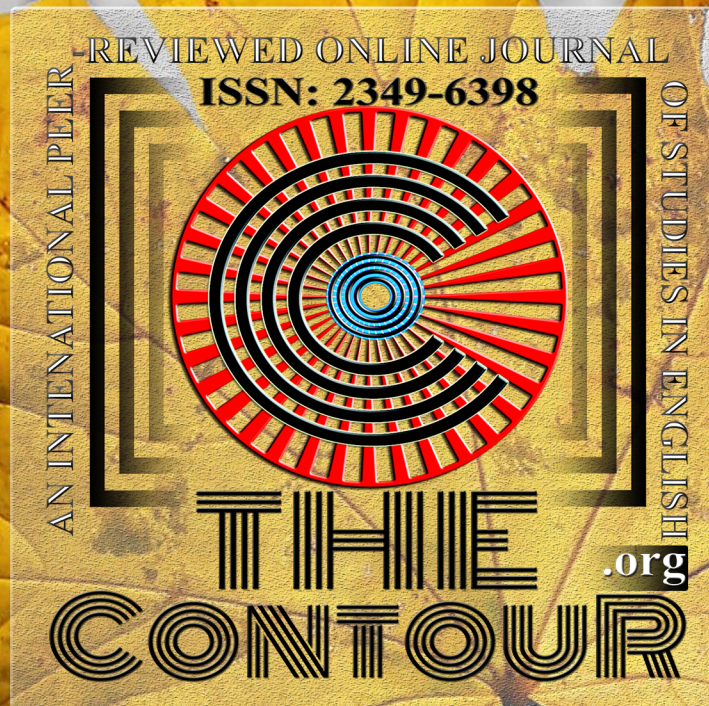


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EDITORIAL

From the Desk of the Editor-in-Chief

Susanta Kumar Bardhan

The Editorial Board feels happy by publishing **Volume 5, Issue III & IV** (January 2019 & April 2019) of our journal *The Contour* (ISSN: 2349-6398). It has become possible only because of the constant and enduring support and encouragement we have received from its well-wishers.

We also express our sincere gratitude to the reviewers and advisers for their critical perspectives and suggestions much needed for upkeep of the sound health of the journal. For several technical reasons we have not been able to accommodate all the papers submitted for the present issue.

The readers and the well-wishers of the journal are earnestly requested to give their valuable suggestions for the improvement of its future issues.

It is also declared that the views and observations presented in the writings are solely of the respective authors, not of the editor/editorial board of the journal.

Special thanks should go to Suman Saha who with his expertise in computer have been working strenuously and sincerely since its very inception for giving the shape to the journal out of his sheer enthusiasm.

25.05.2019

Susanta Kumar Bardhan

Editor-In-Chief

The Contour

&

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ARTICLE

The New Poetry: Tagore, Whitman and Sri Aurobindo

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Abstract

*Despite Sri Aurobindo's problem of expression between 1917 and 1920, when he was serializing *The Future Poetry* in *The Arya*, he could speak a lot, in wonderful moments of revealed prose, about the possibility of a dynamic revival of poetry from the ancient times. He finds traces of the revelatory utterance, the mantra of the Vedic seers, in the poetry of Whitman, Tagore and Carpenter, as also in Yeats and some other Irish poets. The letters and *The Future Poetry* taken together complete the entire theory, which sheds light on three of the great modern poets, Whitman, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo himself. The present study seeks to explore the achievement of these three poets, the whole of *Leaves of Grass*, Tagore's song-lyrics (*Gitobitan*) and Sri Aurobindo's own poetry written between 1930 and 1950, through the lens of Sri Aurobindo's theory of poetry.*

Keywords: mantra, Kavi, agni, third production, rhythmic voyage.

Sri Aurobindo tried revisions of his unfinished poetic manifesto, *The Future Poetry*, not once but many times, and being unsatisfied with the incompleteness of his theory, said a firm "no" to its publication. The book came out after his passing; it came out first with the permission of Nolini Kanta Gupta in 1953. It will be a mistake to believe that Sri Aurobindo did not know about the overhead or spiritual planes or the source of the *mantra*, but he could speak clearly about them with reference to poetry only later in his letters to K.D. Sethna written in the 1930s. When he wrote the *Life Divine* earlier, he was explaining those planes frequently with reference to yoga and spirituality.

The Overmind is a creator of truths, not of illusions or falsehoods: what is worked out in any given overmental energism or movement is the truth of the Aspect, Power, Idea, Force, Delight which is



liberated into independent action, the truth of the consequences of its reality in that independence. There is no exclusiveness asserting each as the sole truth of being or the others as inferior truths: each God knows all the Gods and their place in existence; each Idea admits all other ideas and their right to be; each Force concedes a place to all other forces and their truth and consequences; no delight of separate fulfilled existence or separate experience denies or condemns the delight of other existence or other experience. (CWSA 21.278)

This he wrote much before he started the Future Poetry in 1917. It shows he was well aware of the location and the characteristics of this overhead zone. He sees well that it is the last summit of the Mind linking the Supramental territory with the lower hemispheres of human consciousness. He differentiates perfectly between the Overmind and the Supermind at least three years before he began writing The Future Poetry. The following passage is a more clarified view of this linking plane:

The Overmind is a principle of cosmic Truth and a vast and endless catholicity is its very spirit; its energy is an all-dynamism as well as a principle of separate dynamisms: it is a sort of inferior Supermind,—although it is concerned predominantly not with absolutes, but with what might be called the dynamic potentials or pragmatic truths of Reality, or with absolutes mainly for their power of generating pragmatic or creative values, although, too, its comprehension of things is more global than integral, since its totality is built up of global wholes or constituted by separate independent realities uniting or coalescing together, and although the essential unity is grasped by it and felt to be basic of things and pervasive in their manifestation, but no longer as in the Supermind their intimate and ever-present secret, their dominating continent, the overt constant builder of the harmonic whole of their activity and nature. (279)

This is the plane which gives one access to the feeling of cosmic awareness, a cosmic identification with all beings. The Supermind cannot be expressed in human language; if it wants to express itself, it has to express itself through the Overmind. One suspects, Sri Aurobindo was not able to connect the concept of the overmind with his theory of poetry between 1917 and 1920. He was struggling to connect it. The result was the repeated revisions of the Future Poetry and his ultimate dissatisfaction about it.



Sri Aurobindo's one-room life began from 24 November 1926. As a recluse he might be feeling more relaxed, as became evident in a drastic change in his prose style. His structure and language in general became lucid and smoother from the 1930s onwards and with that came an improved communicative skill, a better way of expressing things as he wrote to K.D. Sethna on the Overmind and the other overhead planes with an absolute spontaneity and clarity with reference to poetry that comes from the higher planes of consciousness.

The Overmind is essentially a spiritual power. Mind in it surpasses its ordinary self and rises and takes its stand on a spiritual foundation. It embraces beauty and sublimates it; it has an essential aesthesis which is not limited by rules and canons; it sees a universal and an eternal beauty while it takes up and transforms all that is limited and particular. It is besides concerned with things other than beauty or aesthetics. It is concerned especially with truth and knowledge or rather with a wisdom that exceeds what we call knowledge; its truth goes beyond truth of fact and truth of thought, even the higher thought which is the first spiritual range of the thinker. It has the truth of spiritual thought, spiritual feeling, and spiritual sense and at its highest the truth that comes by the most intimate spiritual touch or by identity. Ultimately, truth and beauty come together and coincide, but in between there is a difference. Overmind in all its dealings puts truth first; it brings out the essential truth (and truths) in things and also its infinite possibilities; it brings out even the truth that lies behind falsehood and error; it brings out the truth of the Inconscient and the truth of the Superconscient and all that lies in between. When it speaks through poetry, this remains its first essential quality; a limited aesthetical artistic aim is not its purpose. It can take up and uplift any or every style or at least put some stamp of itself upon it (Sethna 50).

Poetic lines become *mantra* by the touch of the Overmind inspiration or by the touch of very high Intuition, which is a plane just below the Overmind (1.Higher mind 2.Illumined mind 3.Intuition 4.Overmind). The Overmind is a gateway to the Supermind, which is no more to be called Mind, because it is above the human mind forming a bridge with the Ananda or the Sacchidananda. Neither the Supermind nor the Sacchidananda can be expressed in human language. But then something of the supermind percolates down into the Overmind and expresses something of the divine afflatus through it. Poetry then becomes a living image of the Truth in human language. The mantric poetry is an inspired Word, a supremely inevitable utterance that is born with the influence or the direct intervention of the Overmind or the mixed influence of the Intuitive-Overmind.



The Overmind is not strictly a transcendental consciousness - that epithet would more accurately apply to the supramental and to the Sachchidananda consciousness - though it looks up to the transcendental and may receive something from it and though it does transcend the ordinary human mind and in its full and native self-power, when it does not lean down and become part of mind, is superconscious to us. It is more properly a cosmic consciousness. (13)

That clarifies a part of the Overhead aesthetics and the poetic theory of Sri Aurobindo. But then, Overhead planes may be mixed in their action and influence on the poetic lines. Sri Aurobindo offers specific characteristics of the Overhead planes including its highest range, that is, the Overmind:

...of course all Overhead poetry is not from the Overmind, more often it comes from the Higher Thought, the Illumined Mind or the pure Intuition. This last is different from the mental intuition which is frequent enough in poetry that does not transcend the mental level. The language and rhythm from these other Overhead levels can be very different from that which is proper to the Overmind; for the Overmind thinks in a mass; its thought, feeling, vision is high or deep or wide or all these things together: to use the Vedic expression about fire, the divine messenger, it goes vast on its way to bring the divine riches, and it has a corresponding language and rhythm. The Higher Thought has a strong tread often with bare unsaddled feet and moves in a clear-cut light: a divine power, measure, dignity is its most frequent character. The outflow of the Illumined Mind comes in a flood brilliant with revealing words or a light of crowding images, sometimes surcharged with its burden of revelations, sometimes with a luminous sweep. The Intuition is usually a lightning flash showing up a single spot or plot of ground or scene with an entire and miraculous completeness of vision to the surprised ecstasy of the inner eye; its rhythm has a decisive inevitable sound which leaves nothing essential unheard, but very commonly is embodied in a single stroke. These, however, are only general or dominant characters; any number of variations is possible. (11-12)

And the variations are caused by the mixed influence of these overhead planes; one line may be from the illumined mind, the next may come from the Higher mind and yet a third may be from



Overmind or Intuition, Or there can be the blend of the Overmind-Higher mind or Overmind-Illumined Mind or Overmind-Intuition on a line or lines. Sri Aurobindo could not clarify this aesthetics when he was writing the *Future Poetry*, although there were excellent intuitive observations on Whitman and Tagore in the book, supported by a sound intellect. And he was entering the soul of Whitman with his great inlook:

But beyond this representation of the largest thought and life and broadest turn to the future possible to his age, there is something else which arises from it all and carries us forward towards what is now opening to man around or above, towards a vision of new reaches and a profounder interpretation of existence. Whitman by the intensity of his intellectual and vital dwelling on the things he saw and expressed, arrives at some first profound sense of the greater self of the individual, of the greater self in the community of the race and in all its immense past action opening down through the broadening eager present to an immense future, of the greater self of Nature and of the eternal, the divine Self and Spirit of existence who broods over these things, who awaits them and in whom they come to the sense of their oneness. (CWSA 26 196-97)

Sri Aurobindo was meaning the incantatory verse of Whitman, the rhythmic journey into the subjective self, the large music and the great choric chants in Homeric inspiration. He offers an example too, which may be aptly explained by his clarified aesthetics of the letters written to Sethna in the mid-1930s. Sri Aurobindo quotes the following famous lines from Whitman:

O Thou transcendent,
 Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
 Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them,
 Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving, . . .
 How should I think, how breathe a single breath, how speak, if

out of myself

I could not launch to those superior universes?

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,

At nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,

But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, O actual Me,



And, lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
 Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
 And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of space... (198)

One hears here the rolling cadences of a vast ocean, and to borrow Wordsworth's phrase, "breathless in adoration" (Palgrave 273). Here is that mighty majestic sweep of mantric poetry which comes from the Overhead planes, and surely from the Overmind in the first seven lines of the cited passage. But there are other great passages, not referred to by Sri Aurobindo, which speak of the Infinite in moments of great inspiration in the American poet, who, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the beginner of the new trend in modern poetry to be followed by Carpenter, Tagore and the Irish poets.

I too lived—Brooklyn, of ample hills, was mine;
 I too walk'd the streets of Manhattan Island, and bathed in the waters around it;
 I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,
 In the day, among crowds of people, sometimes they came upon me,
 In my walks home late at night, or as I lay in my bed, they came upon me. (Blodgett and Bradley 162)

The large sweeping rhythm of the epanaphoral "I" suddenly grows quiet with a sublime realization at night, at bed time. One is tempted to go back to Sri Aurobindo's own words on the greatest and the truest poetry, the poetry that rises from the fountainhead of the Spirit. For neither the intelligence, the imagination nor the ear are the true or at least the deepest or highest recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true or highest creators; they are only its channels and instruments: the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claim to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry. Therefore poetry has not really done its work, at least its highest work, until it has raised the pleasure of the instrument and transmuted it into the deeper delight of the soul. A divine Ananda, a delight interpretative, creative, revealing, formative,—one might almost say, an inverse reflection of the joy which the universal Soul felt in its great release of energy when it rang out into the rhythmic forms of the universe the spiritual truth, the large interpretative idea, the life, the power, the emotion of things packed into an original creative vision,—such spiritual joy is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in pouring also



into all those who are prepared to receive it. This delight is not merely a godlike pastime; it is a great formative and illuminative power. (CWSA 26 12)

These words fit in the lines of Whitman, most appropriately, fittingly, opening our eyes and ears to the “deeper delights of the soul”, “spiritual joy”, and “illuminative power”. But there are other variations of the incantatory verse, not in the power of Whitman but in the sweetness of Tagore.

*Aji joto tara tobo akashe
shobe mor o pranvori prokashe
aji joto tara tobo akashe
nikhilo tomar eseche chutiya
mor majhe aji poreche tutiya he.
tobo nikunjer monjori
joto amari onge bikashe
aji joto tara tobo akashe
shobe mor o pranovori prokashe
aji joto tara tobo akashe
dike digonte joto anondo
loviyache ek govir gondho
amar chitte mili ekotre
tomaro mondire ucchashe
aji konokhane kareo-na jani
shunite na pai aji karo bani he.
nikhilo nisshasho aji e bokkhe
bashorir shure binashe
aji joto tara tobo akashe
shobe moro pranovori prokashe
aji joto tara tobo akashe. (Gitobitan Visva-Bharati, 33)*

Innumerable stars in your sky tonight
jewelled in my inmost,
Hurried comes the entire earth
Prostrate at my door
all flowers in your sprawling fields



Bloom in my self
Waking up from each cell in me
Alive, awakened and free
Ananda many motioned from all directions
wakes up into a deep strange smell,
mingled and absorbed in my heart,
Merges into your temple floor in a wide ecstatic delight.

Today I know none
No words come to my ears
A fragrant breath from the cosmos rises in my inmost heart
Ringing with the sound of a divine flute. (my translation)

Sri Aurobindo begins from where Whitman ended, making his verse more disciplined to echo the sublime quietude of his self, a self-withdrawn in the inmost centres and a self often pushed up to the highest heights of consciousness. Can there be poetry from those heights? Maybe Sri Aurobindo's answer is "Yes". But who are his audience? The question baffles us as we probe deeply into the texture of his lines. Outwardly, one listens to the rhythmic voices of Whitman. A deeper look reveals the poet's invitation to a new adventure of consciousness. The following lines from a sonnet will speak of the essence:

I feel the greatness of the Power I seek
Surround me; below me are its giant deeps,
Beyond, the invisible height no soul has trod.
I shall be merged in the Lonely and Unique
And wake into a sudden blaze of God,
The marvel and rapture of the Apocalypse. (CWSA 2 606)

More baffling lines appear for the critics when Sri Aurobindo goes beyond Whitman in his experience of new worlds:

Calm heavens of imperishable Light,
Illumined continents of violet peace,



Oceans and rivers of the mirth of God

And griefless countries under purple suns. (*Savitri*, Book 2 Canto 3, 108)

Can this poetry be explained with the help of critical tools we have with us in the present times? The question of objective correlative naturally arises while standing in helpless awe before such lines, which Sri Aurobindo writes frequently and with absolute spontaneity between 1930 and 1950. Even the poetry of yearning and aspiration takes on a new incantation as he writes in quantitative metre a maturer statement of Yeats's mystic rose:

Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,
Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss:
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life beatitude's kiss. (CWSA 2 564)

The Earth's aspiration takes an incantatory leap through the poet, pressing the wonderful fire, the Universal Cosmic Shakti, the agent and essence of the Divine, to come down on the world and make a permanent dwelling place here on this suffering planet. The new spirit in poetry that began with Whitman and crept in the great Bengali poet subsequently finally reaches a peak of spiritual glory in the hands of Sri Aurobindo.

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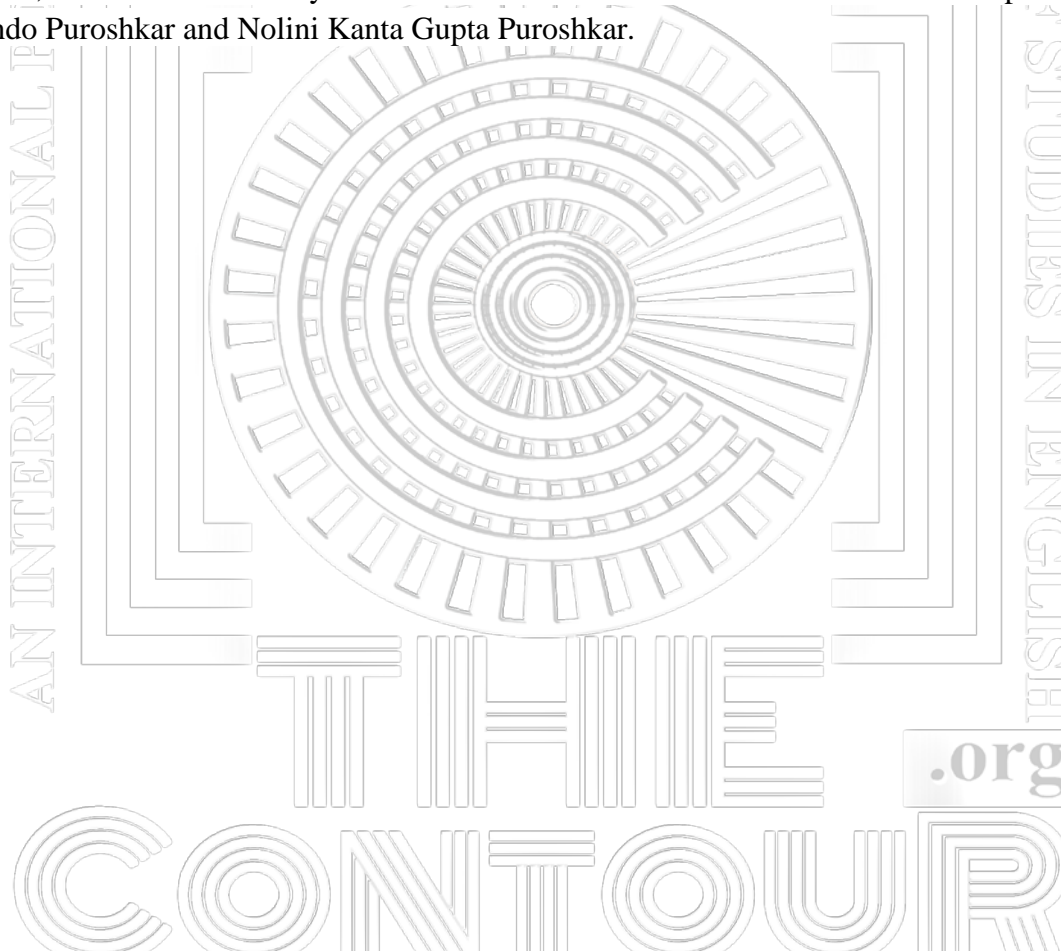
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Goutam Ghosal, D.litt., is Professor of English, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. A leading interpreter of Sri Aurobindo's literature, psychology, philosophy and sociological thoughts, he was the chief editor of *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly* from 2005 to 2007. His major books include *The Rainbow Bridge: A Comparative Study of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo* (2007), *Indian Literature: Points of View* (1987), *Sri Aurobindo's Prose Style* (1992), *Sri Aurobindo and World Literature* (1997), *Notes on Prayers and Meditations* (2002), *Notes on the Renaissance* (2002), and *Magic Mirror and Other Poems* (2001). Ghosal has published more than two hundred papers and articles in various journals, especially on Sri Aurobindo and other Indian English poets. His areas of specialization are Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindrasangeet and his contemporary Bengali composers, Nineteenth Century British and American literature. He is the recipient of Sri Aurobindo Puroshkar and Nolini Kanta Gupta Puroshkar.





When Detective seeks the Ghost: Exploring the Paranormal in Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's Baroda and Byomkesh Stories

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Abstract

The eminent Bengali litterateur Saradindu Bandyopadhyay is famous for his two extremely popular characters, notably Baroda, the bhūtanweshi or the ghost-hunter and Byomkesh Bakshi, the satyanweshi or the truth-seeker. However, the frameworks within which these two figures operate are entirely different from each other. Whereas Byomkesh Bakshi, being the detective uses his scientific and logical reasoning faculty to search the truth and solve the case; Baroda encounters supernatural events in his life and proceeds to narrate his occult experiences which are devoid of any apparent rationality. Nevertheless, the author presents a unique glimpse when these two fictional characters confront each other attempting to establish the supremacy of their respective ideas and thinking processes.

My paper entitled “When Detective seeks the Ghost: Exploring the Paranormal in Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's Baroda and Byomkesh Stories” is a modest attempt to explore the intricate structure of both detective fictions and ghost stories of Saradindu Bandyopadhyay. In the story “Byomkesh O Baroda” the detective Byomkesh Bakshi is able to outwit Baroda proving his explanation of paranormal activities as vague and irrational. However, in another story “Shailarahasya”, Byomkesh succumbs to Baroda's notion of ghost as he himself experiences the existence of ghost or unearthly spirit, which becomes a crucial factor in solving the crime. This study aims to provide a critical response to the antithetical treatment on part of the author where neither scientific rationality nor supernatural theories achieve predominance. This paper also focuses on the problematic representation of Baroda's character who manages everyone into believing his concept regarding the existence of ghosts and evil spirits.

