboriginal as the humble Child. Records reveal that the Aboriginals were threatened by colonial officials for writing petitions. For instance, Mary Ann Arthur, in her letter to the Colonial Secretary of Van Diemen’s Land, complains against the Superintendent Henry Jeanette: “I thank my father the Gov that he has told us black people that we might write and tell him if we had any complaint to make about ourselves. I want now to tell the Gov that Dr. Jeanette wants to make out my husband and myself very bad and wicked people and talks plenty about putting us into jail and that he will hang us for helping to write petition to the Queen from our people.” The letter ends like this: “I remain sir, your Humble Aborigine Child Mary Ann Arthur” (Jose 356).

Missions in Australia were part of the larger imperial ideology of civilizing the colonials. Most of the aboriginal people found the missions invasive and destructive, where classical indigenous life was banished in an attempt to normalize the tribal people, ‘bringing Truth to those living in darkness’ (Costa 44). A petition by Maggie Moubourne, a Keerrupmjara woman from the Lake Condah region, to D. N. McLeod, Vice-Chairman of the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines states their vigorous protest against Reverend Johann Stahle’s treatment of the Aboriginal people: “. . . Mr Stahle spoke in a threatening manner to me and

stopped our rations, which he denies and I say that he is a liar and has always been. . . and he doesn't treat us justly" (306). The petition written on February 27, 1900 was signed by ten other people including her husband Ernest Mobourne. The Mobournes' protests led to their being removed from Lake Condah Mission. Nevertheless, what makes these letters and petitions significant is the Aboriginals' refusal to be passive recipients of power, pushed to the margins. Instead, they dared to strike either individually or collectively wherever they were denied justice.

Aboriginal writing took a political turn with William Cooper's Petition to the King, the Bark petitions and the petition by the Larrakia people. As mentioned earlier, the commonwealth constitution considered the indigenous people as non-citizens and did not contain any reference to them worth mention. Section 51 (xxvi) of the Commonwealth Constitution stated that:

The Parliament shall, subject to the Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to the people of any race other than the aboriginal race in any State, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.

Indigenous Activists called for an amendment of the Australian constitution so as to give the Commonwealth power in Aboriginal affairs. In the mid-1930s, William Cooper, the secretary of the Australian Aborigine League, sent a petition, with 1814 signatures, to Prime Minister Joseph Lyons, to be forwarded to the King George V saying: ". . .your petitioners therefore humbly pray that your Majesty will intervene in our behalf and through the instrument of your Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth grant to our people representation in the Federal Parliament, either in the person of one of our own blood or by a white man known to have studied our needs and to be in sympathy with our race" (246). Indigenous people from Queensland, Palm Island, Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Goulburn Island mission were among the signatories. However, the Commonwealth refused to forward the petition which led Cooper to call for a Day of Mourning and protest in Sydney to be held on the following 26th of January.

The Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship ran a petition campaign in 1957 which was launched at a huge meeting in the Sydney Town Hall on 29 April that year. It demanded for a Referendum to make Aboriginal affairs a matter of Commonwealth responsibility. The petition was drawn up by the feminist and human rights campaigner Jessie Street, along with Brian Fitzpatrick of the Council for Civil Liberties and lawyer Christian Jollie-Smith.

Petitions of 1957 and 1958 sought amendment of the section 51 (xxvi) deleting the phrase 'other than the aboriginal race in any State' so that the indigenous people of Australia too will get an equal status with 'the people'. These petitions also demanded for the repeal of section 127 which declares that in reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.

Jack Davis' poem "The First-born," echoes the sigh of the brown land craving for its first-born who came out of its womb long ago. Petitions served to articulate the indigenous claim over the land, both moral and legal. For them, the land was not only the source of their livelihood, but also a part of their belief systems. They consider it as sacred and their myths and legends are centered around the place. The land serves as a backdrop to their very existence and was a part of their identity. British invasion made them dispossessed of their native lands. It is worthwhile to mention here that Lieutenant James Cook who arrived at the east coast of Australia in 1770, declared the land he called New South Wales to be the property of Britain's King George III, thus conveniently forgetting the fact that the land was already inhabited by about 750,000 Aboriginal people.