Keywords: paranormal, supernatural, ghost, rationality, logic



Introduction:

Saradindu Bandyopadhyay, a worthy name in the literary genre of historical romance also finds a prominent place Bengali literary tradition for creating the characters of detective Byomkesh Bakshi, the *satyanweshi* who apart from solving perplexed crimes also seeks to explore the truth; and Baroda, the *bhutanweshi* who comes across several paranormal incidents and narrate his occult experiences to his friends simultaneously trying to provide a possible justification while shaping his inconclusive arguments. Saradindu is best remembered for his excellent craftsmanship and artistic imagination and these qualities are reflected in both *Byomkesh* and *Baroda* stories. Considering the detective fictions, Saradindu has written thirty three adventures of Byomkesh Bakshi where the sleuth solves the crime exercising his logical thinking capacity and power of intuition. Only in two stories, the reasoning ability of detective tussles with the uncanny phenomenon but providing two different outcomes. In “Byomkesh O Baroda”, the detective Byomkesh Bakshi not only solves the crime but also unravels the mysteries of Baroda’s ghost giving a rational exposition to the delusive idea of planchette describing Baroda’s views on ghost as a figment of his imagination. In contrast, “Shailarahasya” offers an alternative ground where the ghost himself plays a vital role helping Byomkesh to solve the case. This event foregrounds his belief on the existence of supernatural powers and subsequently conforming to Baroda’s concept of ghost and shadowy apparitions. In the twelve ghost stories of Baroda, Saradindu frames a network where the principal character through narrating his story, entangles his audiences into believing the paranormal incidents (this literary strategy is much identical with Satyajit Ray’s *Tarinikhuro* series). Although, characters like Amulya and Sudhansu often question Baroda’s narrative but at the end they all come into contact with eerie and supernatural occurrences. Therefore, ridiculing the delusional hypothesis of ghost by applying logics at the primary level, but gradually accepting the supernatural conceptions where scepticism has no part delineates Saradindu’s problematic approach towards the fallacy.

Encounter between Rationality and the Supernatural:

The encounter between detective Byomkesh Bakshi and ghost-hunter Baroda in “Byomkesh O Baroda” signifies the conflict of rational arguments and occult beliefs. The story begins with the fundamental difference in character of these two individuals. Byomkesh is *satyanweshi* or the seeker of truth, a man of science who is devoid of all blind faiths and prejudices. On the other



hand, Baroda is *bhutanweshi* or the ghost-hunter who believes in the existence of ghosts and considers planchette as an effective medium to set up conversation with the dead spirits.

It is not a very old episode when satyanweshi Byomkesh Babu once met bhutanweshi Baroda Babu. (my trans; 222)

The story takes place at Munger town in Bihar where Baroda used to live. Byomkesh went there for a tour at the invitation from his friend, Shashanka Babu who drags Byomkesh to solve the murder of Vaikuntha, the jeweller who was supposed to have amassed a huge amount of wealth and riches before his untimely death. In due course of investigation, Byomkesh sees the apparition and also participates in conducting planchette with Baroda. However, it is interesting to note that this act of planchette becomes a method of knowing the criminal rather than establishing the existence of ghost. The moving of tripod during planchette was consciously done by Shailen Babu who happens to be the murderer of Vaikuntha. Byomkesh by applying his excellent reasoning capabilities unfolds the way in which the crime was committed and at the same time, he also explicates the mystery of the frightening ghost which entirely debunked Baroda's fictitious rendering of paranormal events at the end. Whereas Byomkesh is the embodiment of scientific rationality, Baroda epitomizes supernatural experiences and the confrontation between these two figures registered the former's victory over the latter.

This rationalization of paranormal accounts by the detective finds a homogenous portrayal in famous Sherlock Holmes stories by Arthur Conan Doyle. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), detective Sherlock Holmes encounters a terrifying, fiendish hound of mysterious origin which is supposed to have caused deaths and murders. Nevertheless, Holmes by utilizing his sheer deductive logic comes to the conclusion that the hound is a perfect mortal animal that was being used as a device by the actual criminal to incite fear. This hellish appearance of both the hybrid mastiff dog in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the ghost-mask in "Byomkesh O Baroda" is a similar strategy adopted by the murderer. In another story "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire" (1924), Holmes solves the case of blood-sucking vampires by dint of justifying his deduction that the act was in fact committed by a human being. Therefore, the analogous authorial position of implementing cogent inferences through the figure of detective and logical systemization of supernatural mysteries can be observed in writings of both Arthur Conan Doyle and Saradindu Bandyopadhyay. It is a known fact that Saradindu was hugely influenced by Conan Doyle and he might have adapted the technique of infusing ghostly or paranormal elements in detective fiction



from his western counterpart. This view is further postulated in Doyle's short story "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot" (1910) which bears a striking resemblance with Saradindu's story "Agniban" in Byomkesh series, where the method of using poisonous gunpowder while lighting a lamp or safety-matches is indeed an innovative mode of crime.

Among the twelve ghost stories of Baroda, the happenings of ten stories either refute Baroda's attempt to make his narrative credible or reject any scope whereby the readers can find any trace of plausibility. Baroda's various accounts present an uncanny atmosphere of his tales and rather than pinpointing the actuality of ghost or describing the ghastly appearance (except the story "Malkosh"), most of his plots revolve around the unnatural or mysterious representation of real life incidents. This peculiar depiction further complicates any assertive interpretation of supernatural phenomena which might either seem as bizarre consequences having concrete reasons or expressions resulting from unbridled imagination of the narrator, Baroda. In the story "Pretpuri", the horror generated by the appearance of an anonymous man whom Baroda thinks as an evil incarnation of that tehsildar who had died long ago is negated at the end when the theft of Baroda's wristwatch and moneybag is revealed. Though not clearly stated but it becomes evident that the ghost was actually a thief. In the next story "Rakta-Khadyot", the readers wonder whether it was really the evil spirit who killed Suresh Babu or he died of a natural death caused by pneumonia. This feature, according to Goswami is a manifestation of "fear psychosis" (20) and its dreadful reaction. "Tiktikir Dim" is a comic account of how the ghost of a lizard kept on haunting the narrator; and the basic structure of this story tends readers to interrogate the falsity associated with its description. "Moron Bhomra" does not exhibit any death but evokes the fear of upcoming disaster. One can always question whether the bee was really a detrimental omen of the terrible Death. A similar treatment is found in "Oshoriri", where the real motive of the advocate's suicide is ambiguous. The unspecificity of the man's death can be considered as an example of psychological breakdown resulting from immense obsession of carnal impulse or a state of frenzy when a person loses his sanity. "Sabuj Chosma" is unique because the author has coalesced strands of uncanny with scientific inventions. The knowledge of science which discards any paranormal existence becomes a device to authenticate the subsistence of supernatural entities in this mundane world. This use of science to establish a weird claim contradicts the very notion of rationality and hence, can be dismissed. "Dehantar" delineates the aspect of doppelgänger where a person changes his own nature and assumes the idiosyncrasy of a dead man. Whether the ghost has really taken



over the body of that living person or it is just a psychological malfunctioning generated from unfulfilled romantic desire is essentially to be questioned.

Saradindu Bandyopadhyay has stayed in Munger for some years and perhaps his own experiences tend to create the character of Baroda and thus, the geography of Munger provides a physical space for the encounter between Byomkesh and Baroda. Like Byomkesh who endorses rational and empirical approach towards explaining natural facts, Amulya and Sudhangshu in the Bengali club of Munger also resonate the voice of reason. They are not ready to accept Baroda's dictates regarding strange and unearthly occurrences. In all the above mentioned stories, they inevitably find faults in Baroda's storytelling and indicate the loopholes in his incoherent narrative. They disregard any possibility of ghosts in the modern factual world where each and every incident is incorporated within the cause and effect relationship. In fact, Amulya thanked Byomkesh for reinstating his beliefs on sceptical outlook. They all become quite successful to outwit Baroda who had nothing but to receive their scornful laughter.

Paranormal takes the Lead:

Apart from championing rational mindset, Saradindu has also delicately imbued paranormal elements in the texts. In four stories, we find a completely different perspective where the rational individual gives in to the supernatural functioning of the main plot. In "Shailarahasya", the ghost of Manek Mehta himself helped Byomkesh to solve his murder. This participation of a supernatural entity in principal affairs of detecting the crime compelled Byomkesh to believe in the existence of ghost and withdrew from his previous stance of not conforming to Baroda's ideals. This becomes evident through his letter to Ajit,

Have you remembered that many years ago we met Baroda Babau in Munger who was a specialist in ghostly affairs? I told him- let ghost and *pret* exist, but I want to keep them outside my account. But after coming here, I am caught in deep troubles, and it is becoming impossible to keep those out of consideration. (my trans; 245)

The ghost of Manek Mehta provided Byomkesh with the clue to find the culprits, the address where Haimavati and Vijay Biswas lived together. Without this assistance from the ghost, perhaps Byomkesh would have never found out the trace of criminals. Therefore, this story is significant not only because it alters the conventional viewpoint of the detective but also the credit of solving the case partially goes to a supernatural being.



In the three Baroda stories, namely “Bohurupi”, “Akashvani”, and “Protidhvani” we find characters of Amulya and Sudhangshu, who all like Byomkesh believing in the existence of ghosts and supernatural phenomenon. These individuals who previously used to proclaim the voice of scepticism and scientific reasoning were forced to accept Baroda’s idea of ghosts by witnessing paranormal activities. In “Bohurupi”, Baroda throws a direct challenge against atheist Amulya who often mocks at him. In this story, the ghost himself participates in human affairs appearing before human eyes and successfully completing Baroda’s challenge of proving the actual presence of spectres and spirits. Goswami writes that the ghost has tried to “impersonate” Baroda (20). A similar technique is implied in “Akashvani”, where the disbeliever Sudhangshu himself becomes the eyewitness of paranormal incidents and thereupon, adheres to Baroda’s notion of ghosts and apparitions. “Protidhvani” is noteworthy because the authorial persona undertakes the venture in search of phantasm where he encounters shadowy presence of spirits enhancing the uncanny ambience. These accounts contradict the former rational approach towards supernatural enquiries. All the people who did not believe in the existence of ghosts and paranormal entities reconstructed their opinions and Baroda emerged triumphant. This prompts the readers to interrogate the authorial intention behind such paradoxical representation. Possibly, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay who created the figures of Byomkesh as well as Baroda did not want one of his creations to be projected as seemingly ludicrous. Hence, the necessity of Baroda’s recognition was obligatory to locate the two protagonists on an equal plane. This view is reinforced by Kshetra Gupta who in his book *Ramaniya Saradindu* writes,

...To the readers, in the story “Byomkesh O Baroda” one dear child of the author was ousted by the other. The author himself did not like this. Thus, he in the story “Shailarahasya” of Byomkesh series made Baroda victorious without bringing him-made ghost a winner... The problem of the murder is solved, but not the mystery of ghost. . . . (my trans; 136)

Conclusion:

The confrontation between skeptical point of view and supernatural beliefs draws one’s critical attention to the problem regarding indeterminate ramifications of ideological face-off. In this modern society where scientific discoveries have illuminated every corners of human life, there is no place for any dark apparition to exist. It is expected from a versatile twentieth century writer having a universal outlook to advocate rational exchange of views. Moreover, as an author of



detective fiction which requires a great degree of logical argumentation and reasoning faculty, favouritism towards paranormal phenomena not only questions Saradindu's motivation but at the same level, renders the portrayal where diverse facets remain in equivalent proportion. One might also bring to the surface the creative genius of Saradindu, who maintains a perfect balance while interlacing a series of tales and fashioning a complex web of characters while bestowing optimal equipoise of social interests and narrative prerequisites. Characters like Byomkesh, Amulya or Sudhangshu who at the first hand, did not show any sign of credence to Baroda's fabrication of supernatural episodes, had to abandon their rational standpoint in due course of time. This act of capitulation on part of the detective can be conceived as an instance where the seeker of truth (or *satyanweshi*) concedes defeat at the hands of ghost-explorer (or *bhutanweshi*) renouncing his intellectual skepticism. Amulya or Sudhangshu who were much critical of Baroda's framing of imaginative discourse on supernatural bear resemblance with Byomkesh Bakshi as all of them exercise the power of analytical reasoning. From this perspective, they too become *satyanweshi* (like Byomkesh) as they both dared to face the precarious adventure of encountering the existence of paranormal beings. Taking all the stories into account, the readers get a glimpse where the *satyanweshi* is engaged in search of ghost, which is considered as the truth by *bhutanweshi* Baroda and this mutual involvement between these two personas ultimately results in foregrounding the authenticity of occult existences, where paranormal takes the final leap.

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Absence of the Real from the Reel: Politics of Exclusion and Cinematic Aloofness for the Dalit Cause in Popular Bengali Films of Recent Decades

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Abstract

The construction of a homogeneous national identity through the filmic narratives has been one of the most persistent tropes of the Indian cinematic culture for a long time now. The popular Hindi cinema in particular has made a conscious attempt to appeal the elite bourgeois imagination and thus prepared a field for creating certain stereotypes. The portrayal of the English educated, masculine-romantic hero as true 'Indian' national, often failed to grasp the essence of a pluralistically constructed nation like India. Now, my paper would look into the curious case of 21st Century Bengali cinema which has a visible inclination towards the attributes and vogues of popular Hindi film. This Kolkata-centric regional film industry with a huge number of annual releases of mindless commercials and a parallel art-house movie-making, addresses chiefly the complexities of romantic love and urban crisis to gratify the taste of its upper caste/class spectators. Most notably, the recent upsurge of Bengali detective films bluntly exhibits the industry's project of preserving the Bengali bhadralok identity and showcasing the image of an ideal Bengali man with an intellectual bent of mind. Hence, the construction of the masculine and the intellectual has left a minimal space for the lower caste people who are otherwise perceived as weak and imbecile. My paper would therefore argue that the issue of caste, in spite of being one of most abhorrent social stigmas, found least cinematic representation and the community of socially marginalized people are even more strategically distanced from the filmic sphere which is governed by a dominant upper-caste ideology in the context of Bengal.

Keywords: caste, cinema, dalit, bhardalok, chotolok, representation.

Indian Cinema and the Question of Caste

Cinema is undoubtedly the most impactful mode of visual representation of the intriguing social realities in India. The copious nature of annual film-production and the efficient strategies employed in post-production distribution and marketing, ensure the smooth entry of those films



into the public domain. Indian cinema can be credited with the making of some brilliant, socially-aware movies over the years. But ironically, its engagement with the issue of caste and the representation of the Dalits on the celluloid, stand very questionable, given the insignificant number of films made on this issue in Hindi as well as other regional film industries.

The Mumbai-based Hindi film industry, popularly known as Bollywood, is essentially caste-biased and is largely responsible for validating the dominant upper-caste hegemony in some way or the other. The glorification of the upper/middle class values and the creation of an Indian utopia have been the chief concern of the Hindi film industry, while the other marginalized groups or religious minorities are excluded from its scheme of things. This project itself can be viewed as a part of the grand nationalist discourse which was prevalent in almost every sort of socio-cultural transaction in post-Independence India. Anirudh Deshpande rightly observes, "...the upper-caste, upper-class, patriarchal and largely Hindu family is the ideological epicentre of bourgeois cinema in post-colonial India" (122).

Since the day of its coming into being, Hindi filmic sphere has been dominated by the elite intellectuals and therefore its strict adherence to the niceties of the bourgeois life is quite obvious. It has a strong formative influence on the popular mind in terms of the conceptual construction of the Indian nation-state. The promotion of the patterns of a glazing lifestyle on screen defines what it is to be Indian, while the representation of the lower caste/class people has largely been stereotypical. Of course, there are many films which deal with the never-ending struggle of the poor people and they gained high commercial success. But, the matter of the fact is that they have failed to understand the complexities of caste/class nexus in the Indian society. The question of caste has often been merged with the question of class. Suraj Yengde says, "Bollywood has successfully elided caste as a theme by subsuming it within categories of 'the poor', 'the common man', the hard-toiling Indian or, at times, the orphan" (4). The portrayal of the protagonist in the male-centred Hindi movies has two visible strands. In the first category the hero is always 'young, fair, handsome, eligible, romantic, mother-fixated, upper-caste, north-Indian and preferably rich' (Deshpande, 104). In many other films the upper caste hero undertakes a journey from poverty to success. The plots in these cases culminate into a happy ending and they end up being unable to enter the core of the debate.

However, the caste-question is not entirely left out from the corpus of Indian cinema. There are films, though very scanty in number, has taken up this issue with all seriousness and thus



questioned the status quo of the filmic mainstream. Franz Osten's 1936 film *Achhut Kanya* is one of the earliest examples. It unfolds the love story of an upper-caste boy and lower-caste girl, which of course ended in tragic separation. Although the director ultimately had to be entrapped within the ghetto of political correctness by not allowing the boy to marry the lower caste girl and thus sustained the orthodox caste-biased morality, it was nonetheless a brave attempt. Bimal Roy's *Sujata* (1959), Shyam Benegal's *Ankur* (1974), Shekhar Kapoor's *Bandit Queen* (1994), Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan* (2001) and the more recently released *Masaan* (2015) by Neeraj Ghywan addressed this issue and built alternative cinematic narratives around caste and interrogated the foundational norms of the biggest entertainment industry of the country.

All these films have their own dynamics of representing the caste-question. Especially *Sujata* and *Bandit Queen* are very revolutionary in their approach to understand the intersection of caste and gender. *Suzata* is perhaps the first of its kind, unlike *Achhut Kanya*, which ends in an inter-caste marriage. The film thus successfully transgresses the norms of the society which is at once patriarchal and caste-biased, where inter-caste marriage was still considered as social taboo. On the other hand Shekhar Kapoor's *Bandit Queen* challenges the upper-caste, male gaze which looks at a Dalit female body as desirable. Soma Chattapadhyay considers this film to be an altogether fresh attempt to recreate the image of an Indian woman (344). Although vulnerable to the evil patriarchal forces as an object of sexual gratification, Phulan rises from strength to strength and never submits to that force.

Rachael Dwyer, one of the earliest exponents of systematic academic criticism on Indian films, has noticed that only the films exclusively based on caste consciously depict the lower-caste people and their struggle in an authentic way, but the so-called mainstream films which are globally circulated and branded as Indian films are least bothered about this issue. As discussed earlier, most of them are very insensitive and stereotypical in their approach to the caste-question. Dwyer says:

Very few films show lower castes or Dalits, unless the film is specifically about caste issues...or wants to make a point about Dalit uplift. Even with the rise of lower castes as political group in north India, they have not featured in films unless they are directly concerned with the topic. (140)



However, Marathi Dalit filmmaker Nagraj Manjule's award-winning works like *Sairat* (2013) and *Fandry* (2016) are some of the finest examples of 'Dalit Cinema', a term which is gradually gaining prominence in the academic sphere. Both of his films has firmly established 'a new discourse on Dalit-centred socio-culturalism' (Yengde, 1) and thus constructing alternative narratives of Dalit resistance through his filmic texts.

Bengali Cinema and the *Bhadralok/Chotolok* Binary

Any sort of discussion on Bengali cinema is a very complex process, as the wide range that it covers defies any generalisation. Madhuja Mukherjee's argument on the possibility of a holistic history of Bengali cinema being written is true to a great extent. She rightly thinks, "...no linear narrative is possible, for so-called Bengali cinema, as the category of 'regional cinema' in India is a product of conflicting forces, as regards to political conditions, industry, aesthetics, taste and target viewership" (1). This statement, indeed, is indicative of the shifting tendencies of Bengali cinema over the decades and its varied responses to the socio-political as well as socio-economic undercurrent. In this section, we will very briefly look into the ever-existing dichotomy between the *bhadralok* and *chotolok* and see how this has made an impact on the on the general nature of Bengali cinema.

Post-Independence Bengali cinema saw the arrival of some serious socially aware movies. From 1950 onwards till 1980 the stalwarts of Bengali cinema explored the manifold implications of life in the postcolonial Kolkatan milieu. The pangs of partition, the visible decadence of moral and ethical values of a generation of people, the turbulent political ambience of Kolkata in the 70's, class struggle, the ups and downs of left political ideology – all these issues have been addressed in every possible way. But the films exclusively made on the evils of caste prejudice are surprisingly rare and awkwardly sporadic. Way back in 1979 Ritwik Ghatak made *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* (1973) based on the brilliant novel of the same name by Adwaita Mallabharman, a Dalit writer. Both the novel and the film explore the life of Kishore, a young fisherman of low-caste origin. Rajen Tarafdar's film *Ganga* (1960) is an adaptation of Samaresh Basu's novel of the same name. This film also is a meticulous representation of the stark realities of the life of low-born fisherman community. This film does not have a direct reference to the existing caste-hierarchy and the evils of untouchability. It rather touches on the issues of capitalist exploitation by the upper-class people and the crushing threat of poverty that these people had to face. Director Mrinal Sen had made a very memorable film on the issue of untouchability in Telegu language – *Oka Uri Kotha* (1977).



But surprisingly none of his Bengali language films had ventured to take this theme up. After almost three decades from the release of *Ganga*, another very potential director Goutam Ghosh came up with his revolutionary film *Antarjali Jatra* (1987) which offered an outright critique of the Brahmanical hegemony and the rigid social orthodoxy in Bengal.

The paucity of more films like those mentioned above, explicitly demonstrates the dominance of a certain section of people in the sphere of cinema. Bengali cinema in the two decades preceding the 21st century has explored the middle class bourgeois life like never before, of course with a few notable exceptions. Ajay Kumar Dey is very sarcastic about this urban-centricity which denies to look beyond the crises of the so-called *bhadralok* community and thus ignored the huge presence of the lower class/caste people outside the urban space (43).

The ideological figuration of the *bhadralok* dates back to the colonial era when the term was used to refer to a group of English educated middle-class Bengali people. Over the years, the term has acquired multiple shades of meaning and the community itself emerged a force which exerted its influence in the cultural sphere of Bengal in every possible way. Now, the term itself is a constant referent to another group of people sitting at the other end of the social spectrum – the *chotolok*, the Dalit or the lower caste people. While *bhadralok* literally denotes a man of superior cultural taste, *chotolok* bears a caste-connotation within its formation. The later, of course, is an upper-caste construction which is chiefly used in everyday parlance to point to the cultural supremacy of the elite as well as to humiliate the ‘other’ for the lowliest professions it is associated with. According to Sumit Sarkar,

The subordinate jatis consisted predominately of peasants, sharecroppers, artisans or other rural labouring groups, and literacy rates among most of them remained abysmally low in the vernacular and almost non-existent in English. (87)

The relevance of the caste-question in present day Bengal has been dismissed by many and the stratification of the society has been done based on the issue of class. But the peripheral existence of a huge number of lower-caste people disproves such conclusive assumption. In an article, Nauman Reayat and Dr. Zehanzeb Khalil present an exhaustive list of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population, collecting the data from the Backward Classes Welfare Department, Govt. of West Bengal (130). There are almost 60 different categories of scheduled caste people and a large number of them are associated with lowliest professions which the *bhadralok* people



look down upon in regret. Monoranjan Byapari, a famous Dalit writer from Bengal starts his autobiography with some remarkably significant lines which bears great relevance in this regard. He says,

Here I am. I know I am not entirely unfamiliar to you. You've seen me a hundred times in a hundred ways. Yet if you insist that you do not recognize me, let me explain myself in a little greater detail, so you will not feel that way anymore. When the darkness of unfamiliarity lifts, you will feel, why, yes, I do know this person.

I've seen this man....You will see a bare-bodied goatherd running behind his cows and goats with a stick. You've seen this boy many times. And so the face seems familiar to you. That is me. That is my childhood. Now come outside your house for a while. Look at the tea stall that stands at the corner of the road where your lane meets the main road. That boy whom you see, uncombed hair, wearing dirty smelly, torn-vest, with open sores on his hands and feet; he has been beaten a while ago by his owner for breaking a glass and has been crying – that there is my boyhood. And then my youth. Ferrying goods at the railway station, climbing up the bamboo scaffolding to the roofs of the second or the third floor with a load of bricks on my head, driving the rikshaw, waking nights as guard, the khalashi on a long distance truck, the sweeper on the railway platform, the dom at the funeral pyres. (ix)

Now, the collective *bhadralok* attitude of inadvertence towards these people consolidates into the 'darkness of unfamiliarity' that Byapari talks about. *Chotolok* is therefore largely thrown out of the social as well as cultural horizon of the elite people. The association of everything that is 'low' and ugly causes this relegation as the Dalits are generally thought to pollute the socio-cultural environment. Though the theory of 'purity and pollution' is associated with the practice of untouchability, this can be applied here as well. The lower-caste people of Bengal may not suffer from this curse today, yet they are considered as cultural untouchables. That is why their participation in any cultural happening is still a big no-no to the upper-caste/class people.

Sudeep Chakravarti, in his book *The Bengalis: A Portrait of a Community* defines the *bhadralok* class as 'a species that displayed societal and intellectual independence' and 'a class of educated, self-aware, globally-aware Bengalis who would now be administrators, lawyers, scientists, writers and thinkers, a class that rapidly outgrew the limited purpose the colonial masters had initially designed for them' (226). Cinema as a medium of cultural transaction is no exception. This



marginalization, of course operates at two levels. One, the life of a Dalit is assumed not to have any interesting factors to draw the cinematic materials from. Two, they are never encouraged to put their own step forward to voice their anxieties through the celluloid. The number of upper-caste actors and directors testifies this upper-caste filmic monopolization. Cinema, therefore can be called a significant and politically motivated *bhadralok* project which helps to assert the cultural identity and sustain the hegemony of the more privileged group as always.

21st Century Popular Bengali Cinema: The Celebration of the Macho and the Intellectual and the Absence of the *Chotolok*

The 21st Century is marked by a very subtle transition in the film industry of Bengal, in terms of content, production, the role of the audience and market. It stands at the cross-current of multiple genres and aesthetic approaches of film-making. While, in the earlier decades there was an already existing rift between the hardcore commercial films and the parallel art-house movies, the rift tended to be even bigger than before. The advent of a liberal economy in the pan-Indian context during the 90's had created a huge number of entertainment-mongers who are the bi-products of a consumerist culture and who wanted more *masala* factors to be added to the films. That is why, the entire film-going audience was divided into two clear categories. One category of audience derived immense pleasure from the action movies which basically revolved around a romantic love story, a masculine hero and his spectacular fight with his enemies (most of the time the goons sent by the heroine's father) and his victory. The other category consisted of the so-called intellectual people who were the lovers of serious films which mostly explored complex aspects of human life that were intricate, psychological and very rarely talked about.

The 'action-hero' culture in Bengali commercial cinema started mainly in the '80s in the hands of directors like Haranath Chakraborty, Swapan Saha, Prabhat Ray et al as a result of the undeniable influence that came from the Bollywood and obviously some technological as well as social changes that took place during this time. The rise of this new form of heroism was indeed more masculine and gender-biased. Spandan Bhattacharya, in his article, locates this within a particular industrial, technological and aesthetic framework. He terms this as a 'dominant figuration' and claims that it has a "strong connection with technological transformation, trans-regional film production networks, star images and directorial interventions" (2). According to him, the changing social patterns and the newer production equations within the industry, the initiation of the colour film technology, change in the film viewing cultures, the proliferation of video halls



within the suburban areas of Bengal, the emergence of a new offset printing press used widely for printing posters – all contributed immensely to the rise of action heroes like Prosenjit Chatterjee (3). The 25 year long reign of Prasenjit as an action hero came to a twilight with the release of Haranath Chakraborty's phenomenal film *Saathi* (2002) with Jitendra Madhani, popularly known as Jeet as its protagonist. Jeet as a hero gained a wider acceptance as he was a new face which both the industry and the relatively new generation of audience were badly searching for. But more or less his kind of heroism was a continuation of the style that Prosenjit explored in many ways.

But with the arrival of the SVF (Shree Venkatesh Films) production house and its gradual expansion to be the biggest and richest banner of the industry, an altogether new hero was born. The release of Rabi Kinagi's film *I Love You* (2007) starred by Dev, brought in a more muscular and macho action hero that Bengali audience had never seen on the silver screen. The new hero became the prime spectacle of the films as his sculpted body and tall stature fitted very well as a proper cinematic material. This film became a blockbuster, in terms of the box office-collection, and it was able to successfully set the new trend of film-making in the Bengali film industry where the physique of the hero became the chief sellable commodity.

Understandably, the narration of these films shifted its attention from the age old family-drama and started constructing the individual heroism. The stories filmed on the screen only revolved around the hero's aspiration, desires, conflicts and revenge etc. The glorification of this new muscular (as well as masculine) self is awkwardly visible in the names of the films also – *Rudra the Fire*, *Challenge*, *Fighter*, *Ekai Eksho*, *Shooter*, *Macho Mastana*, *Boss*, *Sultan* etc., to name a few. While the earlier generation of action heroes showed a kind of moral anger and stamina, there is everything physical about the new hero. Neelam Sidhar Wright observes this transformation of the figure of the hero as a tendency that crept in the 21st Century popular Indian cinema in general. She says that the new hero

...must be measured and approved....he must sponsor a decent haircut, display the muscles of a superhero....He must offer everything that a Hollywood A-list actor does – and more. The much talked about rebranding of Bollywood megastar Shahrukh Khan demonstrates this shift perfectly. Khan is famously known for having initially gained popularity despite having his scuffy hair, dark skin and ordinary stature. He originally won the audiences over because of his mischievous smile and 'cheeky yet charming' character. However the actor himself discussed his



need to reinvent his image (through hair extensions, chest waxing, intensive body building and skin lightening)... (7)

Having said all these, I argue that the creation and celebration of the macho and the muscular is in itself a political act of relegation. The repetition of the same success-formula of *masala*, fight, songs, dance and the projection of such a hero is never challenged in the commercial arena of film-making. While, the larger part of the audience, which is an amalgamation of both urban and rural viewers, are exposed to the mainstream, it is very easy for the film-makers to impart some social message through entertainment. But, in an attempt to maintain the box-office, the Bengali film-makers never ventured to take up intriguing social issues and never ventured to film the existing social stories of oppression and dominance. The stories narrated in these films are more or less the same. The hero has a strongly-built physique, with always-visible muscles, an air of romanticism around him. He is essentially an upper-caste hero, though not always upper-class. He falls in love with a girl of high breeding and status (the representation of the heroines are always very stereotypical and humiliating). Her father, being a man of wealth and power, does not like this connection and does numerous attempts to separate them. And then an eternal conflict between the hero and the heroine's father goes on. Finally the hero conquers ladylove by having an emphatic victory over the goons sent by her father. Sometimes the hero starts as a poor, hard-working young man, but eventually, at the end of the smooth running plot, claims both the princess and the kingdom.

Using the Freudian explanation of the term 'scopophilia' i.e. pleasure in looking, famous film-theorist Laura Mulvey does a brilliant discussion on various aspects of visual pleasure that cinema offers. In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", she says,

The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, shape, stories are all anthropomorphic. Here, curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world. (114)



Now, my argument is that the socially constructed *chotolok* or a lower caste person, who is always perceived as weak, dirty and imbecile, is never considered as the ‘anthropomorphic’ element to fit into the conventions of mainstream cinema as the lower-caste people as taken as sub-human entity. The social prejudices against Dalit bodies are nothing new. The upper caste Hindu gaze strongly projected a Dalit body as feeble, stupid and submissive. And many a times, the society has associated criminality with a Dalit body and it is seen as violent, threatening and socially unacceptable. The exclusion of the Dalit from the filmic sphere is therefore very easy to justify for the upper-caste film directors because the life of a Dalit which is full of mortal struggle is never supposed to provide that larger than life visual pleasure that the audience can derive pleasure from.

The representation of the lower-caste people, as said earlier, is very stereotypical. Prem Singh in his unpublished paper (2011) argues that, “In Indian cinema the body of the Dalit male and female presents a stereotype contrast to the body of the upper caste Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Viewed as untouchables, male Dalits are depicted physically untidy, emotionally weak, intellectually hollow and an object abhorable because of their ‘low’ birth” (2). Ashutosh Gowariker’s *Lagaan* is perhaps the best reflection of the society’s prejudiced notion of a Dalit body. In this film, Kachra, the Dalit character has been depicted as deformed, dark-skinned, untidy and silent.

Surprisingly, there is a very curious example of a Bengali commercial film which takes up this issue of caste, though not that convincingly. *Amanush* (2010) film directed by Rajiv Kumar Biswas, narrates the life-story of the lower caste protagonist Binod (Soham Chakraborty) who is an orphan and is brought up by a church father. He is characteristically an introvert but he was a genius also. When he goes to college, he proves to be a complete misfit in the atmosphere of the college where most of his class-mates are upper-caste students. They regularly mock him for his appearance and caste and hated him as they thought he got admission to the college for the quota system. Binod, who is shown to nourish a psychological disorder in the darkest corner of his mind for the disturbed childhood he has had, gradually turns violent in the college campus. Meanwhile he gains the friendship of an upper-caste girl Riya (Srabanti Chatterjee) who starts to bring some fresh rays of happiness. Riya, well-behaved and polite-mannered girl starts ‘civilizing’ him. Gradually Binod falls in love with Riya. But at this particular point of the story, a handsome looking, upper-caste boy Aditya enters into the Riya’s life. Binod can not tolerate this relationship. He slowly turns into a psychopath killer and starts killing everyone. He even attempts to murder



Aditya but eventually the film ends in Binod's tragedy and he kills himself in an extremely dramatic climax.

This film is, no doubt, brilliant in its attempt to project a lower-caste protagonist on screen, which itself challenges the norm of Bengali commercial cinema. But, again, the director fails to go beyond the limitation of stereotyped representation. The plot which could have been a success-story of Binod, turns into a tragedy. After a certain point of time, the audience even started to lose sympathy for him. Binod's characterization as a criminal entirely reflects the social attitude towards the *chotolok*.

Apart from the mainstream *masala* movies, there has been a recent upsurge of detective films which are also viewed widely throughout Bengal. The term 'popular' obviously has gained new meaning. The line of divide which existed between the commercial films and the literary films in the earlier decades, started to become thinner in the last 5 years or so and detective movies have been enjoyed by both the urban and rural audience. The audience of the 21st Century is made of a slightly younger generation of people who are, now, comparatively more exposed to the world cinema due to the huge developments in technology and cybernetics. Therefore a movie of good taste is always a welcoming event to the younger generation. Since 2010, after the release of Anjan Dutta's *Byomkesh Bakshi*, there has been a huge number of releases of Byomkesh Bakshi films every year, which, once again, I see as a political act of continuation of the *bhadralok* dominance in Bengali cinema.

The repeated appearance of Byomkesh Bakshi on screen certainly is an assertion and reconstruction of the Bengali *bhadralok* identity. The image of the sharp-witted Bengali detective can therefore be seen as a direct contrast of the intellectually hollow lower-caste man. The figure of the Bengali detective has a strong role of in crystallizing the Bengaliness as he is very much rooted in the societal and cultural matrix of colonial Bengal and is inclined towards Europhone rationalism. Gautam Chakrabarti observes the creation of a detective as a an act of forming resistance against the colonial power, at least in a theoretical level. He says,

It is this location in the Indian Bengali mindscape that makes *Satyanvesi* (truth-seeker) Byomkesh Bakshi, a quintessentially *bhadralok* private investigator, who spurns that designation and prefers to calls himself a truth-seeker, a character



created by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay, a fictive representation of an autonomous, proto-postcolonial identity-forming urge. (259)

The frequent filmic adaptation of Byomkesh stories in recent times and the construction of the image of the Bengali intellectual has, theoretically at least, left no scope for the *chotolok* counterparts to the part of the big screen.

Conclusion

So, the possibility of the emergence of a cinema of and for the lower-caste is a far-fetched imagination so far in the context of Bengal. Even, film-critics, and commentators are also very silent about it. The social marginalization of a certain section of people has always been the norm and it is never challenged. Although Dalit writers like Monojan Byapari, Monohar Mouli Biswas, Adhir Biswas et al are voicing their own self through their memoirs and autobiographies for a long time now. The assertion of the Dalit selfhood through Dalit literature, of late, has stirred the status quo of Bengal social structure and a huge number of scholars and academicians are engaged in working on this issue. Now it is high time to address the 'gap' in the linear narrative of Bengali cinema which is inherently dogmatic about caste-question.

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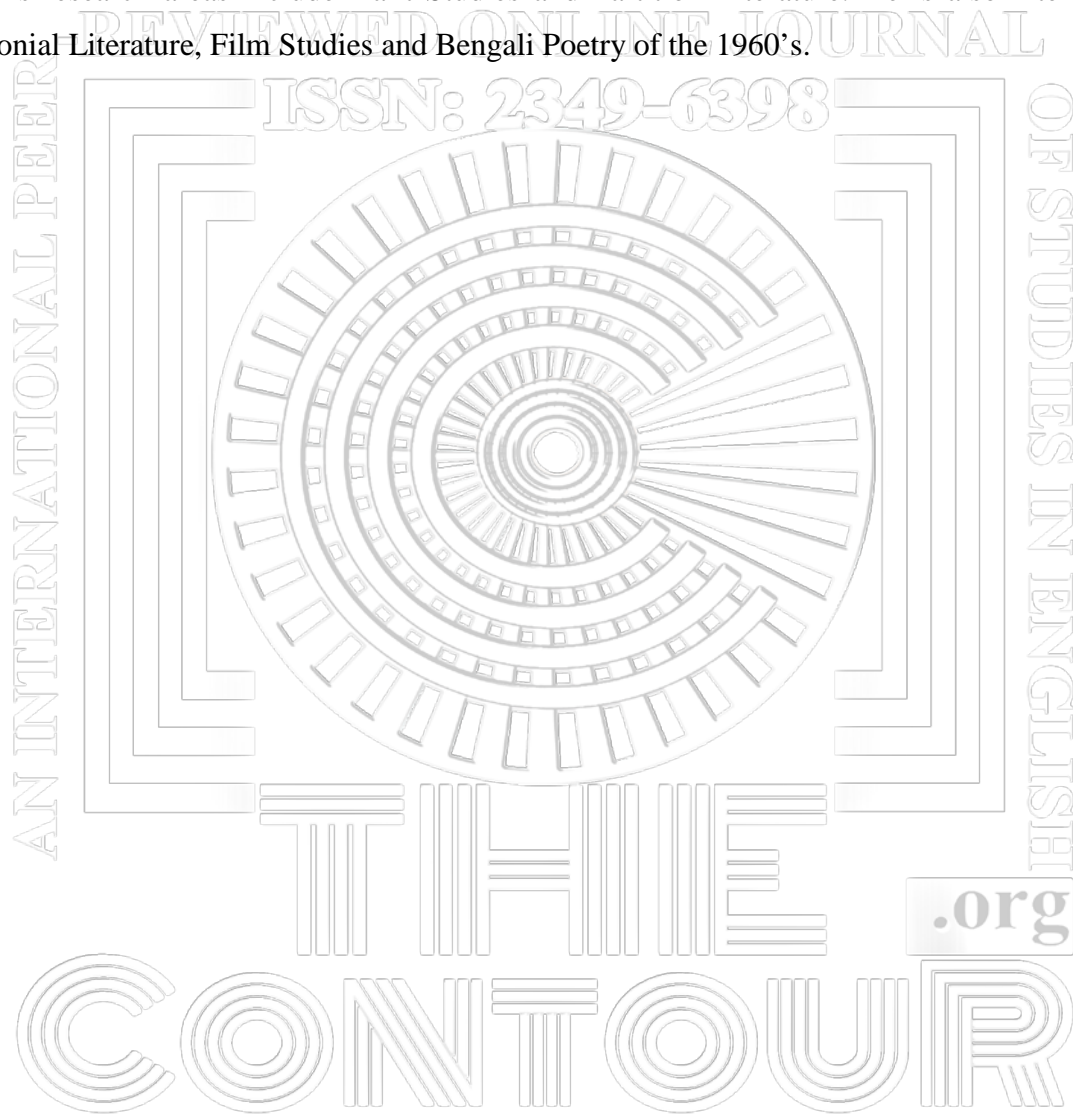
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Destruction of Nature's Unfettered Playground: Coaxing Subversions in *Prodigal Summer* and *Aranyak*

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Abstract

Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (1995) and Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak* (1939) persuade to envision the environs and key predators as the pivotal part of the natural community whose existence is de rigueur for the sustainment of biodiversity and ecological stability. Their cultural upshot renders a human story of environmental propensity that substantiates the blistering effect of removing the key predators from the ecosystem. The environmental concerns should be repugned across the local and worldwide communities and urge people to subsist along with the nature. My paper at this juncture focuses on the coaxing subversion of the ecological sustainability and its horrid effect on environment with various worldviews in discernible restraints.

Keywords: subversion, environs, nature, eco-warrior, ecological-justice.

The act of penning nature is analogous to the earnest endeavour of ameliorating the severance and complexion between isolated human world and silent natural world. Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (1995) and Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak* (1939) are the chef-d'oeuvres which exhibit authors' cognition or *noesis* about the territory within the respective environs or purlieus. The very chassis that recounts the severance between human world and natural world is the indicant of permeative and precarious modernist construction of the world and its creatures. In *Aranyak* and in *Prodigal Summer*, the novelists Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay and Barbara Kingsolver take Rachel Carson's concretion of bucolic and majestic ecology that delineates the reverberation against a rigorously modernistic, nifty and mechanistic vista of nature as isolation of and apathetic to human. There is a cabalistic and declaring collateral among *Aranyak*, *Prodigal Summer* and "Small Wonder" as Kingsolver acknowledges in her novel,



Bears are scarce in the world now, relative to their numbers in times of old; they're a rare sight even in the wildest mountains of Iran. They have been hunted out and nearly erased from the mountains and forests of Europe, much of North America, and other places that have been inhabited for thousands of years by humans, who by and large find it difficult to leave large predators alive. (10)

In *Prodigal Summer*, one of the main proponents is Deanna, a park ranger, who endeavours and pleads for the forest of southern Appalachians, situated on the border of Virginia and Kentucky. Satyacharan, the main protagonist in *Aranyak* also cares for the forest of Lobtulia baihar and Ajmabad and by living there, he perceives the real and "Sanatan Bharatbarsha" (or, the eternal India) retained in the coarsened arduous terrain of Lobtulia baihar. One may easily colligate the very logical argument of the *Rig Veda*:

*aranyani aranyani asau ya preva nasyasi
katha gramam na prchasi na tva bhir iva vindatim.* (10.146.1)

Goddess of wild and forest who seemest to vanish from the sight.

How is it that thou seekest not the village? Art thou not afraid?

Opening with Aaron Kramer's 1948 poem "Prothalamium," Kingsolver incarnates three plots: "Predators", "Moth Love" and "Old Chestnuts" with the three female protagonists who enucleate the edified environs and three male antagonists interpret the respondent and impudent anti-environmental stances; the female protagonists allude to the "bucolic" nature and the male antagonists advert to the majestic ecology. While Aaron Kramer's "Prothalamium," ostentates the Spring as the groom that capable of igniting "murdered dreams" and ingratiating song from "mute birds," Kingsolver's novel graphs an inflaming of aspiration and ecological interconnectedness only after a season, through the path of one single virid summer. In *Aranyak*, the female characters like Bhanumati and Manchi correspond to the arcadian motif of the forest. Kingsolver's Appalachian and Bandyopadhyay's Lobtulia baihar are isochronal to Hardy's Wessex, Synge's Aran Island, and R. K. Narayan's Malgudi which stand for their respective cultures in relation to the topography of a country. Patrick Murphy renders how contemporary novels with an astute focus on ecology interrogate "human perception, preconception, and misconceptions about the nature of nature and of human beings as discrete individuals" (77-78). Kingsolver and Bandyopadhyay exhibit the constituent through their writings of what Cheryll Glotfelty in her "Introduction" to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) calls "the notion of 'the world' to include the



entire ecosphere” (xix). One of the depicted objects of these novels is the extinction of the animals like red wolf, and the most assertable elimination of the Coyote, the wild Buffalo, birds and most importantly deforestation. It is the wraith or the “ghost” of the elided animals that both Deanna and Satyacharan perceive around them. Both Kingsolver and Bandyopadhyay are inditing to avouch and avow their integral position in the ecological system that espouses far more than anthropocentric value. It is espied that both *Prodigal Summer* and *Aranyak* are predominately about the pursuance of self. Lisa Abney enounces that neither Deanna nor Lusa feels “comfortable with her identity, though they are two intelligent and strong women” (qtd in Narduzzi: 62). In *Aranyak*, we substantiate the fact that Satyacharan is also excruciating of identity crisis as the loneliness of the forestland has an upshot upon him as he has not presumed he would find himself in. The importance of communities like the “Egg Fork” in Appalachian and the “Gangata tribe” in Lobotulia and the reclamation of the traditional ways of life are significantly interconnected with the particular geographical location.