Petitions such as the Yirrkala bark petitions of 1963 reveal that the native leaders were not consulted even while taking important decisions with regard to their land. The petition prompted by a proclamation made by the then Prime Minister Robert Menzies that the federal government shall grant lease for bauxite mining in Arnhem land leading to the excision of about 300 square kilometers of land from the Arnhem reserve for the purpose. The petitioners clearly state their fear that their needs and interests will be completely ignored as they have been ignored in the past. They reclaim the land for themselves by asserting that "the land in question has been hunting and food gathering land for the Yirrkala tribes from time immemorial: we were all born here." Signed by 131 clan leaders of the Yolungu, the petition merged both the indigenous and the commonwealth traditions of law by using bark painting with text typed on paper. The petition contained the clan designs of all the areas that were threatened by mining. The painted designs proclaim Yolungu law, depicting the aborigines' traditional relations to land whereas the text was typed both in English and Gumatj languages. Though these documents did not achieve the constitutional change sought, they were effective in making a way for the eventual recognition of Indigenous rights in Commonwealth law. The 1963 petition was followed by a series of bark petitions over the years; in 1968, 1988, 1998 and 2008. The 1968 petition is a request to the House of Representatives not to change the name of their land from Nhulunby to Gove. It says, "this name Nhulunbuy was given to the

area by Wuyal, our dream-time ancestor, who has given us our laws. We do not want the name he gave to this area to be changed.” Another attempt towards a massive petitioning was made by the Larrakia people in 1972 calling for land rights and political representation for the aboriginal people of Australia. The Barunga statement of 1988 demands for permanent control and enjoyment of the ancestral lands, compensation for loss of lands, and protection of and control of access to their sacred sites, sacred objects, artefacts, designs, knowledge and works of art. The Yirrkala Petition presented to Kevin Rudd, the Prime Minister of Australia in 2008 by the clans of East Arnhem land seeks the recognition and protection of the indigenous people’s rights to their property and life.

It is significant that the aborigines made use of the legal procedures and language of the coloniser in order to voice their demands. As Peter H. Russell notes, “Adopting the white man’s political means to achieve Aboriginal ends is a deeply ironic process....The very vocabulary through which Indigenous leaders come to articulate their aspirations – referring to their societies as ‘nations,’ asserting an original ‘sovereignty,’ and claiming ‘title’ to their lands and waters is the vocabulary of the dominant society” (31).

Thus, over the years, petitions have provided a conduit for the aborigines of Australia to assert their claim to be the rightful citizens of the land thus making them a part of the larger historical process of drawing the contours of the nation as we see it today. Land figures as the prominent metaphor in most of the petitions. Reclaiming it, is for them the first step towards decolonization. The petitions may interest an anthropologist or a historian also because they provide information about the various tribes like Djapu, Mangalili, Madarrpa, MagarrwanaImirri, Djambarrpuynu, Gumaitj, Marrakulu, Galpu, Dhaluangu, Wangurri and so on that existed in Australia during the period of colonial invasion.

The very act of petitioning helped to build a collective consciousness among the indigenous people of Australia. It led the people to assemble under their respective indigenous leaders for a common cause. Thus petitions also paved the way for the emergence of a social space, an indigenous social space, where the first-borns of Australia found a voice for themselves. In their attempt to re-state the indigenous sense of self that had been eroded by an age-long process of dislocation, they may be viewed as a part of the broader spectrum of resistance narratives that sprung from the colonies.

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Caryl Churchill and the Element of Feminist Consciousness in Postmodern British Drama: A Representational Study.

Preethamol M.K

The place of Caryl Churchill among contemporary women dramatists in the panorama of post war British drama is matchless and inimitable. Being a resolute guardian of the feminist discourse, her masterly crafting of the landscape of the female world suppressed by the malaise of the patriarchal society delineated in the canvas of drama makes Churchill an original figure to be reckoned with in this post modern era. *Top Girls* which is hailed to be one of her most iconic of works is the finest yield which showcases her concern for the rampant vulnerable issues enveloping the female world. Churchill drew the attention of the contemporary world by exposing the politics in the female work world. She also emphasised the class culture of women working in various positions and the diverse tensions associated with the women community. She wanted to point out how material success for a few women cannot be a scaling point for measuring and attributing triumph of the entire women community in general. For vindicating this argument, Churchill has introduced a wide array of female types who have opted for separate life choices in the play *Top Girls*. This article aims at a critical reading of these thrust areas in the light of a detailed feminist appraisal.