In Kingsolver’s fictitious agronomist community, nature exists on the fringe of most people’s lives. Yet, the acquired habit of coronating economics over environmental constancy imperils the intrinsic value of nature. By renouncing the debentures of nature, Kingsolver’s agrestic, rustic and uncouth community experiences a disruption in all spheres of subsistence. Aldo Leopold in his illustrious essay called “The Land Ethic” (1949) writes that “indigenous peoples have been having for centuries about the colonization of land and the debilitating mindset where the land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations” (168). As the militant activists, Kingsolver’s female protagonists intended to change this enfeebling or the ignoble mindset. Finally they understand human’s indocility, and also perceive that if humans become vanquishers, all the creatures of the ecological system have to endure the distress or the sufferance. What Kingsolver engrafts is the conception that human’s iniquitous deeds have far reaching entailments or implications. Deanna, the denizen of the Appalachian forest, has a very keen awareness of the abolition of the topical ecological system, and she interprets the extinction of the native species leaving a void in the environs where each component and living being is important for the existence of the other:

There were hundreds of reasons for each death—pesticide runoff, silt from tilling, cattle in the creek—but for Deanna each one was also a piece in the puzzle she’d spent years working out. The main predator of the endangered shellfish was the



muskrat, which had overpopulated to pestilence along the riverbanks over the last fifty years. What had kept muskrats in check, historically, was the mink (now mostly coats), the river otter (also nearly gone), and, surely, the red wolf. (63)

Deanna presumes that the constrained migration of coyote population in the topical Appalachian area is the consequence of hyperactive industrial enterprise and she also enunciates that the area that is impregnated with the coyote once “vacated two hundred years ago by the red wolf” (63). Incited by Darwinian “Theory of Population Genetics and Evolutionary Ecology,” Deanna speculates that the extinction of the red wolf from the deserts of Mexico and the Southwest in the high mountains and forests of the Appalachians hinges on the goaded migration. “Why else would they have ventured so high up the mountain into this forest, so far from the fencerows and field margins that are a coyote’s usual domain?” (57). Deanna’s research “keystone predator” is established on the Robert T. Paine’s hypothesis in the year 1960 in which he had abolished all the starfish from the water reservoir and observed the multifariousness of the species reduced to very few from many. While Deanna delineates Paine’s keynote concept to her lover or the coyote hunter Eddie Bundo, he somehow devises it with the Makah Indian Tribe in the lands along Washington’s Pacific coastline to ascertain the ecological encroachment of abolishing one key predator from the ecosystem annihilated the ecological sustainability and also the biodiversity. Deanna recounts that without starfish the mussels enhance and deplete all the living being or crowd them out. They dominated the ecosystem and destroyed the diversity. She also formulates the extinction of mountain lion from the Grand Canyon which “had rendered it a monoculture of prolific, starving deer that out-bred all other herbivores and gnawed the landscape down to granite” (62). It is Deanna who intends to convey the message to the rugged hunter community that the extinction the “keystone predator” can demolish the whole ecosystem consequentially. Coyote runs very fast in order to obliterate the prey and also pulverizes the crops of the farmer. The constant menace of the coyote makes the farmers and residents consternated and vigilant; they are compelled to get hold of the arms against the gray ghosts of the forest, to shoot down the threats. As there is no bag limit in the Appalachian forest, many huntsmen are allowed to hunt as the farmers and residents of the area comprehend that they could get rid of the threats as a result. As we can perceive that the ranchman Eddie Bundo avouches that detesting coyote is his religion; as a religion it is lies deep within the sustenance of the ranchers. This resonates the fictional voice of Aldo Leopold’s “Land Ethic”, where he asserts that everyone is a member of the society of interdependent. Deanna becomes the eco-worrier who voices against the obliteration of the top



predators from the eco-pyramid. Leopold in his book *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) avers that the fewer wolves betoken the more deer and the annihilation of the wolf implies the promised land for the hunters. He further avows that how the abolition of the carnivorous animals enhances the number of herbivorous who engulfs the vegetation stratum of the surface soil which results the eradication of the flora fauna. Deanna also limns the endangered mammals like wolves and blue whales, etc. Deanna actually articulates the importance of the 'other' member of the environs and she also hypothecates the eco-shift and encompasses a new path of envisioning the universe from the perspective of the predators. Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* (1968) also grapples with the issue of predator politics. Both Abbey and Kingsolver voices for the environmental justice necessitates for the sustainable environs. In the chapter like "Moth Love", Lusa, who is an entomologist exemplifies the importance of the insects and their effectuation on the sustainable farming which is also the conjectured by Rachel Carson in her book called *Silent Spring* (1962). She abnegates herself from the planting of tobacco in her farm. Nannie Rawley wants to controvert the herbicides as it infests not only the fauna in the region and the ecosystem but also affects the reproductive systems. She is a strong exponent of organic farming system such as natural control of pest and a conceiver of the frangibility of the ecosystem. Ruth Ozeki in her book called *All Over Creation* (2004) recounts the details of the agrarian community and their selection of the use of pesticides and its deplorable impact on the reproductive bodies. Actually, they deal with the path of communality and shared liability, which is elementary as such.

During the interposing time of the two world wars, when the impatience, lassitude, uncertainty and innoculation are prevailing in the society, Satyacharan obtains the job of assistant manager in Purnia district. It is an impenetrable forest and Satyacharan has to investigate the forest and ingather all the revenue from the land. From the very commencement, the pantheistic environs seem to be very deadly, draggy and irksome to Satyacharan as he lacks the sophisticated and cultured city life. Day by day the jungle becomes a living entity, a motherly figure to him. In the forest he comes across the impecunious and destitute farmers, the Brahmins who are in straitened circumstances, immigrant penurious laborers, and the adivasis who are supposed to attain the forest land in order to farm the land. He also meets the kingly ancestral family members, who are starkly against the deforestation, subsist their lives by the pasturing or by sustainable hunting. Till date, the subjugated, execrable communities are despised and ignored. Meanwhile, many parts of the forest were imparted to the denizens and settlers. They make the land desirable for the agricultural purpose by cutting down the trees and often burning the long cherished trees.



Satyacharan's anguish for spifflicating the mother-nature makes him uneasy. When the wealthy men grippe the poor farmer's land and crops intentionally, he expresses his dissent to the affluent:

The person who possessed five acres had started to claim rights on crops that ripened even in the adjoining five. Moreover, a few days before harvest, several Rajputs who claimed to be relatives of Chhotu Singh had arrived in the region on his invitation. Finally, it was revealed that these guests were nothing but petty criminals, thugs and goons. Apart from his own hundred and fifty or two hundred acres, he wanted to claim the harvest of the entire thousand acres or whatever he could lay his hands on, by brute force. (173)

The poverty, inequality and degradation of the society lead to the expansion of capitalism, which results to the environmental dilapidation. This illustrates the notion of Eco-Marxism, where profit is the mantra. The capitalist force which enslaves the proletariat is the same power which subjugates and ruins the mother-nature. Satyacharan is also mortified and agitated to experience the slaughtering of birds. It somehow resonates the ambience in *Silent Spring*, where the dead silence prevails because of the killing of the bird. Satyacharan voices for the justice of the birds and prohibits the fowler in the forest, even orders the scout not to prey a single bird. The novel also reminds us of *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, where he shows his concern for the jungle birds and ponders for their non-appearance in the Walden pond. Satyacharan's anxiety for the discarded substances like tin, plastic in the Saraswati kundi, his eco-sensitiveness makes him the eco-worrier of the forest:

It looked like a black smudge on the painting like landscape of my pristine Labtulia.
(263)

The jungle is no longer an unhazardous place for the buffaloes and deers, the affable protector, the buffalo deity Tarbaro is always there to protect them from predicament. The forest is almost exterminated and the left will be abolished soon as Satyacharan is ordered to collect Khajna and he has to allocate the land among the settlers as soon as possible. Jugalprasad incriminates the Gangata tribe for their wrong attitude toward the nature. His languishment for the Saraswati Kundi substantiates the very situation of the forest. The rapid encroachment of the area by the settlers excruciates Jagalprasad as the Saraswati Kundi cannot be salvaged from them. The Dhanjhuri area, where the nature bloomed to its full with Palash, Mohua and Shalchara trees, is now endures of



placid repose. Satyacharan now realizes that nothing can fend the avarice of the civilized people to demolish the land of the sylvan, the marginalized. Indian writer Pankaj Sekhsaria in his book called *Islands in Flux* (2017) depicts the very picture of the massive devastation of Andaman and Nicobar archipelago and the Jarawa community. It is said that massive deforestation grasps the tribal's sustenance hastily and the concomitant soil erosion demolishes the corals and the oceanic animals. Satyacharan, the protagonist in *Aranyak* makes himself amenable for the Ecocide and at the far end, he adjures pardon from the desolated God, i.e. the God of Fulkia-Baihar:

The God of the Forest had not forgiven me for my heinous deed...and they never will. I have heard that confession somewhat diminishes the load of sin from the shoulder of the sinner. If not, at least speaking of my guilt shall unburden my heart of the rock solid grief I bear. (7)

Both of these novels delineate the anthropocentric disposition toward the Mother Nature and they also incarnate the environmental ethic which aphoristically corresponds to Kingsolver's and Bandyopadhyay's enunciated environmental ethic. The adorned strategy is posited in the dependence and the interdependence between the human and the non-human world. The novels *Prodigal Summer* and *Aranyak* showcase the predilection toward the ecocentrism, where a sense of belonging can be perceived. A similar literary technique can be witnessed in Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selbourn* (1789), Susan Fenimore Cooper's *Rural Hours* (1887), and Thoreau's *Walden* (1854).

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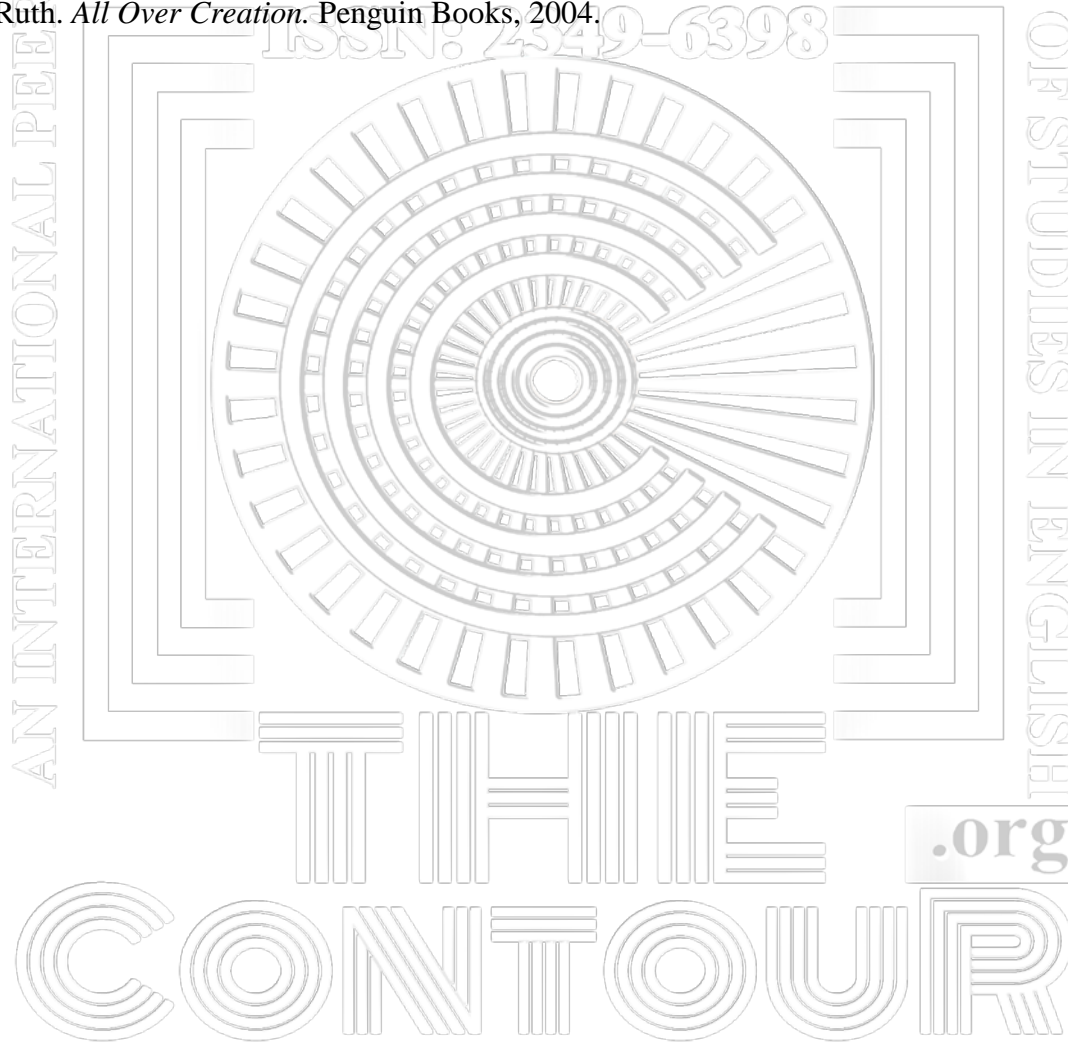


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The Republic of Gilead: The Dystopia of Cultural Feminism and Environmental Devastation

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Abstract

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*This paper wishes to take a closer look at this social setting of the futuristic dystopia, called the Republic of Gilead in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and thus try and analyze how the subjugation of nature and natural forces are directly equated with the subjugation of women in Gilead. The paper closely analyses Atwood's contrasting portrayal of the radiation devastated nature outside the walls of the Republic of Gilead and the lush, beautiful and green gardens located within the walls of Gilead and thereby tries to equate this with the placement of the Marthas and the Handmaids within the walls of the Gilead and the Unwomen outside it, in the colonies. By studying these contrasting delineations by Atwood the paper affirms Ortnier's argument regarding the universal subjugation of women and nature; and as such the Republic of Gilead manifests a blatant culmination of all domineering tendencies of man vis-à-vis nature and women.*

Keywords: dystopia, Gilead, women.

Professor Sherry B. Ortner in her influential essay, "Is Women to Men as Nature Is to Culture?" had argued rightly that the domination of women to the doctrines of patriarchy is closely likened to the subjugation of nature and natural forces to the progress of culture; to the extent that the heavy brick wall of fortification that seeks to shut out the forces of nature from the city also acts as a boundary which prescribes the roles that the women are to play within a civilized society.

The Republic of Gilead, the locus of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* although set up by the "Sons of Jacob" is much different from the Biblical Gilead, as it not only shuts out the radiation devastated nature by a high wall but also seeks to dominate over all the women by reducing them to the meagre roles of a Martha (assigned to look after the household) or a Handmaid (assigned the task of giving birth to babies, without having any right to call them their own). Thus within this nightmarish world of Gilead, the infertility of nature is attempted to be balanced by the fertility of the women within. Any failure on the part of the women to confirm to



either of these two roles results in their branding as “Unwomen”, followed by a deportation to the radiation devastated colonies or to the secret brothel called Jezebel’s. The men on the contrary are assigned only two functions within the Republic of Gilead that is either to fight the rebels or impregnate women.

The very first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis delineates the creation of both Adam and Eve, but where Adam is individually sculpted from dust and brought to life by Lord God himself, Eve is born out of a rib of Adam; allowing Adam to not only identify Eve as the “bone of my bones/ and the flesh of my flesh” but also claim to call her “woman”, as she was “born out of man”. (*Genesis 2:23*) Similarly the denial of citizenship to both women and slaves in Ancient Rome but granting the same to the men or the refusal to grant voting rights to women for a long time in UK are only a few examples of the “universality of female subordination”, that Professor Ortner argues is a fact “that exists within every type of social and economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity” (Ortner 67).

Professor Ortner lists that, either one or all three types of the following “data” is found to be prevalent in some form or the other within the precipices of all culture; and this is evidence enough to assert the universality of female subordination to male/patriarchal doctrines. Firstly, according to Professor Ortner, there is the presence of “elements of cultural ideology and informants” that explicitly devalue women’s contribution to the society and thereby, conferring greater importance to the functions performed by men (Ortner 69). For example, within the Victorian society women were encouraged to stay behind at home for the purpose of performing daily household chores and for childrearing leaving all cares of the outside world on the broad shoulders of men. Although the women were hailed and appraised for their sacrifice by attributing them the title of the “Angel of the House”, their hard labour and contributions found no such formal recognition in the world of men. Instead the services performed by the Victorian women was rather seen to be only their natural disposition and not something even remotely extraordinary as the functions performed by the men, such as the founding of colonies in unknown lands or fighting with rebellious tribal forces on the lands of the foreign nations so that the flag of the Union Jack may fly high. Secondly, Professor Ortner states that nearly in all cultures there is the presence of “symbolic devices” that attribute “defilement” and therefore the eventual “devaluation of women” (Ortner 69). Continuing the example of the Victorian era, the concepts of the “New Woman” or the “Fallen Angel” are all such “symbolic devices” used by the then patriarchs of the Victorian society to connote or identify



such women who refuse to adhere to the role of the “Angle of the Hose”. Thus the “New Woman” is found to be portrayed riding a bicycle or smoking a cigarette in the cartoons of the newspapers of the time; while the disrespectful and piteous treatment meted out to a “Fallen Angel” or a “Fallen Woman” is ideally portrayed in Tomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Thirdly, within the structuring of every social milieu, Professor Ortner claims to have found the existence of some “arrangement” that seeks to “exclude women from participation in or contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside” (Ortner 69). To exemplify, the doctrine prevalent in the Hindu tradition of debarring of women from entering into the inner sanctum of temples, touching of any holy relic or worshipping of gods during their period of menstruation is among one such “arrangements” to exclude women from coming into contact with figures of power and authority.

Apparently the only position of power and authority that a woman may dream to acquire is through motherhood, wherein for her ability to give/create life out of her own body, the woman who was earlier either despised or subjugated by the patriarchal society is now raised to a position of a goddess by the same patriarchy. This is particularly in keeping with God’s blessings to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply.

Nevertheless, Professor Ortner particularly refers to De Beauvoir’s advocacy that, “the female, to a greater extent than the male, is the prey of the species” to argue vituperatively that the significant position attributed to mothers in almost every society is nothing more than another ploy to render the females subservient to males, as before. She summarises De Beauvoir to state that “many major areas and processes of the woman’s body serve no apparent function for the health and stability of the individual; on the contrary, as they perform their specific organic functions, they are often sources of discomfort, pain, and danger”, (Ortner 74) and further illustrates this by directly citing from De Beauvoir:

Many of the ovarian secretions function for the benefit of the egg, promoting its maturation and adapting the uterus to its requirements; in respect to the organism as a whole, they make for disequilibrium rather than for regulation – the woman is adapted to the needs of the egg rather than to her own requirements (Ortner 74).



Similarly, Professor Ortner also points out, after De Beauvoir, that menstruation — which is not only uncomfortable and often painful, but also “frequently has negative emotional correlates and in any case involves bothersome tasks of cleansing and waste disposal” serve no other purpose but that of preparing the female body for motherhood; and further continues to argue that while pregnancy dangerously depletes the woman’s body of vitamins and minerals by channelizing it “into nourishing the foetus”, childbirth itself is a very dangerous and painful procedure that the women undergoes (Ortner 74). Professor Ortner is thus right to formulate, that, much of the “woman’s body space, for a greater percentage of her lifetime, and at sometimes great cost to her personal health, strength, and general stability, is taken up with the natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species” (Ortner 75).

Closely related to this patriarchal repression of women is the desire of culture to triumph over nature and natural forces and bend nature to its own whims. To expatiate vividly, all of the great civilizations of the world could only come into existence and sustain itself once they had been able to control the forces of nature, such as floods and droughts, rampages by wild animals, storms, etc; and thus ensure for themselves a steady, sustainable source of food and water and a certain security of life. One of the most common techniques that enabled these early civilizations to keep out the effects of nature and natural forces was to build high walls or fortifications around the cities. Thus, civilization thrived within the walls of the city while outside it was nature, wild and uncontrollable. But with the advancement of time, man got the better of nature, as he promptly took to reach into the deepest recesses of the earth and the sea and to exploit the natural resources for his own wellbeing.

Professor Ortner is thus right to point out that, every “culture implicitly recognizes and asserts a distinction between the operation of nature and the operation of culture (human consciousness and its products)” where, “the distinctiveness of culture rests precisely on the fact that it can under most circumstances transcend natural conditions and turn them to its purposes”. Hence, “culture (i.e. every culture) at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct from but superior to nature, and that sense of distinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform – to “socialize” and “culturalize” – nature” (Ortner 73).

Analysed in this light the subjugation and subduing of females by the patriarchal society attains a completely different dimension. Within a civilized society, the females are blessed with the power



to create life out of their own body, and are also tasked with the purpose of nurturing the babies from their infancy till adulthood. In this respect the woman becomes much likened to nature; for doesn't nature also has the ability to give birth to life and is tasked with the responsibility of nurturing it with all necessary environmental requirements? On the contrary, as professor Ortner points out, the males "lacking natural creative functions, must assert his creativity externally, through the medium of technology and symbols"; but the objects thus created by man are relatively lasting, eternal, transcendental objects; while the products of woman's creation, that is man is mortal, and has a limited span of existence. Furthermore, since hunting and fighting wars is always associated with masculinity irrespectively in all cultures, it can be further inferred that males alone has the power to kill while the females can only bring forth life (Ortner 75). Such facets of conceptualization of the male-female and nature-culture binary that has been deeply ingrained in every civilization makes the subjugation and subduing of females to males a truly "universal and pan-cultural fact" (Ortner 67).

The Separating Wall of the Republic:

All readers of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, would be quick to realise that, the reasons, justifications and the manners by which the females are claimed to be rightfully subjected to patriarchy and that of nature and natural resources to the progress of culture by Professor Ortner, as expatiated above, bear an uncanny similarity with the Republic of Gilead — the locus of the plot and action of the novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The Biblical land of Gilead mentioned in the book of Genesis was said to exist on the east of the River Jordan, and was supposedly a land of peace and fulfilment, for the Lord God had in person instructed Jacob to flee with all his possessions to Gilead — the land of Jacob's father Isaac and also that of Canaan — in order to save himself from the biased treatment meted out to him by Laban and his tribe. The Republic of Gilead as Atwood tells us in *The Handmaid's Tale* had been set up by the "Sons of Jacob". However, these Sons of Jacob are no good Samaritans but are rather Christian fundamentalists who set up the Republic of Gilead after staging an attack and killing off the President and nearly all of the members of the Congress. Furthermore, unlike the Biblical Gilead, the Republic of Gilead is no land of peace and fulfilment, but is a hierarchical regime of Old Testament-inspired social and religious fanaticism that seeks to repress the liberties of women to the extent where they are reduced to nothing more than mere tools of procreation.



To expatiate vividly, as Offred, the protagonist of the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* informs the readers that within the Republic of Gilead, the women are asked to fulfil either of any of the following roles — the Wife or Daughters of a Commanders of the Faithful, an Econowife, a Martha or a Handmaid. Each of these roles prescribed to the women is mutually exclusive and are never overlap; and each one of these women (whether a Wife or a Handmaid) has to wear a specific dress of a single colour to represent their hierarchical position within the society of the Republic of Gilead.

The Wives and Daughters of the Commanders of the Faithful occupy the highest standing among all other women in the society of Gilead. The Wives wear the blue dress, closely resembling the delineation of the Virgin Mary in historic Christian art, which is ironical, since the Wives of the Commanders being sterile and unable to give birth to babies their “virginity” stands susceptible to much problematic interpretation. Unlike the Wives of the Commanders of the Faithful, their Daughters are required to wear an all-white garment by the theocratic rulers of the Republic of Gilead to symbolize their innocence and sexual purity. The Daughters upon reaching maturity are given in marriage to able men, through the ceremony of “Pravaganza” (formed after the conjoining of two words Prayer and Extravaganza) who had helped defend the Republic of Gilead against the rebel forces who were always at hand trying to disrupt the social setting prevalent there.

Immediately following the rank of the Wives and Daughters of the Commanders of the Faithful are the Marthas and the Handmaids. Dressed in green overalls, the Marthas are tasked with the job of tending to all household duties (baking, cooking, cleaning the household, etc.) in the houses of the Commanders of the Faithful. In utter dissimilitude to the Marthas are the Handmaids. Dressed in bright red, somewhat like the Whore of Babylon, the Handmaids exist only for one purpose — to satisfy the sexual desires (on the nights of the Ceremony) of the Commanders of the Faithful, and thus become their surrogate mothers of their babies, without any more claim on these babies than one has on over someone else’s property. In other words, the Handmaids, not just resemble the Whore of Babylon in their attire, but also in the very purpose they serve to exist. The least and the last category of women are the Econowives, who are as Offred elucidates, are women who have married low-ranking men, not belonging to the elite category of the Commanders of the Faith and are therefore required to fulfil all the functions of household duties, companionship and child bearing. The Econowives could thus be identified by their multicoloured dress having shades of blue, green and red.



Distinctly differentiable, the men in the Republic of Gilead are tasked with either of the three jobs: defending the Republic of Gilead either through fighting as Angels in the war against the rebels or by serving in the system of surveillance or the local police within the boundary of the Republic (the ones in charge of surveillance are called The Eyes of God or simply “the Eyes”, while the local police in the Republic of Gilead are called the Guardians of the Faith) or look after the effective administration of the Republic of Gilead by serving in the ranks of the elite Commanders of the Faith.

Offred, as stated above is the protagonist and also the central voice in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, and it is through her narrative that all about the Republic of Gilead and its nightmarish repression of women comes to light. Offred serves as a handmaid in the house of one of the Commanders of the Faith, but as Atwood etches, the life and work of a Handmaid is wrought with repression and torture in all possible aspects. At the very beginning of the novel one is struck by the fact that although the Wife of the Commander has a name, namely Serena Joy as well as the two Marthas, who are called Rita and Cora; strangely the Handmaid is simply named Offred; which when interpreted lends itself to a variety of interpretations, where Offred could mean offered for sacrifice, belonging as a property to the Commander of the Faith, whose name is most likely Fred, thus Of-Fred; or Offred could simply mean a pseudonym that is interchangeable depending on the name of the Commander she is sent to serve next. Likewise, Offred's narrative presents the reader with such an astounding list of prohibitions that a Handmaid is forced to abide by, that one is to shudder at the very thought of living such a cursed life. For starters, Offred as a Handmaid is denied any right to read or write, reserving the freedom of literacy only to the Commander alone; so much so that even the Bible — the very words of the book that are to serve the Handmaids as a rule book of conduct — is kept under lock and key inside a secured box; just as the library of the Commander, containing hundreds of books (even those banned under the laws of the Republic of Gilead) is off limits for any and every member of the household, save for that of the Commander. Similarly, Offred is required to utter only such preset words of greetings as “May the Lord open”, “Blessed be the fruit” and “praise be” when interacting with other members of the society and also even with other Handmaids. The list goes on to include Offred's right to move about freely on the streets of the Republic of Gilead (she is to be escorted by another Handmaid and walk in pairs whenever she steps outside the house of her Commander, carrying at all times her passes in their zipper pockets); using any kind of cosmetics that may glorify or assault the



female form; and even wearing any other clothes except for her red “habit”. Startlingly enough, following a previous case of commitment of suicide, the Commander of the House has even removed any objects from her room — to the extent that even her baths are supervised by either of the two Marthas — that may allow Offred to take away her life. The only freedoms that are made available to the Handmaids are the ones which in the words of Offred are “freedom from” sexual oppression, unlike “in the days of anarchy” when the “freedom to” choose what one wants to do existed. In other words, before the Republic of Gilead was founded, the women were although subjected to various kinds of torture by the males, making their lives quite unsafe; but with the establishment of the Republic of Gilead the lives of the women were made safer and valuable, but their freedom to choose the life they wanted to lead was taken away from them.

Nevertheless, the actual reason behind the denial of the most basic freedoms and liberties to the Handmaids was that they were thought unimportant in respect to the purpose of their existence. In other words, the sole duty of the Handmaids was to serve as surrogate mothers for the babies of the Commanders and their otherwise infertile Wives; and in respect to this duty such freedoms were regarded to be impediments. The Aunts (the governing functionaries who also acted as teachers) of the Red Centre — the state sanctioned institutes set up to assist ordinary females into forgetting their past life of luxuries and freedoms and indoctrinate them into the ways of the life of a Handmaid, and thereby turn themselves into passive tools of procreation — themselves are heard to say, “for our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential.” (Atwood, 108); which is the purpose of giving birth to babies. Even Offred herself attests to this passive performance of giving birth and being valued only for her womb, in one of her musings, as:

[Earlier] my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me... Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red with its translucent wrapping (Atwood, 88).

The “pear” shaped object or the womb of Offred, has attained such a kind of autonomy of its own within the precincts of the Republic of Gilead, that it overshadows and governs the very life of its bearer.



All and any women who fail to participate in this state sponsored compulsive act of procreation are branded as “unwomen” — an umbrella term that is used within the Republic of Gilead to designate all such women who are sterile, unmarried, certain widows, feminists, lesbians, nuns and politically dissident women. These “unwomen” according to Offred are either exiled to the colonies, where owing to prolonged exposure to harmfully radiation infested, and hostile environment they die within a span of three years; or they are forced to become prostitutes in the secretly run state sponsored brothels, called Jezebel’s, for the sole purpose of entertaining the Commanders and their guests. The common point linking the fate of both these types of “unwomen” is that they exist outside the walled boundary of the Republic of Gilead.

However, the most gruesome of the punishments is reserved for those females who despite appearing to have apparently confirmed to the stereotypical roles as prescribed by the laws of the Republic of Gilead, commit some act of rebelliousness (which for the Handmaids would tantamount to a murder of the babies born, undergoing an abortion or the most heinous of all, that is getting impregnated by some other male other than the Commander to whom the Handmaid owes all loyalty of service; while those for the Wives would be committing some act of adultery). Such females are publicly hanged on the noose in the ceremony called “Salvaging”, and thereafter their lifeless bodies are left hanging on the Wall as a lesson and a further warning to all other females to not cross the laws of the Republic.

Much like the fate of the Handmaids, nature also seems to have taken a subservient position epitomizing passive beauty and reproduction. A single description of the private garden maintained by Serena Joy, the Wife of the Commander, as seen through the eyes of Offred would suffice to evince the ostentatious role that nature has taken to serve in the Republic of Gilead. The description goes:

Then we had irises, rising beautiful and cool on their stalks, like blown glass, like pastel water momentarily frozen in a splash, light blue, light mauve, and the darker ones, velvet and purple, black cat’s ears in the sun, indigo shadow and the bleeding hearts, so female in shape, it was a surprise they’d not long since been rooted out. There is something subversive about this garden of Serena’s... A Tennyson garden, heavy with scent, languid; the return of the word *swoon* (Atwood 175).



As Offred herself notices this garden maintained by Serena Joy in her house has a certain pictorial, almost poetic appearance that appears to be almost unreal when compared to the harsh environmental conditions that exists outside the boundaries of the Republic of Gilead; which Offred delineates as:

The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells. Who knows, your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and unborn babies. Maybe a vulture would die of eating you.... Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers. Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants, along the San Andreas Fault... and the mutant strain of syphilis no mould could touch (Atwood pp 128-9)

This utter discrepancy that exists in the environmental condition inside and outside of the boundary of the Republic of Gilead only further adds conviction to Professor Ortner's argument of that what man could subjugate and subdue gets included within civilization, while every "other" is promptly excluded.

Furthermore, Offred also observes Serena Joy to mutilate the seedpods of the flowers by the cruel use of shears just when the season of spring has set in her private garden; and thereby depriving the flowers a chance to propagate and reproduce. Observed closely, this mutilation of the reproductive parts of the flowers is not just a metaphorical subjugation of nature to culture, but it also subtly underscores Serena Joy's own secret desire to exact revenge upon the fertile Offred by ripping off her fertile womb from her body.

Similarly, Roberta Rubenstein rightly points out that description of the atmosphere of "birthing" by Offred in terms of animal imagery, such as, "the smell is of our own flesh, an organic smell, sweat and a tinge of iron, from the blood on the sheet, and another smell, more animal, that's coming... a smell of dens, of inhabited caves" (Atwood, 141); or that of the Aunts at the Red Centre prodding the novice Handmaids using cattle prods and tattooing them clearly helps to associate women with lower animals of nature, (Rubenstein, 106) that must be subjugated to the control to the faculties of the higher animals, that is of man and his civilization.



Thus, to sum up after the enlightened interpretation of Rubenstein, the utterly polluted and denuded environmental atmosphere coupled with the existence of the unwomen, outside the known boundaries of the Republic of Gilead is endeavoured to be balanced by the fertile wombs of the Handmaids and the disciplined maintenance of the adjoining gardens of the Commander's house; both of which exist within the boundaries of the Republic of Gilead. (Rubenstein 103). Thus, it can be stated that delineation of the futuristic dystopia by Atwood in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* should act as a tale of caution for the modern society, which if unheeded may spell the doom of the entire humankind.

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Contextualizing English language instruction through descriptive writing tasks

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Abstract

Language is basically a medium of communication to be used within an immediate available social environment. No language is separate or cannot be separated from the world around the people who use that language. The purpose of any language instruction is never to equip the learners with language abilities which they may not even use in real-life communication. As far as the second and foreign language instruction is concerned, learners, in some cases, do not get enough opportunities to use the language for day-to-day communication as they already have a common language (L1) for the purpose. It becomes the responsibility of the teacher to create enough authentic situations in which learners could use the target language. The present paper attempts at enabling learners' written production of English in authentic contexts. The attempt is made to enable the learners to create the descriptions of places, people, and situations readily available to them.

Keywords: contextualization, content-based instruction, authentic content, authentic instruction, descriptive writing.

Introduction

Language is a basic need in society. It is a major medium of our day-to-day communication in different places like the market, home, shopping mall, classroom etc. We cannot exist in society without a language. Everyone on this planet knows at least one language. When any language is used for communication, it is always used in a situation and with some purpose. We cannot go on making empty expressions without any communicative value assigned to them. Language is always used to do things in our day-to-day lives and to perform various functions such as complaining, enquiring, questioning, and expressing opinions, describing people, places and things around and so on. Similarly, when it comes to learning and teaching language, we cannot learn or teach it in the laboratory conditions completely detached from the real life situations. The language learned through such controlled situations is not likely to be used for a real life communication. Most of the learners of English in India, even after 10-12 years of formal instruction in the English



language, fail to use the language for real-life communication. The root of this failure lies in our ways of teaching English in our schools and colleges. Contextualization, or making the language instruction authentic or real life-like, becomes a necessary condition if that language instruction has to reach the stage of actual real life communication (Richards, 2014). Contextualization of the instruction also means the use of authentic materials and classroom tasks in the language classrooms. The use of authentic classroom tasks is directly connected to the interest and motivation level and even learners' overall productivity in the classroom. If the learners do not find the classroom tasks relevant and useful and if they cannot make a connection between the classroom and the world outside, then, however, rich or effective the instruction may be, it would not yield the fruitful outcomes for both the learners and the teacher as well.

The present paper is a report on one of such classroom studies where the focus of the classroom teaching was to make English language instruction as authentic and as contextualized as possible. The attempt is made to authenticate/contextualize the English classroom instruction through the use of descriptive writing tasks. The study discusses the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How effectively do the descriptive writing tasks help in making English language instruction authentic?
2. What is the effect of using descriptive writing tasks on learners' interest and motivation level?

The Study

The present study is an attempt to explore the usefulness of descriptive writing tasks to contextualize and authenticate the English language instruction. In particular, the study examines closely the effect of writing descriptions by the learners of the world around them (places, people, things, and situations). The study is a qualitative study and the researchers used *microgenesis*¹ as the method for analyzing the qualitative data. This data was collected by using the teacher's classroom observation, teacher's reflective notes and students' writing responses to the given tasks.

¹*Microgenesis* is a research method that is often used by the researchers in the area of sociocultural theory. It is a way to track the development in a phenomenon over a short period of time. The present study does not use this method in the true sense of the term as the growth shown or analyzed in the study is based on the observation of only one classroom session (Lantolf, 2006).



The study was carried out by two researchers and it uses data from their classroom teaching experiences when they did a one-month summer camp as the guest teachers with the target learners. It was a one month English language communication and leadership skills development program with the learners from 6th to 10th grade. It was a heterogeneous class. The classes were arranged as part of one-month summer camp for the students who are supposedly educationally deprived and who belong to the backward strata of the society. This stratification was done based on the government records. Most of the students had Telugu as their mother tongue. There were students from 6th to 10th class in each section and each section had forty students in it. It was a smart classroom with adigital system which was new for the students. Some of the students had fairly good command over English but they were not confident to use the language for the day-to-day communication. However, most of the students from all the sections and classes were unable to use English for numerous reasons. But they were quite interested in attending the English classes and highly motivated and enthusiastic to learn English. There were two types of descriptive writing tasks given to the learners:

- i) Task-1: Describing the given pictures
- ii) Task-2: Describing the premises where the camp was conducted

Task 1:

Group Work: From a group of five members

Observe the two pictures carefully and find the differences between them. Write the differences on a sheet of paper.

The focus of this task was to enable the learners to observe the two pictures (appendix) and find out the differences. Learners were asked to write the descriptions of the pictures in a group. This task was given before the task two (the descriptions of the camp) because the target group was heterogeneous and most of the learners in the class did not have a basic idea of how to observe and describe things, places, and people. They needed a task which guided them with more scaffolding. The picture description task was a controlled task as the learners did not have to describe anything beyond the two given pictures unlike the task two where they were supposed to observe the entire campus and make decisions of what to describe and how to describe. Though this task was controlled in comparison to the task two but it was not decontextualized. It required the limited



response from the learners and the cognitive load was relatively less. It was a good example of a pedagogic task.

Task 2:

Now, we are at the end of this summer camp. Recollect your experiences about the place and describe it in not more than 300-350 words.

Relatively, this was a cognitively challenging task than the task one. The task required rigorous planning, decision making, selecting, prioritizing and organizing skills in writing. This was a fully authentic and real life task where learners were asked to describe the camp site and include the details about the world around them as they observe and perceive them. The task had immediate context and it required them to describe the place from their perception which made the task more personal.

Learners were first given the task and there was a discussion between the teacher and the learners on the requirements of the task. After the instructions were clear, the teacher helped the learners in planning the stages of their writing whenever they required. The learners were also free to refer any source or reference materials or discuss with their peer and the teachers. This task became more authentic in the sense that it was administered in the fashion as it would happen in real life. The only thing that could have reduced the authenticity of the task a bit is that the learners did not have enough time to revise and edit their writing as it happens in real life writing.

The purpose of designing this task was to make the classroom situation more relevant to the learners, to make them understand and feel in their own world of experience, to create a real scenario in the classroom for the learners' better understanding, to inspire the learners and to encourage them to use new words by using dictionaries. Also, the aims of this task were to develop learners' writing skills, to see the way they organize their ideas and develop them into comprehensive descriptions, to make them imagine the real picture of their campus and to connect it with their real life. The teachers also aimed at finding out the cognitive development of the learners, their interest and the differences between the learners' performances in the past, at present and also to predict their future potential as far as their writing abilities were concerned.



Before going to the main task there was a discussion in the classroom among the students guided by the teacher. The students discussed their campus, their new experience in the smart classroom with the digital system, the environment of their camp, the quality of the food, the teachers, etc. The discussion gave them an overall idea about how to develop the ideas and organize their writing. They got a clear picture of the content which enhanced their interest and motivation level.

While this entire classroom instruction scenario was happening, the teachers were playing the role of researchers and observers. There was always one teacher teaching in the class while other was busy in classroom observation. Both the teachers observed their classes from the teacher's and researcher's point of view as well. While observing the class the teacher maintained a diary in which she recorded both her observations and her retrospective reflections.

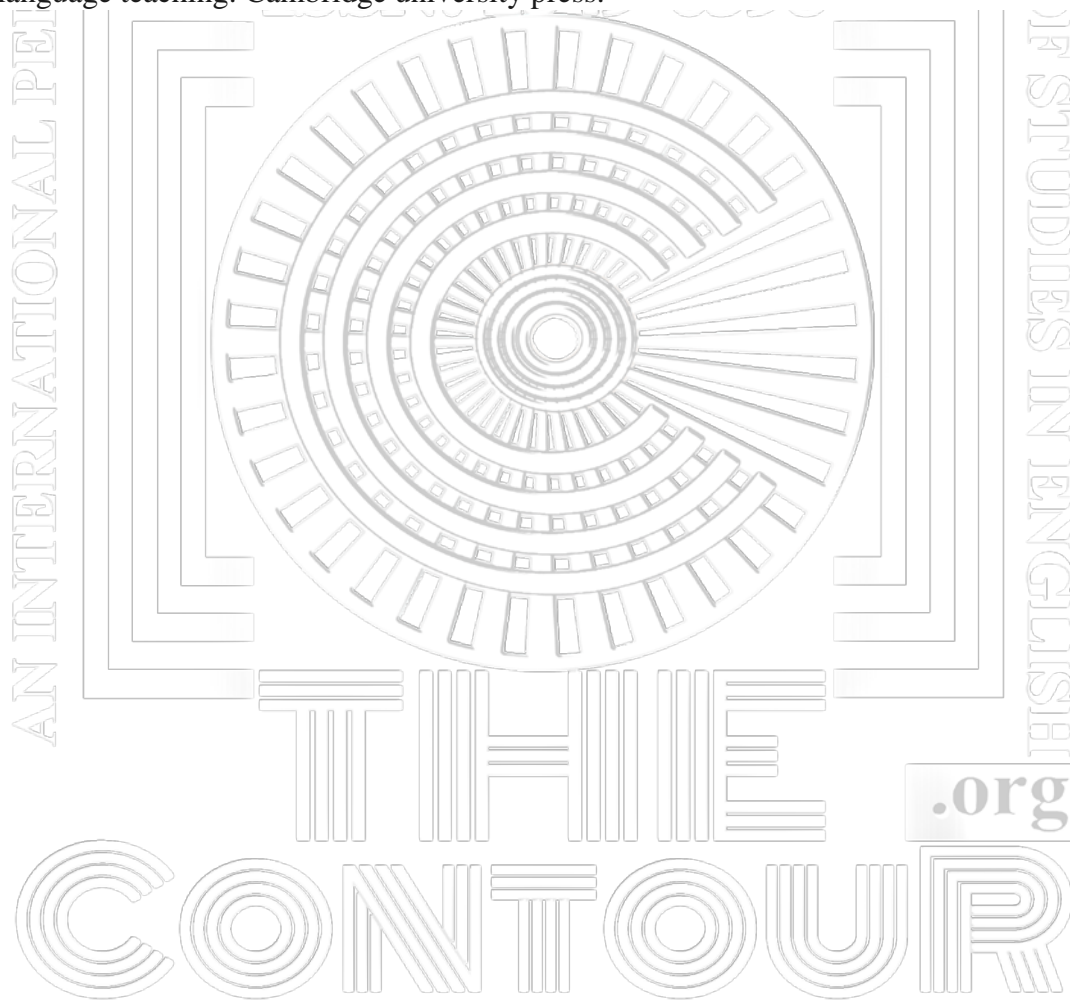
After the learners complete both the tasks the teacher collected the papers from them. It was a complete process of learning on both the part of the learners as well as the teachers as teacher-researchers. As compared to the learners' previous performances the learners were quite interested in the present task because they were largely involved in it and this involvement was caused because of their high motivation and interest level. The discussion on their campus before going to the main task gave a clear picture to the learners of their campus which was a type of pre-task activity. So the learners were quite confident to write about their campus as well as in the picture description activity which was facilitated through the discussion with their group members. They were showing active interest while doing the activity, communicating with their group members and sharing their ideas, which the teacher-researcher found while continuously monitoring the class.

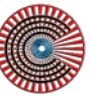
While monitoring the class the teacher found most of the students using dictionaries to find some new words which they did not know. Thus they were learning new vocabulary which shows that the students were quite enthusiastic about the task. After the task was completed by the students the teacher collected the papers. While going through the papers the teacher found a lot of changes in the writing of the students which were quite different from the way the students were writing previously. There were a lot of developments in the way the students organized their ideas, the vocabularies that they used, the link between the sentences, the way they extended their ideas etc. This development shows the students' complete involvement in the tasks, their high interest and motivation level and the successful productivity, relevance and the usefulness of the tasks at the end.