The playwrights of a period draw true testimonies to the happenings of the time in which they lived. This makes them successful and legendary in the craft that they are best at. Coupled with their imaginative power and the shrewd acumen that they have to select issues which are relevant to the times, playwrights constantly carve the niche of a new tradition that is exclusively right on the target. Measuring the lives of the people, the playwrights were quick to indicate through their works what happened in the lives of the people who inhabited the society. The works portrayed current themes camouflaged in proper messages that were relevant and valid in highlighting the sensitivity of the people. This was an unconscious movement by the playwrights which was indispensable to the change in times. Post war British playwrights are

noteworthy in this area in that they are unbeaten in delineating the disquiet of post war Britain and its effect on the British society. Though this is an open observation on playwrights in general, it holds true of the contemporary Modern British playwright Caryl Churchill.

Enumerating the handful of playwrights who have changed the arena of British drama in post war Britain, Caryl Churchill definitely needs a status in the foremost row. She is one among the present day women playwright who is constantly on the lookout for new themes and new formats. She firmly believed and worked on the principle that “Playwrights don’t give answers, they ask questions. We need to find new questions, which may help us to answer the old ones or make them unimportant, and this means new subjects and new form” (Churchill 446). She has gained renown not only in contemporary Britain but also in the US too. Unlike other playwrights of her time in the 1960s, Churchill was adamant in pursuing a diverse trail in routing her career. Her works and theatre always held the tag line of against the status quo. Furthermore, Churchill worked under the tough times of Margaret Thatcher who had brutally cut down the subsidy for public arts. She was lucky enough to get associated with fringe theatres and other women’s theatre groups who recognised her talent and presented her with numerous opportunities as a woman writer.

Born in the year 1938 in England, Caryl Churchill was well educated and had her degree in English from the prestigious seat of learning – University of Oxford. Following her marriage, Churchill had a homely time raising her three sons though keeping abreast of what was going on in contemporary Britain. She wrote small plays for the television and the radio, but felt that she was left out from the main stream happenings of the times. She felt the desperate need to be part of something more. Alicia Tycer tries to frame the discontent of Churchill:

I didn’t feel a part of what was happening in the sixties. During that time I felt isolated. I had small children and was having miscarriages. It was an extremely solitary life. What politicized me was being discontent with my own life of being a barrister’s wife and just being at home... it seemed claustrophobic...By the mid -60s, I had this gloomy feeling that when the Revolution came I would be swept away. (Tycer 6)

But luckily for Churchill, she realised that there were others who shared the same sentiments of restlessness and wanted an outsourcing for their emotional disturbances. She felt the need to work with other women who shared her politics and her creativity. The group rallied forward upholding and raising their voices against the changes in the social and political life of the period. They got a brilliant venue for staging their displeasure when the politically

left minded theatre groups like Monstrous Regiment and other fringe theatre groups gave the budding playwrights chances to work with them. The main stream theatre groups provided lesser opportunities for newcomers especially women playwrights. In such a circumstance, the fringe theatre groups were a blessing in that they applauded those writers, especially women who worked along and raised their voices on burning themes concerning women issues like female health and family. Caryl Churchill became actively involved with such theatre groups who gave her absolute autonomy in exercising her creativity. In the year 1974 her first official feminist work saw the lime light. It had clear feminist arguments in the form of handling desire among women. The ensuing years transformed Caryl Churchill the writer to a fully fledged politically charged woman playwright who fought for the rights of women through her dramatic works which ultimately resulted in their successful stage expressions. She also had some brilliant prospects of collaborating with renowned directors of drama with whom she shared like minded opinions. Her political attitude and targeted focus as a socialist feminist in her dramatic works gave a clear direction to her career within a limited period of time. Churchill's popularity coincided with the upsurge of 'second- wave feminism' in Britain.

To analyse the dialectics of feminism in the oeuvre of Caryl Churchill, *Top Girls* (1982) seems apt in that the play upheld a commanding avowal on the status of the women of the 1980s. It was also the work which established her reputation as a playwright of renown both in terms of literary reputation and commercial viability. The 1980s witnessed a rapid increase in the contribution of women playwrights to the main stream drama. The concept of women also underwent a change from that of a docile individual to that of a superwoman who was capable of balancing home and work. She excelled in both domestic and professional fields and was considered to be on par with her male counterparts. The rule of Britain by Margaret Thatcher spoke volumes about this aspect of woman wielding super power. Through *Top Girls* Churchill wanted to portray an image which was contrary to the popularly accepted belief that women can have it all.