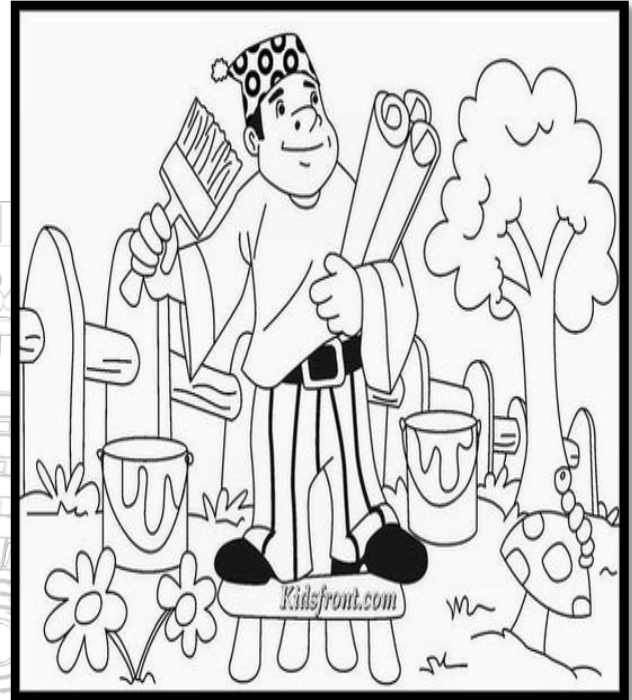
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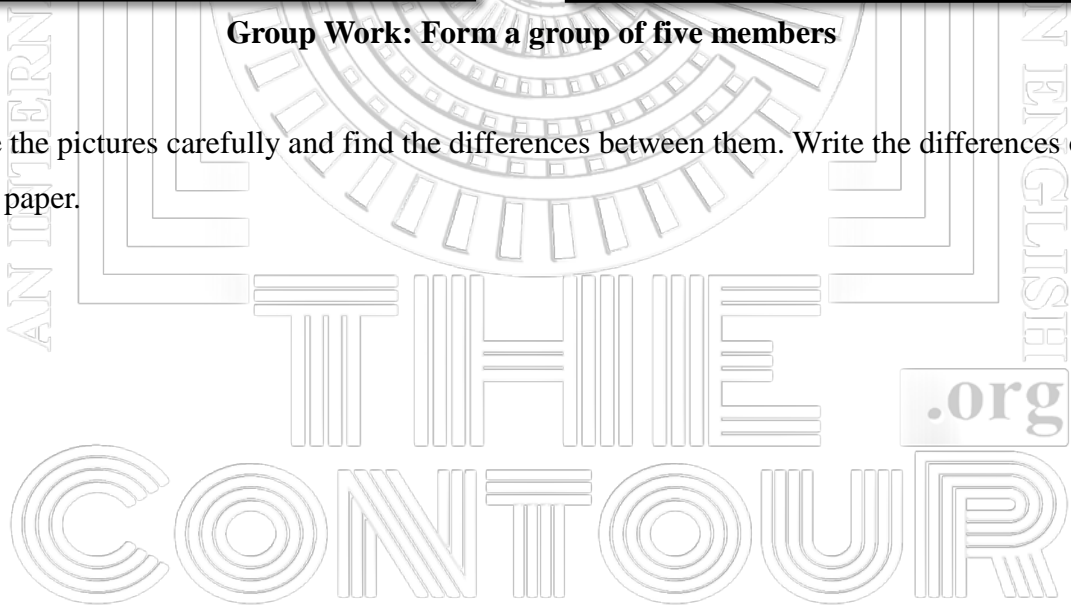


Appendix



Group Work: Form a group of five members

Observe the pictures carefully and find the differences between them. Write the differences on a sheet of paper.





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Revisiting racism in M. G. Vassanji's *The Magic of Saida*

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Abstract

*Racism is the belief of one race assuming to be superior to those communities inferior to them in terms of economy, politics, culture and society. They are to be inhumanly discriminated and thereby treated as the other. History gives many instances of racism deep-rooted in society like the Holocaust, apartheid regime in Africa, slavery in East Africa and the segregation in the United States etc. M. G. Vassanji as a postcolonial writer never fails to focus on racism and other discriminatory practices of the European colonisers colonising the blacks. In *The Magic of Saida* (2012), one of his most famous novels, Vassanji has portrayed the vivid picture of the practice of slavery of one generation and protest and resistance of the next generation, of course, geared by education and culture, against the racial outlook of the whites. The concurrent attempts of the protagonists to be assimilated with the superior culture get into conflict with their backward pull of tradition and sinister rites related to their native culture and history. An attempt had been made in this paper to trace how far the author is able to portray the protagonists' attempts to reform their cultural and racial backdrops and get assimilated with the European culture and practices.*

Keywords: race, racism, chotara, golo, slavery, colonization.

Introduction

Racism works as a prime factor for the build up of the conflict between us and them, high and low, white and dark, superior and inferior, oppressor and the oppressed, the western and the native etc. It is an ever evolving process of our society which continually produces the terms like natives, sub citizens etc. Race is the criteria by which one's individual importance is valued and judged in a society, a community and even a country. Whereas one is racially black, he/she cannot enjoy any sort of privilege that the racially superior people enjoy in their lives. It is often thought that a racially poor man cannot have the right to make any progress in life no matter whether he/she is potential in any field. The racial conflict is one of such issues in postcolonial studies which do not prioritize the racially other people who are consequently pushed to the background.



Racism is the thought that one's race is superior to the other race. Racism is "the contemporary discourses and practices that try to keep the other at a distance, to segregate him/her to get rid of him or her and in more extreme cases to expel or to destroy him or her." (Wieviorka, 1992) Racism is not only a form of colonial domination and inferiorization but also the practice to exploit people in the name of their racial and biological attributes. In the 18th and 19th centuries the European colonisers made the natives slaves who had to suffer from 'the white man's burden.' Slave trade was common in Africa where kinship structure was prevalent in society. Children of slaves could not get entrance into the master's kinship group or rise to prominent positions if they had the wish to do so. The natives in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) have been discriminated and barred from enjoying cultural, political, civil, economic and social rights. To the people of the West the East is a place of ignorance. Their identity is in crisis as they are dehumanized and dominated by the European colonisers. In *Imperialism and Sexual Difference* (1986) Spivak identifies a cultural norm of white male as a political trope. It signifies that the whites symbolically represent the vibrant powerful masculinity while the blacks hold the characteristics of submissive femininity. "The displacement, racial discrimination and the generation differences put hindrances in the way to formulate an independent individual identity." (Roy, 2013) Postcolonial discourses attempt to focus on the way the colonised natives assimilate into the white society.

According to Peter Bohmer (1999), what Marxist theory says about racism is that it serves the interests of the capitalist or employer class by dividing black and white workers reducing their potential unity and thus their bargaining power. Racism is a system of oppression of the people of colour and the ideology of white supremacy and black inferiority. The racially marginalized people try to raise their voice against the colonial domination and bondage. The trials and tribulations of the racially dominated people are a recurrent theme in the prominent texts of the postcolonial Diaspora writers. These may include Nadine Gordimer's *My Sons Story* (1990), Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1982), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Michael Ondaatje *The English Patient* (1992) Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) etc.

Jonah Ruskin said, "modern novelists – from Conrad to Lawrence, from Kipling to Orwell, from Forster to Cary have been preoccupied with race with cultural and national conflicts." (1971) E. M Forster in *A Passage to India* (1924) tried to depict racism and oppression of Britain ruling over India. M G Vassanji is an East Asian African Diaspora writer who traces the movements of the



Asians from Africa to North America. He has portrayed in his novels the racial stereotyping of the dislocated and hyphenated people of East Asia and Africa. Vassanji was born in Nairobi, Kenya, brought up in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and went to the United States to study physics. His life is characterised by ‘a complex ethno cultural identity’ incorporating multiple countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Canada, India, and USA), religions, languages and professions. He has written six novels so far namely *The Gunny Sack* (1989), *No New Land* (1991), *The Book of Secrets* (1994), *Amriika* (1999), *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003) and *The Assassin’s Song* (2007). He has also written two collections of short stories and two nonfictions and twice won the Giller Prize and Commonwealth Prize.

Brief storyline

In 2012, his recent book *The Magic of Saida* was published. The novel is “an ambitious passionate work about racial identity, deracination and the irresolvable mysteries of the human heart.” (Kirkus Review) It is a haunting novel of mystery, history and past events. Kamal Punja, a physician in Edmonton, Canada was born in Kilwa as a ‘chotara’ (a Swahili term meaning half-caste), a mixed blood of an absent Indian father and Swahili African mother of slave ancestry. His father abandoned the mother to go back to his Indian father. Leaving behind his childhood love Saida, Kamal had to leave his mother and go with his uncle Jaffu Ali Punja to live with their Indian community in Africa. Kamal then goes to Mkerere University to study medicine in Uganda but as Idi Amin comes to power Kamal and Shamim, his girlfriend and later his wife immigrate to Canada. Thirty five years later Kamal a famous successful doctor returns to Kilwa by his magical bond and love for Saida, his childhood friend. The story unfolds many details of the Maji Maji rebellion, slavery of the East Africans, the export of the African slaves to India, Idi Amin’s atrocities against the Asians in Uganda etc.

Kamal: a chotara

The sense of discrimination and demarcation results in a sort of hyphenation between two identities, two worlds, two spaces. The in-between space is a space of compromise where there is no fixed or stable point. The hyphenation arises from the difference between the coloniser and the colonised. Colonial oppression compels man to adapt to the high culture and dominant identity within their racial boundaries. In their attempt to cross the racial boundaries they are hindered at the threshold of the two doors , the one already shut up and the door to be open, of the two worlds,



the old and the new, the domestic and the foreign. This threshold is the liminality which the migrants and the natives in each of Vassanji's novels often experience in their diasporic journey.

Homi Bhabha (1994) persistently argues that the Self/Other dualism creates a sort of “cultural ambivalence”, “interstitiality” or inbetweenness which is “the Third Space of enunciation that destroys the mirror of representation facilitating the transfer between the Centre and its margins.” “It is the inter – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of meaning and culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national and anti-nationalist histories of the people. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves.” (Bhabha, 1994)

When Kamal was 11 years old his mother sent him to an estranged father's family. Jaffu Ali said to Kamal “you are now a Mhindi, an Indian, and will live like a Mhindi. You will go to a good school and you will learn. Your father wanted that. Forget about the past. It is over.”(186) ‘Kamal's father left behind evidence of his fall from Indian respectability – having gone local, fathered a half-breed, an outcaste whom he could never call his own back in Gujarat.’(27) ‘Slowly, slowly he learned to bend his tongue to utter Kihindi. He could never call it by its Indian name, Kutchi; to him it was always Kihindi. The language of *kin ai*, and *thik ai* and *kem chhe*. He spoke it with a certain lilt, a musical accent, and he would tend to put vowels at the end of the words, the Swahili way: *mamedi*, *booti*, *foulo*. This manner of speaking, his dark brown skin, and his curly hair set him apart in his new, Indian environment. He was the local chotara, the half caste.’(194-5) Kamal is ostracized for being too African to the Indians living in Africa and too Indian for the Africans. But when Idi Amin comes to power and expels all Asians he flees to Canada. ‘Kamal could never get the African out of him, even when he washed himself with bleach to get his muddy brown out.’(28)

‘But that's what he was in Dar es Salaam: Golo, African; the chotara, the half caste Indian; mouthing Indianisms with increasing fluency, occasionally stumbling.’(195) “My mother abandoned me and broke my world?”(183) Kamal had to become a Shamsi. A singing Indian.’(193) Everyone had a nickname in school, and his was Golo. It was friendly; even to this day, Kamal said, some of his friends knew him as Golo.’(195) Being a Golo, ‘the dark curly-haired half African’, Kamal had the blood of an African warrior. Sabini would laugh: “you are a rogue Kamalu, and a true Swahili.”(203)



Kamal became a 'half caste bastard' (240) The making of Golo into an Indian of the Shamsi community meant that he had to learn their language and worship their gods, sing weird hymns to them.'(214) 'He was African, the Indian part didn't matter. He could not speak the Indian language correctly, and his English sounded African, was often brutally imitated.'(227) But 'how could this Golo, with the dark chotara skin and curly hair that screamed "Unteachable!" and "Donkey!" learn to sing the Indian ginans whose ragas were stranger than the film tunes that came on the radio.'(216)

'His skin colour was rarely an issue now, he had grown into the Shamsi community, he was one of them, though a dark one. His Swahili intonations had gradually been smoothed away under the clamour of two Indian languages and English.'(237) 'It was the Golo in him who sent up the partial cheer for Idi Amin. It was the half-caste who had identified with the house servants ("boys"), flinched at their abuse and humiliations, and suffered his own share of them in school. It was the boy who has cried for his African mother and his special friend in Kilwa. He recalled his horror and shame when he saw a young African woman coming out of his uncle's back room. He had been reminded of his mother – and wept at night because he was nothing but a half-caste bastard.'(261)

German colonization

Colonization sows the seeds of racism. Ashcroft claims "racial discrimination was in the majority of cases, a direct extension of colonial policy and continued to receive both overt and covert support from the ex-colonial powers."(Ashcroft et al, 2001, p 44) The Germans 'broke the rules of our elders, our sharia. For disobeying which, kiboko, the whip. For this misdemeanour, the khamsa-ishirin, for that one, the same. The twenty five referring to the number of lashes, delivered so hard they made you bleed and weep like a woman. Not for nothing we remember the German as mkono wa damu; the hand of blood. As the song says, the Arab put us in chains, the German whipped us raw, and the British sucked our blood.'(69) Vassanji's society was compartmentalized on racial ethnic bases.

African slavery

The roots of European racism lie in the slave trade. African slaves helped build European nations as economic powerhouse. When Germany acquired her colonies the kidnapping of natives and the resulting trade in slaves were rampant in East and West Africa. British researcher Richard Burton found that during the 1860s twenty thousand slaves were sold annually from Kilwa to Zanzibar.



Towns like Bagamoyo, Zanzibar, Kilwa, Tabora were scars of slave trade. African, Asians and indigenous people were the victims of slave trade. While reconstructing the history of Kilwa, Kamal mentions slavery vital for the lost story. In the slave trade across the Atlantic the Africans were transported to slave markets to North and South America. Kamal's mother tells Kamal: "the sea holds many secrets, you understand? Kilwa is an old town. Slaves were brought here, from the south. Many died. Others? – sent off to Zanzibar, Bagamoyo. Arabia. India." "There were African slaves in India? Slaves everywhere."(49) She also reveals that slaves were captured and sold 'at the market here in Kilwa. One day his men captured my grandmother who was Matumbi. Makungunya sold her to an Indian.'(50) Kamal's nickname was 'golo' when he was in school in Dar. 'Golo' means a slave or servant. Kamal mentions that the Africans being stupid "were chained and taken as slaves, Africans are the most stupid and uneducated in the world. And I am a mshenzi, the most uncivilized of Africans. My grandmother was a mtumwa, a slave."(228) Shamim is outraged: "how can you allow yourself to be called a slave. Where is your pride?" (195)

The end of chapter seven reveals Kamal's grandmother's slavery and Kilwa being the centre of East African slave trade. Kamal's Mama confesses to him that she was a Matumbi – "the bravest of people, who live on those hills in the distance." Makungunya, also known as Hassan bin Omari, one of the Yao people "captured slaves and sold them at the market, here in Kilwa. One day his men captured my grandmother, who was a Matumbi. Makungunya sold her to an Indian."(50) "One gang of lads and women, chained together with iron neck-rings, was in a horrible state, their lower extremities coated with dry mud and their own excrement and torn with thorns, their bodies mere frameworks and their skeleton limbs slightly stretched over with wrinkled parchment like skin." "In Kilwa, the roads upon which the crooked black lines of slaves passed were called the "places of the skulls" by the locals. Some slaves were 'owned by Indians, who used them as concubines, their womenfolk not having joined them, and as servants, and they sold them to pay debts.'(28)

Assimilation

According to Milton Gordon assimilation can be described in three terms such as assimilation, acculturation and incorporation. "All three describe the process when persons with various cultural backgrounds come into contact and during this contact form a context for a common cultural life."(Gordon, 1964) To assimilate means "to turn something into an entity having the same pattern as the agent's own nature, ... to incorporate into a system to integrate losing the former ethnic and



cultural identity and thus fully integrating into the hoist society” (Oxford English Dictionary). To assimilate is to be ‘sandwiched between two cultures.’ Assimilation is to assimilate with the colonial culture by the colonised people. This is an articulation of the oppressed people for self identity or self-definition. It is a postcolonial claim to refuse to ‘acknowledge the superiority of the western cultures.’(1990) The postcolonial discourse emphasises on reconstruction and resistance. In the attempt of self-definition one assimilates identity with the superior race and culture and to adjust with the new and different environment. Homi. K Bhabha (1994) observes that “the displaced people move from home culture to alien culture leading to an assimilated culture.” (407) After the marriage of Kamal and Shamim, ‘they had become Canadians, and as he liked to say, Canada had become them. They carried no bitterness for past insults, because they had been so successful.’(270) Zera Auntie encouraged Kamal to go on and settle down with Shamim and be happy. She said: ‘how nice! – you will be in Vilayat, among the whites! You will become a white! All the snow!’ (264)

Conclusion

Racial difference is a crucial issue representing the change in the socio cultural scenario in the lives of the East African Asians and the indigenous Africans. Due to his lived experience of recurrent power politics, difference in races and ambivalent identity, Vasaanji earns success in his attempt to portray the racial boundaries and conflicts in the society of the people. The Europeans attempted to control the native Africans by seizing them and reducing them to slavery. This resulted in the Maji Maji war (1905-1907), one of the resistance movements against the German rule. The uprising of the Matumbi tribesmen paved ways for the uprising of the other nationalist movements. Though numerous Africans died in the wars but the imperial regime instituted some reforms for the wellbeing of the Africans. Such stirring of nationalism is a unifying experience where different people come under one umbrella to establish a nation free from foreign domination and discrimination.

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Consciously of a Multiple Outsider: Exploring the Indian Diasporic Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* with Reference to Two Short Stories

Manisha Bhattacharya

-REVIEWED ONLINE JOURNAL Abstract

This paper will take up two stories (“Mrs. Sen’s” and “Interpreter of Maladies”) from Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), where we get a sensitive and feeling point of view; the failures, disappointments, conflicts, crises, confrontations, anxiety, displacement that this interface of cultures, Bengali and American, could have upheld. What Lahiri’s often understated yet subtle narrative technique does, is to point out and firmly establish the reality of this Diaspora, of this specific kind of Bengali postcolonial experience. Often the experience is filtered through women, and the stories thus become a poignant testament to the many kinds of alienation that migration of cultures denoted. The paper will address the female diasporic anxiety through the delineation of female protagonists, Mrs. Sen and Mrs. Das who are both of Indian- American descent and struggle with a kind of “in-betweenness” throughout their lives. And the paper will also use Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of Hybridity to justify the diasporic sensibility of the above characters.

According to Amitava Ghosh, “the Indian Diaspora is one of the most important demographic dislocations of modern times and each day is growing and assuming the form of representative, significant force in global culture” (Ghosh 243). Diaspora is a form of hybridity which is subversive, it resists the cultural authoritarianism. Ahmad AZIZ (*In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*) said: “one of the most important aspects of Diaspora writing is that it forces, interrogates and challenges authoritative voice of history. The writers of Diaspora have a global paradigm shift, since the challenges of Postmodernism address the narratives of power relations that silence the voices of dispossessed” (Aziz 54). Diaspora shows us how these marginalized voices have gained ascendancy. To quote Bhabha: “That it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history, subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement- that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking” (Bhabha 100). V.S Naipaul depicts the search of roots in his *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961): “Mohan Biswas’s peregrination over the next 35 years, he was



to be wanderer with no place to call his own” (Naipaul 160). They are national, not nationalistic; inclusive, not parochial; representing the both the local and global (thus making it ‘glocal’); celebrating the plurality of India as vital ‘worldliness’.

Jhumpa Lahiri, another diasporic writer clearly speaks from a position of “in-betweenness”. She describes the failure of belongingness: “No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile whichever country I travel to, that’s why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile” (Lahiri 29). In “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition”, Homi Bhabha states, “It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonizing Other, but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness- the White man’s artifice inscribed on the Black man’s body. It is in relation to this impossible object that emerges the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes”(Bhabha 106). If from the above quote we focus on certain key phrases like "the disturbing distance in between" and the "problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes" that we will enter into certain key areas of experience in Jhumpa Lahiri’s short fiction. Instead of "colonial identity and its vicissitudes" we would have to read diasporic identity and its vicissitudes, since Jhumpa Lahiri writing in English belongs to a diasporic Indian/Bengali community that had to recast itself according to the cultural parameters of the new imperialism of America in the post Second World War world. Her characters are caught between their roots and the “New World”.

If colonization started this great interface of nations, the process of the intermingling of races has continued with migrations and Diasporas of various sorts. One kind of diaspora from India took place in the late nineteenth century, that of indentured labourers who went to work its sugarcane and cotton plantations of the West Indies and in parts of South Africa. For instance, Naipaul’s grandparents traveled to the West Indies in the late 19th century to escape what Pankaj Mishra in his introduction to *VS Naipaul: The Writer and the World*, calls "the dereliction of late - nineteenth-century North India." Another kind of Diaspora was the mass migration of professionals and middle class Indians to America during the 70's in the wake of the Vietnam War which had created a need for professional labourers in America. In Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies (1999)*, we get from a sensitive and feeling point of view, the many minor tragedies, failures, disappointments, clashes, crises, confrontations that this interface of cultures, Bengali and American, could have caused. What Lahiri's often understated yet subtle narrative technique does, is to point out and firmly establish the reality of this Diaspora, of this



specific kind of Bengali postcolonial experience. Often the experience is filtered through women, and the stories thus become a poignant testament to the many kinds of alienation that migration of cultures denoted. In *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), it is often the next generation that Lahiri looks at, pointing out in certain heart rendering cases, the difficulty and tragic fallout of being the children of first generation immigrants and sometimes going too far to adapt to the mores of a new culture.

In The *Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa Lahiri's work traces alienation of various kinds. In the story "Mrs. Sen's", one of the most relevant in the collection, we are brought face to face with a Bengali woman, recently married and immigrated to America, not sharing a very intimate relationship with her husband, who fails to learn the ropes of crucial adjustment to the new environment. Although, the importance of the Lahiri's stories hinges on portraying a very specific kind of Bengali experience abroad, they sometimes contain Chekhov like, a more universal sorrow and sadness over the irreconcilable nature of human reality, especially relationships. The distance in Mr. and Mrs. Sen's relationship becomes apparent from the narrator's comment: " 'Mr. Sen teaches mathematics at the university,' Mrs. Sen had said by way of introduction, as if they were only distantly acquainted." (Lahiri 112)

In order to institute some values to her otherwise housewifely existence in an American neighborhood, where her only real occupation is cooking for two people, Mrs. Sen advertises to be a babysitter: "Professor's wife, responsible and kind, I will care for your child in my home." (Lahiri 111) The story partly focalized through the child character Eliot, who becomes Mrs. Sen's babysitting responsibility, while reinforcing the oddness and the newness of this babysitter from a different culture, also adds to the story's poignancy as we sense the child's inarticulate sympathy for this woman who was traumatized by certain aspects of her job, like a needed proficiency in driving, an activity for which she felt a singular disinclination and fear. This fear is culturally conditioned, because in India, at the time that Mrs. Sen immigrated which was in the 70's, few women unless belonging to radically progressive families, drove. The story demonstrates Mrs. Sen's acute fear of driving, a fear that causes a minor tragedy in her life and limits whatever expansion or integration into the host community that she had sought, through babysitting.

At the interview between Eliot's mother and Mrs. Sen, driving becomes an issue of some importance. As the impersonal narrator narrates the interview between Mrs. Sen and Eliot's



mother, the importance of driving in American society comes through: "Most of all she (Eliot's mother) was concerned that Mrs. Sen did not know how to drive. Eliot's mother worked in an office fifty miles north, and his father, the last she had heard, lived two thousand miles west."(Lahiri 113)

It is at this point that the husband of Mrs. Sen, silent so long during this interview, intervenes, "I have been giving her lessons, actually," Mr. Sen said setting his mug on the coffee table. It was the first time had spoken" (Lahiri 113). From indications that the text has set up from the very beginning, and the infrequency of the interactions between Mr. and Mrs. Sen, the reader surmises that theirs is not exactly a warm relationship. The alienation of Mrs. Sen in a new country and overwhelmingly different cultural context, and even within her own family situation is not hard to assess. In response to Mr. Sen's pronouncement, Mrs. Sen talks about home and its different ways: "Yes. I am learning...But I am a slow student. At home, you know, we have a driver"(Lahiri 113).

When Eliot's mother responds to this statement with, "and that's all...in India?" the narrator implies Mrs. Sen's emotional reaction to this word of home or India:

The mention of the word seemed to release something in her...She, too, looked around there room, as if she noticed in the lampshades, in the teapot, in the shadow frozen on the carpet, something the rest of them could not. "Everything is there."(Lahiri 113)

Eliot liked coming to Mrs. Sen, because in winter her apartment was much warmer than the one he lived in with his mother. He also loved watching Mrs. Sen chop vegetables everyday with a giant blade that he had never seen anybody use in America:

He especially enjoyed watching Mrs. S. as she cupped things, seated on newspapers ...Instead of a knife she used a blade that curved like the prow of a Viking ship, sailing to battle in distant seas. Each afternoon Mrs. Sen lifted the blade and locked it into place, so that it met the base at an angle. Facing the sharp edge without ever touching it, she took whole vegetables between hands and hacked them apart: cauliflower, cabbage, and butternut squash. She split things in half, and then quarters, speedily producing florets, cubes, slices and shreds, she could peel a potato in seconds. At times she sat cross-legged; at times with legs



splayed...she refused to let Eliot walk around when she was chopping (Lahiri 114-115).

Thus she tells Eliot the stories of her life lived in Calcutta, helping to shape her identity. Mrs. Sen reflects Lahiri's familial experiences as she recalls that for her mother, "cooking was her jurisdiction. It was also her secret". It focuses on Home that is equally communal, yet highly personal. The importance of the other's gaze becomes an important aesthetic in this story as it is so in her other stories in this same collection. Through the gaze of the innocent child, we see how Eliot constructed an image of Mrs. Sen which in spite of his sympathy for her, was predicated on his sense of her strangeness.

As she plied her ritual everyday, a little bit of conversation would reinforce the fact of her loneliness. She told Eliot one day, "Here in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence." (Lahiri 115) Another day she asks Eliot, "Eliot, if I began to scream right now at the top of my lungs, would someone come?" (Lahiri 116) And again, "Mr. Sen says that once I receive my license, everything will improve. What do you think, Eliot? Will things improve?" (Lahiri 119)

A poignant relationship between the baby sitter and the child develops as the adult, lost and estranged in a new culture and in an uncongenial relationship, looks to the child for succour and comfort. It is a measure of Lahiri's clear sighted art that the story shows Eliot to listen, but hardly offer any comfort, as the adult reveals herself in all her vulnerability and yearning for security. However, Eliot does respond to Mrs. Sen's frenzied efforts to learn driving, by answering all the questions she asked him at the tune:

"Impossible, Eliot, How can I go there?"

"You need to wait until no one's coming"

"Why will not anybody slow down?"

"No one's coming now" (Lahiri 120).

However, when he sat with Mrs. Sen, under an autumn sun that glittered without warmth through the trees, he saw how the same pile of cars made her knuckles faint and dim, her wrists shiver and her English falter:

"Everyone, this people, too much in their world" (Lahiri 121).



Eliot noticed that there were two things that made Mrs. Sen happy. One was as the arrival of a letter from home and the other was the obtaining of Irish whole fish from the seaside. On the first occasion that the man from the seaside shop telephoned her about fresh fish, Mr. Sen has to grudgingly take them. In the meantime, Mrs. Sen's driving lessons or attempts at driving don't go well: "In November came a series of days when Mrs. Sen refused to practice driving." (Lahiri 127) That it was an area of acute marital discord becomes obvious to the reader when we learn that sometimes for days Mrs. Sen did not cook or did not order fish from the seaside. However, things become smooth between husband and wife and Mr. Sen once again, takes them to the seaside. Mrs. Sen appears happy too and dresses up in a red sari for the occasion. On the way back, Mr. Sen insists that she drives and she is extremely reluctant to do so. Eventually, giving in to her husband's cold insistence, she does and says, "I hate it. I hate driving. I won't go on"(Lahiri 131).

The story soon moves towards its tragic and poignant end. One day when the fish-seller from the beach calls her to say that he has fresh fish for her, she takes Eliot and goes out in the car and has an accident. The damage is minor-Mrs. Sen made a small cut on her lip; Eliot raised an objection briefly about a pain in his ribs. Mr. Sen apologized to Eliot's mother, wrote out a check reimbursing her for the previous month's payment and Eliot who had heard Mrs. Sen crying in the bathroom, does not get to see Mrs. Sen anymore. On their way back home, Eliot's mother confessed that she was relieved. The story ends on the following note:

It was the last afternoon Eliot spent with Mrs. Sen, or with any baby-sitter. From then on his mother gave him a key, which he wore on a string around his neck He was to call the neighbors in case of an emergency and to let himself into the beach house afterschool (Lahiri 135).

No longer was Eliot picked up from his bus stop, no longer was he peanut hinter on crackers, no longer was his opinion solicited on driving; his mother called him from work and said:

You're a big boy now, Eliot." she told him. "You okay?" Eliot looked out the kitchen window at gray waves receding from the shore and said that he was fine (Lahiri 135).



Laura Anh Williams noted, “Lahiri’s stories brought into focus the quite obliterated female diasporic subjects” (Williams). Let us take for example the eponymous story that gives its name to the volume, “Interpreter of Maladies”. Mr. Kapasi is a tour guide and he has taken the Das family out on sightseeing in India, on it tour of the Konarak Temple in Orissa. The Das’s are a young Indian-American couple like Lahiri herself and have children named Bobby, Ronny and Tina. Mr. Das teaches in a middle school in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The story depicts a conflict between cultures.

All through the trip, Mrs. Das seems bored and imitated. She feels a kind of diasporic anxiety coming back to the place where she was born; coming back to her roots. She asks how long the trip is, whether the car is air conditioned or not, and recriminates her husband for it not being so: “I told you to get a car with air – conditioning”. Mrs. Das continued. “Why do you do this, Raj, just to save a few stupid rupees? What are you saving us, fifty cents?” (Lahiri 49) On the way to the temple, Mr. Kapasi explains his work that he does for living. Apart from being a tour guide he works as an interpreter in a doctor's office, interpreting for the doctor who does not know Gujarati, what the patients are saying in that particular language. Hence we see the possibilities of an ironic implication of the title “Interpreter of Maladies.”

Mrs. Das seems very intrigued by Mr. Kapasi's other occupation and calls it “romantic”(Lahiri 50) and also asks him to describe a typical encounter with a patient. Mr. Kapasi narrates how a patient had recently complained of feeling as though he had straws stuck in his throat, and how after Mr. Kapasi explained it to the doctor, the man's ailment had been fixed with medicine. Mrs. Das seems enthralled by the account and says that Mr. Kapasi has a “big responsibility” because he could easily say something wrong and neither party would know about it:

Well, for example, you could tell the doctor that the pain felt like a burning, not straw. The patient would never know what you had told the doctor, and the doctor wouldn't know that you had told the wrong thing. It's a big responsibility (Lahiri 51).

The story moving in a typical Maupassant manner with hints and shades and nuances of character and feeling, comes to a crisis as Mrs. Das suddenly reveals her past to him, hoping that he would



be able to “interpret” her malady for her. At a moment when her husband and children have got off to see the monastic dwellings at Udaygiri and Khandagiri, Mrs. Das told Mr. Kapasi that Bobby was not her husband's son.

All this while, Mr. Kapasi had been feeling flattered over Mrs. Das's attention towards him and put it down to own attractiveness. Her revelation startles him profoundly and she asks him to say something as an “interpreter of maladies”:

Don't you see? For eight years I haven't been able to express this to anybody, not to friends, certainly not to Raj. He doesn't even suspect it. He thinks I'm still in love with him. Well, don't you have anything to say? (Lahiri 64)

This is the moment of crisis or “moment of truth” as Mrs. Das or Memo goes on:

...my secret, and about how terrible it makes me feel I feel terrible looking at my children and at Raj, always terrible. I have terrible urges, Mr. Kapasi, to throw things away. One day I had the urge to throw everything I own out the widow, the television, the children, everything. Don't you think it's unhealthy? (Lahiri 65)

She begs him to suggest some "remedy." (Lahiri 65) Mr. Kapasi is inadequate to the moment. He asks Mrs. Das an obvious question to which he gets no answer: "Is it really pain you feel, Mrs. Das, or is it guilt?" (Lahiri 66)

The moment of crisis passes without a resolution. Mrs. Das goes back to the family and Mr. Kapasi gives up any hope of continued contact with the family that had seemed possible through Mrs. Das's sudden attention towards him; though Mr. Kapasi imagines a future correspondence with Mrs. Das, visualizing them building a relationship to translate the transcontinental gap between them. At this juncture, we can understand how the ancestral country of their heritage is proved disappointing to Mrs. Sen who is more anglicized than Indian.

The story aids on the note of ‘vertiginous possibilities’ that the open-ended short story is supposed to offer, and which makes it a modernist genre. In spite of the symmetry of design and unity of impression that the story contains, there is no Aristotelian closure or resolution. Although, Lahiri’s story does not fit the Chekovian prescription of his stories being just "middle" (22), her stories have a degree of progression that allows us to think, that even if there is no "end", there is a "beginning" and “middle”. In his book *The Modernist Short Story* Dominic Head



posits that form and context are fitted together in the modernist short story and the use of ellipsis, ambiguity and resonance which are often characteristics of a short story, but with an ultimately unifying effect, works differently for a modernist story. Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories, which while lacking the kind of formal experimentation or symbolic manner that one associates either with Joyce or Mansfield, and often told in a straightforward, realistic manner more reminiscent of Maupassant than anyone else, do put us through a "reality warp." There is objectivity, observation, sympathy, but no sentimentality. Whether these stories are "Unaccustomed Earth," "Only Goodness" or "Nobody's Business" of *Unaccustomed Earth* or "A Real Durwan" "Sexy", "The treatment of Bibi Halдар," "A Temporary Matter," or "This Blessed House" of *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri lays testament to compassion and a wide canvass of human types, which is moving and impressive.

As Ronny Noor asserts, "The value of these stories- although some of them are loosely constructed- lies into fact that they transcend confined borders of immigrant experience to embrace larger age-old issues that are in the world of Ralph Waldo Emerson " cast into the mould of these new times redefining America." (Noor 45) And Ketu H. Katrak commented: "The *Interpreter of Maladies* reflects the trauma of self transformation through immigration, which can result in a series of broken identities, that from multiple anchorages." (Katrak 111) Diasporic novelist of subcontinent origin like Jhumpa Lahiri often articulates through her works a transnational paradigm of identity formation marked by flows of cultural mobility. In the process, the essentialised structures of race, religion or language through which we often seek to construct static, singular moulds of identity are recurrently subverted to yield place to a fluid hybridity that fashions itself through the networking of rhizomic nodes of history, heritage and habitat. The short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian –American– writer, follow a similar trajectory as she locates herself in a 'double city' that combines her present with her inherited past as she recognizes how inside her "is the essence/ of another continent." Lahiri talks about trauma that we witness in diasporic writings, trauma which is deeply tied to our own historical realities which are hardly space oriented. Her perspective is echoed beautifully by Bhikhu Parekh: "The Diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree, like the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life. He spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes and that is the only way he is increasingly comes to feel at home in the world" (Parekh 605).



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Fictional Revisit of the Early Nineteenth Century Bengal: A Critical Reading of *Keri Saheber Munshi* by Pramathanath Bishi

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Abstract

The early nineteenth century has steadfastly been an area of intense critical analysis for scholars. This period saw tremendous socio-economic and cultural tumult that shaped Bengali culture and identity and gave way to what is called Bengal Renaissance. Recent scholarship has opened up new perspectives of understanding the period. This paper seeks to critically analyze how Pramathanath Bishi's Bengali novel Keri Saheber Munshi (1958) fictionally represents and revisits the early nineteenth century and how this fictional representation becomes a tool for him to interrogate the received 'grand narrative' of the Bengal Renaissance. Through heteroglossic mode, the novel dialogizes the narrative and opens up new possibilities and paradigms of understanding the period. Templates like Woman Question, hybridization of different fluid identities, metalingual and metafictional elements etc. become the novelist's strategic tools to dialogize, pluralize and throw open possibilities to reformulate our understanding. In doing so, the novel also becomes a critical commentary on the gradual development of the Bengali language and prose tradition of which the novelist himself is a product. Thus, the novel, the paper argues, is also a part of the modern Bengali novelist's attempt at understanding his, tradition, cultural heritage, self and identity.

Keywords: Early nineteenth century, Fiction, Grand narrative, Culture, Hybridization

The historical and cultural phenomenon called the Bengal Renaissance has been an area that has attracted abiding critical interest. The phenomenon, with its multifaceted aspects, has been subjected to sustained critical enquiry in the post-independence era. Starting with Susobhan Sarkar's influential work *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* (1979), much critical work has come out since and continues to pour out, throwing ever new lights at the myriad realities and aspects that the phenomenon encompasses. Much work has been done to understand the intriguing phenomenon, its origins, nature, myriad features, ideological underpinnings, projects, inherent contradictions, pitfalls, limitations and so on. Yet, it is an area, that even after much work, refuses to exhaust itself to a critically alert reader.



Not only critical works, but a good number of fictional works have also engaged themselves in representing the phenomenon. The fictional works on the one hand have sought to fictionalize the known history; on the other hand, they have questioned the dominant version, the ‘grand narrative’ of the Bengal Renaissance. It is this fictional representation of the Bengal Renaissance that the present study takes as its point of departure.

Pramathanath Bishi (1901-1985), a stalwart of Bangla literature of the twentieth century, in his series of historical novels – *Keri Saheber Munshi* (1958), *Bangabhanga* (1976) and *Poneroi August* (1977), attempts to represent the social, political and cultural fermentation and development of Bengal chronologically from the late eighteenth century to the period of independence with a magnitude hitherto unattempted in fiction. *Keri Saheber Munshi* deals with the period 1793-1813, *Bangabhanga* takes the Swadeshi period as its setting while *Poneroi August* takes 1916-1947 as its temporal frame, as proclaimed by the author himself. The tremendous socio-cultural flux, its transitory nature have been represented by Bishi with a keen sensibility. It is this representation of the Bengal Renaissance with all its faces and facades in *Keri Saheber Munshi* (1958) that this study seeks to explore.

The impact of British rule, rise of bourgeois economy and the western Enlightenment modernity translated into an imposed colonial modernity in the Indian scene produced a flux in Bengal that brought shifts in all spheres of life, society and culture. The entire traditional socio-economic and cultural universe was radically destabilized. The newly arrived science and technology along with a new value-system marked a paradigm shift in the very mental make-up of the Indians. Yet, this transition was far from smooth. The changing times were marked by conflict, reaction, tensions and paradoxes. The paradoxical co-habitation of conflicting realities is perhaps the most crucial marker of the Bengal Renaissance. As Susobhan Sarkar argues: “The guide-line for a proper assessment of ... the cultural life of 19th century Bengal must ... steer between uncritical adulation and scornful rejection.” Pramathanath Bishi’s representation is unique in the sense that his retrospective fictional representation of the Bengal Renaissance is not glorifying or adulatory in attitude, rather his approach is one of critical re-visit.

In the Author’s Preface to *Keri Saheber Munshi*, Bishi opines that a historical novel has two major components, among others. One is historical truth and the other is historical possibilities. The historical truth is generally taken to be fixed, whereas it is through incorporating historical possibilities that the author intervenes into the narrative of historical truth. The two components,



get manifested into two kinds of characters for Bishi – historical characters and characters with historical possibility i.e. characters who could have existed or should have existed in the socio-historical milieu depicted by the novelist. However, the fictional intervention operates at both the levels for Bishi. He posits the narrative of *Keri Saheber Munshi* at the end of the eighteenth century (1793-1813) and presents the life of Ramram Basu in close relation to the times. Thus, in his narrative of the Renaissance, Bishi makes a major intervention by placing Ramram Basu before Raja Rammohan Roy in terms of being the precursor of the awakening. In fact he writes, “It is Ramam Basu, not Rammohan who can be viewed as the first Modern Man of India.” Because he starts the narrative chronologically earlier than is generally done, the entire perspective changes and it posits the reader at a vantage point. We do not see the British and the Indians posited in polar opposition to each other, socially and culturally; rather we see that the fluid socio-economic reality created a space for complex interaction and intersection between the British, the other European forces and the native in all spheres. Thus, in that early phase of colonial encounter, we see exploitation of the British officers by the Calcutta Babus. The novel shows that the Indian English society was divided into different strata as was Bengali society which made the then Bengal a space of complex social and cultural dialogue. The novel charts the simultaneous promiscuity and dissolute life of both English Sahebs and Bengalee Babus, seeing them not as distanced from each other, but developing their evolving hybrid identities, in Bhabha’s sense, in close contact.

Marxist historians (such as Sumit Sarkar) along with subaltern historians have often called the Bengali Renaissance into question. They critique the Renaissance for being elitist and not encompassing the populace. Indeed, the Bengal Renaissance, if any, was confined to the Babus, the educated intelligentsia and not related to the welfare of the mass. Pramathanath Bishi’s attempt at interrogation leads him to explore and depict the ‘other side’. This includes the debauchery of the babus and the ugly face of the city of Calcutta as well. Bishi terms the City of Joy to be the ‘city of devils’. He is out to capture the ‘totality of history’ to borrow Lukacs’ term. Bishi dialogizes the narrative of the Renaissance through his invented characters, used to articulate different points of consciousness, accommodating different discourses, , different ideological positions. Bishi’s interrogation includes the origin and development of Bengali prose and that of the form of “novel”. The novel as a form draws around itself a variety of discourses. Bakhtin in his discussion of ‘heteroglossia’ discusses how heteroglossia ‘represents the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past,



between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form'. Bishi fictionally creates the Bengal Renaissance as a dialogic space and also brings to foreground the very politics of historiography.

One aspect of this dialogism and polyphony is the novel's representation of women. While men come in contact with the new education and knowledge system, women remain in the margins, either as housekeeper or as mistress and this applies to both native women and English women. Two women characters in *Keri Saheber Munshi*, Rose and Tushki, may be culturally galaxies apart, but in their existence as women, they are oppressed by the same patriarchal system. Thus, Bishi seems to suggest that the position of women during the period has to be read through the condition of British and native women taken together. Through the women characters, Bishi fictionally represents the different options of womanhood available to a woman. Yet, in *Keri Saheber Munshi*, Bishi presents Reshmi as a woman of agency. Reshmi moves through different options of womanhood available to a woman in that period yet accepts none. From fleeing the burning pyre of her dead husband to setting fire that would devour herself, she remains the master of her own fate, never allowing others to control her course. Thus, representation of women becomes a major tool for Bishi for countering the efficacy and circumference of the Renaissance.

Bishi's preoccupation with the origin and gradual development of Bengali prose and the print culture provides him with a template of alternative historiography. In his historical narrative, Bishi charts the origin and gradual development of Bangla prose through William Carey and Ramram Basu. Bishi shows that the modern Bangla prose has evolved through selecting and rejecting from a pool of dialects and linguistic registers of Bangla and through interesting intersections between different versions of Bengali and English existing during that fluid period. Thus, in *Keri Saheber Munshi*, Keri takes lessons of Bangla language from divergent sources. On the one hand he studies Sanskrit literature; on the other hand, takes lessons of the colloquial spoken Bangla full of abuses and banal innuendoes from Nyara, a beggar child with non-descript background, a boy with basically no identity. Bishi dexterously shows this complex yet interesting play of different linguistic registers of Bangla at work at the same time. Learning from mischievous Nyara that *Minsey* and *Maagi* are colloquial synonyms of Sanskritized *Manushya* and *Mahila*, he naively expresses his wish to Ramram Basu that he will preach the True Religion among the populace of Bengal addressing them as "*Hey minsey ebong maagi gon, ami tomader modhye satya dharma prochaar koribo*", completely unaware of the derogatory connotation that these colloquial words



have in Bangla culture. This, among other things, foregrounds the subversive potential of language.

This play of languages takes a decisive role in the lives of English John Smith and native Bengali girl Reshmi who, through complex turn of events and situations, turn lovers and in turn, in the lives of all the characters. In response to John's letter asking her to return to him, Reshmi writes that she has taken shelter of *Madanmohan*, meaning that she has devoted herself to Lord Krishna. However, English John thinks at this that she has found a new husband for herself and writes a deeply abusive letter which ultimately has tragic consequences.

Thus, through his novels Pramathnath Bishi seeks to provide an alternative historiography of the Bengal Renaissance. He dialogizes the known narrative in heteroglossic mode through accommodating different voices, classes, different ideologies, positions and linguistic registers and their complex intersections. The binary division of the British and the native is deconstructed to show that at one level both these communities were individually divided into multiple strata and then the culture of Calcutta was shaped by the British and the native together. The novels record interesting intersections both at inter and intra level among the Bengalees and the British.

Bishi's narrative itself plays out the interplay of different social and historical voices, 'speech genres' and linguistic registers in his use of language. It becomes a reflection on the form and structure of Bangla prose and its development. There is a strong metafictional and metalingual element at play in Bishi's narrative. The novel itself refers to and accommodates different generic forms into their complex texture. There are continuous references to the epics – the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Iliad, the Vaishnava tradition, English prose and so on. The metafictional mode also operates through intervening chapters where, as in *Tom Jones*, the narrator stops the narrative and pauses to deliberate in writing what can be done with the future course of events or to remind the reader that he is reading a novel, a literary construct. Even the generic categorization of the novel is difficult; it can simultaneously be called a biography, a social novel or a historical romance. His novel thus becomes a site of play and intersection of literary traditions and languages, self-reflexively glossing on the generic hybridity of the form of novel itself.

Thus, Bishi shows that the modern Bangla language, literature, culture and identity evolved out of a complex maze of class struggles, ideological confrontations, evolution and clash of values,



linguistic and cultural intersections and so on which we often forget while analyzing the phenomenon from a relatively distanced and objective perspective.

The question arises, why does Pramathanath Bishi engage with the Bengal renaissance? The last of Bishi's three historical novels as mentioned above, *Poneroi August*, has the twentieth century as its setting. The critical lens he uses is necessarily of his own times. Is Bishi suggesting that the ideals of the Renaissance were far from achieved even in the twentieth century? In a post-colonial independent nation, in different forms and dimensions, almost similar questions pop up to pose an educated individual with the enigmatic hunt for self, for identity, for the ideas of nation, art, independence and reality. Is it also a search for Bishi's own self and identity as a Bengalee and as a literary artist? All the developments – scientific, social, artistic and cultural have their roots deeply embedded in the tremendous socio-economic and cultural fermentation that the Bengal Renaissance characterizes. Thus, understanding the Bengal Renaissance is to understand our present, to shape our present. *Keri Saheber Munshi*, then, can be read as Bishi's attempt to understand the present Bengali identity evolved from the tumultuous early nineteenth century.