Top Girls won Caryl Churchill the Obie award in 1983 and established her as a strong voice in the sphere of playwriting. The play was a direct answer to the political episodes of the time of Margret Thatcher. The setting of the play is that of the era of Thatcher and the second wave trait of feminism in the 1980 Britain. The country was moving towards a different vista which was more conservative in nature and outlook. Since the Prime Minister was a woman, it was generally believed that she would uphold and be helpful to the point of being lopsided towards females and their demanding issues. But the situation only got hardened and

in fact worsened the plight of the women in that a patriarchal nature and culture of the British society was sustained. *Top Girls* examined these aspects of feminism through the work. Marlene was Thatcher's equivalent in the play. *Top Girls* is mostly referred to as Churchill's 'Thatcher play' as it replicated the era of Thatcher. Marlene is a super woman who climbs and conquers the corporate and social hierarchical ladder but fails to cater to the needs of the lesser fortunate. The subjugation of woman under patriarchal system is the highlight of the play. Thus the politics of a class ridden society is brought out through the dialectical writing of Churchill. As a socialist feminist playwright, Churchill was keen on putting to proper use the complex dialectics of the political theatre. Patriarchy and the issues of gender and sex were intertwined in the sense that both were the dialectics that highlighted the reality of the issues concerning women. Her concern was in delineating the original status of women in a male dominated capitalist society.

Caryl Churchill became more conscious of the politics in her when she got married and had three children of her own. Her social background made her have a clear vision of the world outside. The Thatcher years had an adverse effect on British leftists and artists, but was the most productive period considering the dramatic oeuvre of Churchill. The tag line of Churchill as a socialist feminist writer gains full significance when we read her plays in the background of the 1980 Britain. Patriarchal culture was dominant where the status of women was questioned in the contemporary capitalist society. Gender, issues based on sex and class, matters of motherhood and the career of women, the winning components which defines the professional success of women, the disappointments and the pain which permeates the life of women were some of the concerning factors which defined the status of women in capitalist societies. These feminist and socialist discourses functioned as the dialectics in the plays written by Churchill during the 1980s. Most of these controversial thoughts were concerns of the playwright even before she entered into full fledged playwriting. But they gained a new profile and identity when the audience accepted her as a writer of reputation. The people acknowledged her as a champion who voiced their issues in writing for the public to view. This in turn made her more aware of her social commitment as a writer. These remained as her thematic concerns when she penned *Top Girls*. The play is an ode to the Thatcherian context of England and the fight for the feminist rights of the 1980s. The play represents an all female community and the drama had an all female cast. The playwright wanted the audience to take sides with the oppressed women.

Top Girls was premiered at the Royal court Theatre in 1982 and was directed by Max Stafford Clark. *Top Girls* is a representational study on women belonging to different classes and generations. The women who meet to congratulate Marlene on her promotion as the top girl are interestingly from another era and age. They are cast in a different and by gone time frame to make the audience realise the present day situation of women which has not changed much. But when Churchill wrote the play it was the time when the tag line for women was ‘women can have it all’. The plot of the play was structured in such a way that it was a novel experience for the audience. The audience had to travel to and fro with regard to the element of time. With each scene there was something new about the character of Marlene which the dramatist was eager to acquaint the audience with. Through Marlene the playwright was keen on asking the audience about the focal points of defining success for a woman.

The central attraction of the play is the dinner scene where the historical characters meet for dinner. The scene was a challenge for the audience as it had clashing discourses and fragmented dialogues. Churchill was able to establish the basic theme of highlighting the struggles of women in Scene I itself by aptly placing the guests of Marlene. All the women had stories to elaborate which had marks of struggle and patriarchal oppression labelled on them. By drawing our attention to the subjugated characters, the playwright wanted to draw our attention to the established norms of oppression existent in the society. The diners share the disappointments and pain which they had encountered in their lives while on the road to becoming infamous. Despite the fact that they had to encounter tough situations, the energetic atmosphere is successfully transcended towards the audience. The feminist awareness of the playwright regarding the issues encountered by the characters is well portrayed in the way *Top Girls* is framed as a socialist feminist play. The arguments in the play centre on gender discrimination, and other burning feminist topics which ruled the mind of the writer as a woman and as a feminist. *Top Girls* moulded and further cemented the feminist writer in Caryl Churchill and made her aware of her true calling as a writer with a social commitment. Churchill has explained her evolution as a feminist writer as follows: “For years and years I thought of myself as a writer before I thought of myself as a woman, but recently I’ve found that I would say I was a feminist writer as opposed to other people saying I was. I’ve found that as I go out more into the world and get into situations which involve women what I feel is strongly a feminist position and that inevitably comes into what I write”(Tyser 8).

What prompted Churchill to take up the matters concerning women and to enunciate their problems through her writings is her trepidation over the hassles faced by women all

over the world. The world in which the women inhabit is filled with males who are prejudiced against the way in which they look at the problems faced by women. She wanted to voice out loud the difficulties faced by the women. In *Top Girls* Churchill found the best chance for enumerating the problems faced by a wide variety of females belonging to various generations. All the women in the play had tough experiences from men and fought against the male hardships following which some failed pathetically too. But one binding factor in the play is that all the women portrayed in the play were ignored by the system even though they tried to register their protests. It went unheard in the mayhem of the hustle and bustle of male egoism. The women were the scapegoats of their own system where the males did not care for the sufferings of their women folk. All the characters selected by the playwright have some resemblance or the other. This is deftly structured in as the leading arguments of the play *Top Girls*. All the women pictured in the play are conscious of their rights in that they know that they are not to be mistreated by the rest of the society where the majority are males. Thus they also know that the dominant tradition in the society is that of the patriarchal culture in which there is a specific hierarchical order: a male dominant organisation who are the commanding forces controlling things in the society. To survive in that world of the superior male order, the women are shown to be displaying tactics which they find conducive to their living circumstances. But these tactics developed by the females for their own safety and protection are not accepted by the males. This is where controversy begins.

All of the women attain victory too in their respective spheres viz, Joan becomes a Pope, and she defeats the system in which she is part of by becoming an inherent part of it. She had to camouflage herself as a man though her body betrays herself when she gets pregnant after an affair with one of her chamberlains. Griselda attains the status of a Marquis wife. But she is aware that though her status got a huge raise she will never be like the Marquis on account of the fact that she is a woman. She is obedient to the highest degree that she never argues or questions her husband because she believes that obedience is highly expected of her as a wife and also since she is a woman. Her obedient and steadfast behaviour is finally rewarded by her husband and the patriarchal system in which they were part of. As for Isabella Bird, she is pictured as a traveller. But she was a slave to the Victorian age in which she lived. She was tied down by the society who upheld the notion that a woman's place has to be at home taking care of the male members of the family. When she feels that she is liberated after the death of her dominant father, she fulfils her lifelong desire of travelling around the world. But she feels guilty in that the system of which she is part of has imprinted in her the belief that it was

only the male members who are expected to travel around the world with no care and attention. Brueghel's Dull Gret is the only character who is portrayed as who is earnestly fighting against the devils who took her children away. She is not let down by her gender or her inadvertent situation. She is bold and challenges her destiny and takes action in revenge. Marlene is the top girl who lives the dream life of a corporate woman in the present world. Marlene is driven by the desire to own and control. But she also had to pay a terrible price. She suffered abortions and had to give up her only child to her sister to embrace her dream career in the city. Their success – though all the characters attained it with mid losses – was a pricey one. They are portrayed to be happy with their successes, being part of the economic system, but they are found to be miserable in their own way.

Top Girls reminds us of the way in which a patriarchal society functioned in the old world and how with relatively no change it operates in the present world. The saga reminds us that individual struggles never see the light of the day since the system has its vicious roots deeply embedded in the culture of the society. A better way to fight against the system is yet to be evolved. Churchill accentuates the futility of individual solutions in trying to transform the society. She advocates for a collective action in achieving harmony for the activities of women. She holds the capitalist society being responsible for the misfortunes against the society. Churchill argues that feminism should couple with humanism so as to achieve acceptance in the society. By dissecting the power relations in the patriarchal society, Churchill tires to have a closer look at the social structure and mental working of the society. To attain this Churchill combines in a deft manner social commentary and theatrical inventiveness. Her exploration of the techniques of the feminist theatre such as overlapping dialogues and time shifting has secured her place as a famous woman contemporary socialist feminist theatre practitioner. Her works addresses the marginalisation of female experiences. She reiterates the fact that there will be no movement forward for woman in the society if they are continue to oppress one another.

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