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Translation

Karl Marx

Saadat Hasan Manto

translated by Sumbul Nasim

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TDB College, Raniganj

Paschim Bardhaman, WB

*That Moses without fire, that Jesus without cross
Not a prophet but carries the book in his arms*

(Iqbal)

Today the whole world is staring at Russia. Even earlier people did so but their stare had a mockery in it. In Europe, those who wore the tilted caps of politics would see the struggle of the labourers and snigger at them. When the Russian slaves started to melt the iron of their shackles to feed the foundation of a new government, the free nations often made fun of them. When these slaves tried to build their own houses, those living in their well-furnished and well-decorated houses laughed at them. The struggle which was once considered madness, the labour which was once considered pointless, and the government which was once considered a false dream of the labourers — ultimately bore fruition. Those who wore the tilted caps of politics, those who donned the long robes of religion, free and enslaved nations, those who dwelled in shacks as well as in marbled palaces—everyone witnessed the miracle called the “Soviet Russia.”

Soviet Russia is no longer a dream, a false dream or madness. Now it’s a concrete reality—the reality which clashed with the nefarious ambitions of Hitler in the vast battlefields and smashed the iron-clad fascism. The communism which was earlier considered a plaything of crazy youths, the communism which was treated like a whore by various virtuous nations of Europe, the



communism which was once believed to be irreligious and inhuman is today shining, in the vast fields of Russia, like a ray of hope to the sick humanity. This is the same communism which was envisioned by Karl Marx some one hundred and fifty years ago. Great is this man who came up with a way of introducing equality and brotherhood to the whole world, to all humanity and not just to his own community, creed, race and country.

Just as lotus blooms in mud, similarly Karl Marx was born in a capitalist Jew family on 5 May 1818. While he was still an infant, his father declared that he would grow up to be a devil. Our present generation has already got some idea whether he grew up to be a devil or angel, while the ultimate judgement is in the hands of the posterity. Now we are going to present the life story of this devil or angel in a half-dramatic way in this small feature.

Father: May God have mercy on us. I am sick of your son.

Mother: He is your son too. Why do you always blame me only?

Father: I'm simply fed up of him. I don't understand what to do. I would have been satisfied if he were a dullard. But he is intelligent—quite intelligent, and can learn everything if he wishes to.

Mother: Only if he pays attention to anything!

Father: That is the problem! He was like this in school also, and now in college he has become more of a loafer. He is just not serious about his studies. He is spending these significant years of his life with utmost carelessness. For thousand times, I have talked to him but it's of no use. I had chosen law for him to study but he doesn't pay any heed to it. I can't tolerate his nonchalance anymore. This is the limit of my patience.

Mother: What has he written in this letter?

Father: (*With mockery*) Due to mental and spiritual anxieties, he had been ill and spent some days in hospital. But it seems his spiritual anxiety did not subside even after coming back from hospital and so he writes, "Father, a great revolution is taking place in my mind. I will tell you in detail when I meet you. Hence, I seek your permission to lighten the burden of my soul....." This is what he has written.



(Laughs) He is seeking permission to come over here to lighten the burden of his soul.

Mother: What can be this burden of the soul?

Father: Must have fallen in love again, or perhaps the old love revived in the hospital.

Mother: God, what has happened to him? Why is he insistent on marrying Jenny who is four years older than him?

Father: This is what he calls his “spiritual problem”! Since it couldn’t be cured at the hospital, he wants to come here as if I’ll permit him to marry a girl who is double his age.

Mother: But you gave him permission to marry her?

Father: I had to bluff him, so that he won’t waste time writing letters to Jenny. You know it quite well how he spent the first year of his college writing poetry. I myself saw the fifteen hundred couplets in three copies which he wrote for that never-to-be-his Jenny. I had given permission to marry so that he would stop wasting time in writing these love poems but now it seems he wants some new favour.

Mother: Did you write any reply to his letter?

Father: Yes I have. Listen. (*Reads from the letter*) “May God have mercy on you. You don’t do anything with seriousness and keep dabbling in different subjects. Incoherent musings are always fruitless. Even incoherent academic pursuits are nothing but a wastage of time. You never cared about your parents’ happiness because it’s not important to you. I know with Jenny’s love letters and with the letters of a well-meaning and kind father, you actually lit your pipe. But then it is okay because in this way, at least the letters are saved from reaching others because seeing your slovenliness, one can only hope that if not burnt, these letters will surely reach other people. Even the richest of the boys spend only five hundred thaler in college, but you! You spend seven hundred thaler so easily. Perhaps you think I produce gold. Listen, don’t come home. Though I know that you give no importance to the lectures at your college but at least, there you go to the classroom ritualistically.”



As a result of this letter, Karl Marx did not come home during the Easter holidays. His mother was sad but his father was happy. Whether it was his good or bad fortune, his father fell ill after some time and died on 10 May 1838. After his death, he continued his education despite many problems. Eventually, he was awarded the doctorate degree by the University of Jena for writing a thesis on philosophy. Since Marx believed education and practical life were two different sides of the same coin, soon after completing his education, he entered the world of politics by becoming the editor of the newspaper “Zeitung”, and launched such scathing criticism on the government that soon the newspaper was banned.

- Marx: Ruge, my friend, I am not surprised that they ordered to ban our newspaper, nor am I sad.
- Ruge: Why?
- Marx: Their suppression of our newspaper proves that people are becoming politically conscious. When a nation starts awakening, the speeches and writings are always suppressed in this way. Do you know what the censor officer wrote at this ban?
- Ruge: What?
- Marx: He wrote he was happy that Marx resigned because now he could finish his work within the one-fourth of his usual time.
- Ruge: Why did you resign from the editorship?
- Marx: What else should I have done? Listen brother, I can't work in such circumstances where there is slavery at every step. It's suffocating. I'm simply frustrated with the apathy and stupidity of the ruling class, with the flattery and obsequiousness of my contemporaries, and with the futile arguments of everyday. I can't do anything while living in Germany. God's swear, I can't do anything here. It's humiliating to live in this country.
- Ruge: Then what do you intend to do?



Marx: Let's see. Nowadays, my time is getting wasted only in these stupid problems and nonsensical arguments. And then there is my family who is creating unnecessary problems in my marriage. Just how to make them understand? I really love Jenny a lot. It's been seven years since we got engaged. She keeps trying to reconcile our families, but they won't budge.

Ruge: Why is Jenny's family against this marriage?

Marx: They worship Berlin's government while I am its staunch critic. On the other hand, my family is against this marriage for their personal gain. For years, I and Jenny have been arguing with these oldies who finish every argument with, "We are more experienced than you. When you reach our age, then you will understand" which means I will have to marry Jenny after reaching their age.

Ruge: I'm planning to start a newspaper from here. If it's successful, then a lot of your problems will be solved.

Marx's friend Ruge's plan was successful; he started another newspaper and hired Marx as its editor for five hundred thaler per month. Since the financial problem was solved, Marx married Jenny on 19th of July 1843 and went to Paris where his first daughter was born. Here Marx joined a news agency where he met the famous German poet Heine. Though Heine was German, the French considered him their national poet. When Heine published successive eleven poems in protest against the atrocities of Prussia, the Prussian government pressurised France to exile the editors of the newspaper which included Marx also. Marx migrated to Brussels along with his family.

Wife: Now how are we going to live here? Why don't they let us live in peace?

Marx: Don't worry. God has already arranged something. Just now I received my friend Engels' letter.

Wife: (*Happily*) What has he written?



Marx: (*Opens the letter*) He has arranged for some money. Don't know how much but we shall receive it within a few days. He writes, "I am not sure if this money will be enough for you in Brussels but don't worry, as soon as I get the payment for my English work, I will dispatch it to you. I don't need this money here. Actually I don't want your enemies to be happy seeing you in financial crisis."

Wife: May God bless your kind friend. He cares so much about you.

Marx: We are not mere friends. We are one. Our lives are so inter-dependent and inter-related that we have become one soul. We are each other's shadow.

Wife: Perhaps you first met him at the Zeitung office?

Marx: Yes we met there but our friendship started when Engels wrote his first book and I had praised it a lot. Engels has a deep understanding in the field of economics, though he says that Marx has a sharper and deeper insight. It is nothing but his modesty.

Marx and Engels were indeed very close to each other. Despite Engels' modesty, one cannot deny that in their initial years, Engels gave and Marx received. Even Marx has confessed this. No doubt, they were like two bodies with one life. At that time, Brussels was the hub of bourgeois culture which made it a perfect place to propagate communism. Here Marx had hardly started his work when on 24 February 1848, the historical revolution occurred in France. The fall of the French monarch frightened the European monarchs. Hence, the Belgian king ordered to arrest Marx and his wife. Next day, they were released but with the order of deportation. Again Marx headed towards Paris where, with the help of his revolutionary friends, he started a newspaper which instantly catapulted him into fame. Likewise, the persecution of the government followed. The stakeholders of the newspaper backed out one by one. Yet Marx did not shut it down and invested all the seven thousand thaler which he had inherited after his father's death. But within a few days, came the deportation order. On 19 May, Marx took out the last number of his revolutionary paper and closed it down for good.



Marx: Why does the government play this dirty game with us to make our life hell? Why does it manufacture so much of lies? Yes, we are hangmen, then how can we expect mercy from others?

Friend: The paper is now shut down. What next?

Marx: What next? I am going crazy. The lenders are pouncing upon me for their money. Then there's the payment of these clerks and all. All these days, I have been managing by mortgaging my wife's left-out jewellerys. I wrote to one of my friends for aid but he started asking others to donate.

Friend: So what? You need money.

Marx: No brother, I cannot accept this. I am ready to face any crisis but cannot bring myself to beg people to help me. I was really hurt when I got to know that he was taking donations from others. Immediately I wrote to him not to help me. I had asked him to help, and not ask others to help me.

Friend: Are you intending to stay in Paris?

Marx: Not at all. As soon as money is arranged, I will leave for London.

On 23 August, Marx bid adieu to France and arrived in London. Here he had his son who, due to acute penury, died within a year. Marx was inundated with sufferings and problems but kept on his academic work. At nine in the morning, he would go to the library in London and return at seven in the evening, where he was writing his famous book the *Critique of Political Economy*. The circumstances became less restrained when he got the job of a correspondent for an American newspaper but soon after, he fell terribly ill.

Marx: This illness has weakened me so much. I almost died.

Friend: How are you now?



Marx: *(Smiling)* I have reached a stage where I can neither go outside since all my clothes are mortgaged, nor can I eat meat as this illness has taken away even the little luxury I had.

Friend: How is your daughter?

Marx: She has been suffering from cough and fever for some days but I don't have money for her treatment. Perhaps she will not live.

Friend: May God have mercy on her.

Marx: Yes, God must have mercy. Wife is ill, daughter is ill, son has fever, don't have a penny, for weeks we have been surviving on bread and potato. Perhaps soon this will also finish and we shall starve. Don't have money even to buy paper to write essay and send it to a newspaper. Now I am only waiting for the landlord to throw us out since his 22 pounds are due.

Friend: What if he really throws you out?

Marx: That would be the best because at least it would free me from the burden of 22 pounds but the landlord would not do me even such a favour. There is so much loan to pay—for bread, vegetables, meat, milk, etc. Don't know when these troubles will end. Though it is shameful, I even borrowed from the labourers lest we starve to death.

Friend: It's so courageous of you that despite these crises, you have continued your academic work.

Marx: The bourgeois society tries to distract me from my goal. It tempts me to earn gold but I've told them that they can never turn me into a money-churning machine. I shall remain steadfast in my work, no matter what.

Friend: But it's important to earn money also.

Marx: One should earn money to live and write, and not live and write to earn money.

Even amid such poverty, Marx could never be detracted from his path, even for a second. Like a true child of humanity, he kept fighting for the rights of the oppressed while going through many trials and tribulations. Even while his beloved



daughter was dying and he himself was starving, he remained undeterred in his purpose.

Wife: (*Terrified*) Oh our daughter died!

Marx: Oh!

Wife: For the last three days, she had been grappling with death. I can't even cry. What has happened to me? Is she really dead? Please you go and see. Perhaps she is alive.

Marx: Have patience dear. This was God's will. I am making your bed here on the floor. You lie down. You are not well. What was bound to happen has happened. We should always be grateful to God.

Wife: Oh, my angel is so cold and calm. I don't believe this. I don't believe this (*Bursts out crying*).

Marx: For God's sake, have some courage. If you cry like this, then how will I bear it all? Dear, you have bore so many difficulties. Let us face this too bravely.

Wife: I am her mother. How can I turn myself into a stone? My little girl.....

Marx: Now we should worry about her funeral. We don't have money even to buy poison to commit suicide. (*Sighs*) Poor girl, she died. Now what should we do? (*After some moments*) Let me keep her dead body in another room and then I will go to our neighbour, the French exile. He was very good when I met him a few times. I am sure he will help us with her funeral.

Wife: When she was born, she did not have any cradle and today, when she is dead, she does not have a coffin.

Marx went through quite a few such big blows and yet never faltered. During his stay in London when things had started to settle down little bit, his only son died. Marx loved his son a lot and at his death, for the first time, he knew what it felt to be traumatic. In a letter to his friend, he wrote, "Hegel says that the great men who are on a quest to know the truth remain untouched by personal loss and grief. It seems I am not one of those great men because my son's death has completely



shaken me.” But despite being shaken in body and soul, he continued his writings because he wanted to bring forth a new truth. He was fed up of political upheavals and wanted to publish his economical doctrines in a book form. By the time he completed this book, his penury had reached new heights. On 21 January 1859, the manuscript of the *Critique of Political Economy* was ready but.....

- Marx: Thanks to the economical crisis of America, the “Tribune” is asking for only one essay nowadays instead of two.
- Wife: Even the money which we inherited from my mother’s death was all spent within a year.
- Marx: Yes, because we had to pay a lot of loans. But now what to do of this manuscript?
- Wife: I am sure someone will agree to publish it. You don’t worry.
- Marx: I am worrying because there is no money even to send this manuscript somewhere. Should I send it without a ticket?
- Wife: (*Laughs*) Oh I forgot about the ticket!
- Marx: I had arranged for one ticket. With that I sent a letter to Engels asking him to arrange for a ticket so that I can send this manuscript for publication. (*Laughs*) I wonder if there is any writer who wrote a book on wealth while himself being deprived of it. Once the publication is arranged, I am planning to do a job in the English Railway Company.
- Wife: I don’t think you can do this job.
- Marx: Then the other option is I should officially declare myself bankrupt while our two daughters should work as governesses in some rich house and we two should go to some “Work House.”
- Wife: What are you saying?
- Marx: I am saying that “Work House” is for beggars like us and that there is no difference between Marx’s daughters and the governesses who work in a wealthy house.



However, neither they went to the “Work House” nor their daughters had to become governesses as Engels’ father died in 1860 which resulted in he becoming the owner of his father’s firm, and now he could help his friend Marx magnanimously. Meanwhile Marx’s mother also expired, leaving behind some money. On the other hand, Marx’s friend Wilhelm Wolff also bequeathed some fortune to him after his death. In this way, he was free from financial constraints for some time which led him to found “The International” in 1864. It was a herculean task to bring together the labourers of the whole world and Marx had to slog for it. Being totally immersed in this work, he had forgotten about the burden of earning, but then poverty and illness again knocked at his door.

Wife: I completely agree with your friend Engels that all these problems are because of that damned book *Das Capital*.

Marx: But I have already finished that book and I am sure by the end of this year, my financial condition will improve. I feel bad for Engels that he had to suffer so much because of me. For my sake, he had to strive so much for finances. Without his help, I could have never written this book too.

Wife: And again you have asked him for help!

Marx: Believe me, if it would not have been so acute, I would have never asked him. I would have cut my fingers which wrote this letter to him. It is indeed humiliating to always bother others for help but it’s not so with Engels because we have always worked in equal partnership.

Wife: You were saying that we will start living like labourers.....

Marx: I pondered over this and I think you will also agree with me that in our present circumstance, it’s not possible for us to do that. If I had two sons instead of two daughters, I would have never thought twice about adopting the lifestyle of the labourers.

Wife: Your health is also failing day by day.



Marx: I don't think so.

Wife: But I think so. You yourself have told me quite a few times that you feel weakness in your legs. Doctors have also said that your health is falling day by day. Now you should stop working till late night.

Marx: If I stop my nocturnal work, then how will I earn?

Wife: That is the problem! That without working, one can't have a penny.

Marx: Once the book is published, all will be well. I can't even wish to die when the manuscript is lying at home.

Wife: Don't say such ominous things.

Marx: Will I not be heartbroken if the book, for which I sacrificed my health, happiness and family, is published after my death? You know it very well that those who call themselves practical, consider my work futile, but I laugh at their short-sightedness. So my laughter at them will be paid off only when the book gets published.

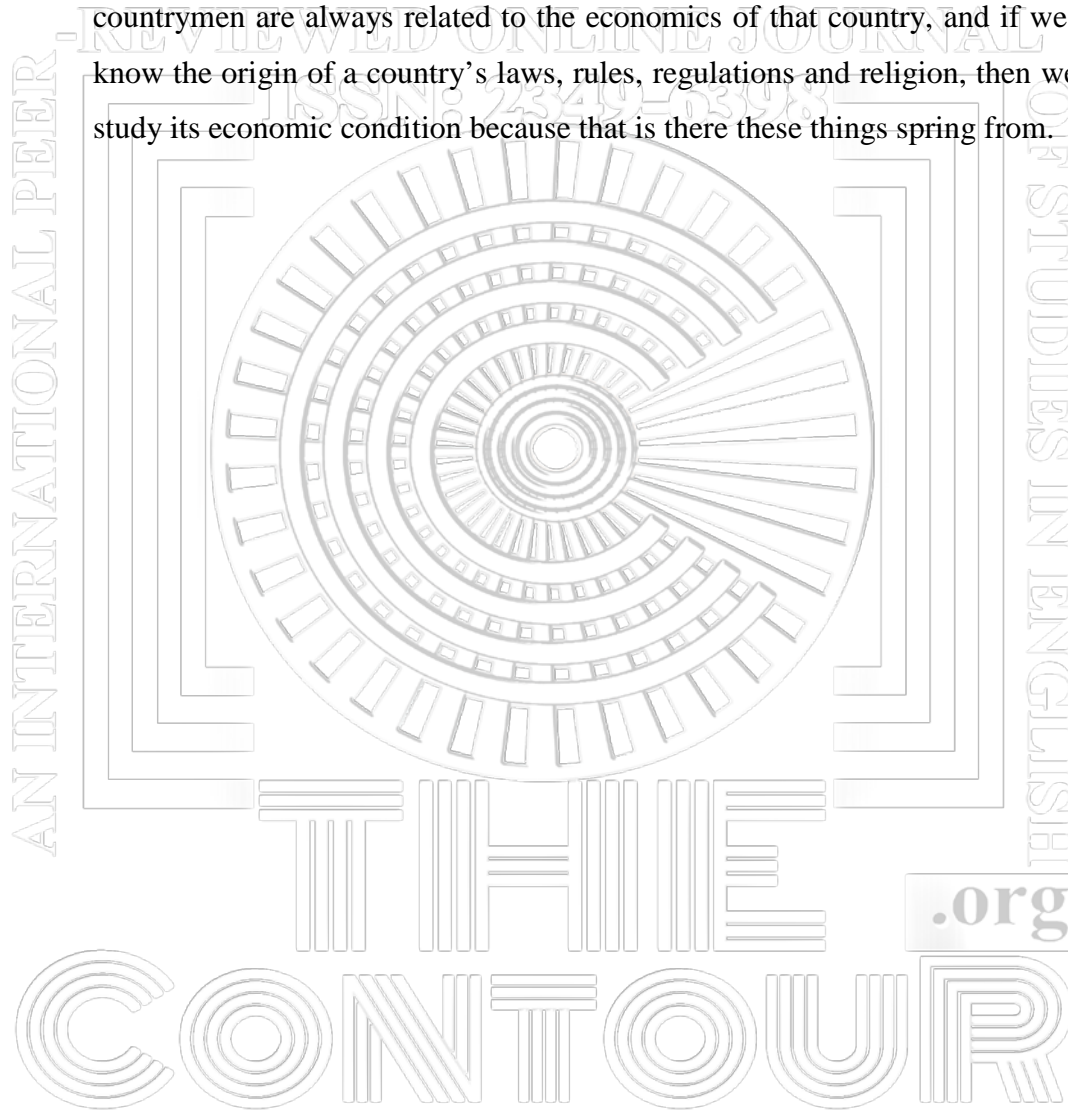
Wife: In fact, those who call themselves 'practical' are the biggest impractical people.

Marx: If I would have died without writing *Das Capital*, then I would have counted myself among those impractical people but for a person like me, it was not possible to be remain silent at the screams of humanity. Only those with a thick skin can be untouched by the sufferings of others.

After recovering from illness, in 1867 Karl Marx himself went to Hamburg with the manuscript of *Das Capital*. On 16 August, its editing was finished and the first volume came out. The editing of the second and third volumes was going on, but the purpose for which Karl Marx was sent into this world was almost fulfilled. Hence, first his wife died on 2 December 1881 while he himself bid adieu to this world on the afternoon of 14 March 1883. On 17 March, he was buried when Engels delivered the following speech at his grave:



Engels: At 02:45 p.m. of 14 March, the greatest mind of the world left us. Marx's death is a great loss to history's point of view and to the proletariat struggle. Just as Darwin had discovered the law of evolution in nature, similarly Marx came up with the law of evolution in society. He taught us how a capitalist and bourgeois society works and that before politics, education, art and religion, a human being needs food and shelter. He taught us that a country's art, literature, law, and the basic beliefs of its countrymen are always related to the economics of that country, and if we wish to know the origin of a country's laws, rules, regulations and religion, then we should study its economic condition because that is there these things spring from.





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Report

Two-day National Seminar on Gandhi in Indian English Literature Philosophy of Gandhi and Marx Together can meet the Challenges of our Time

Prof. H.S.Chandalia



Udaipur. A two-day National seminar was organized by the department of English, M.V.Shramjeevi College, Janardan Rai Nagar Rajasthan Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be) University, Udaipur on 22-23 Jan 2019 to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary year of Mahatma Gandhi. In this two day seminar forty five scholars presented their research papers from different parts of the country. The discussions led to the conclusion that both Karl Marx and Mahatma Gandhi had influenced twentieth century. Although western capitalist model today dominates the world but it has given rise to several challenges and problems in the world. The philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Karl Marx together can provide the means to address these problems.



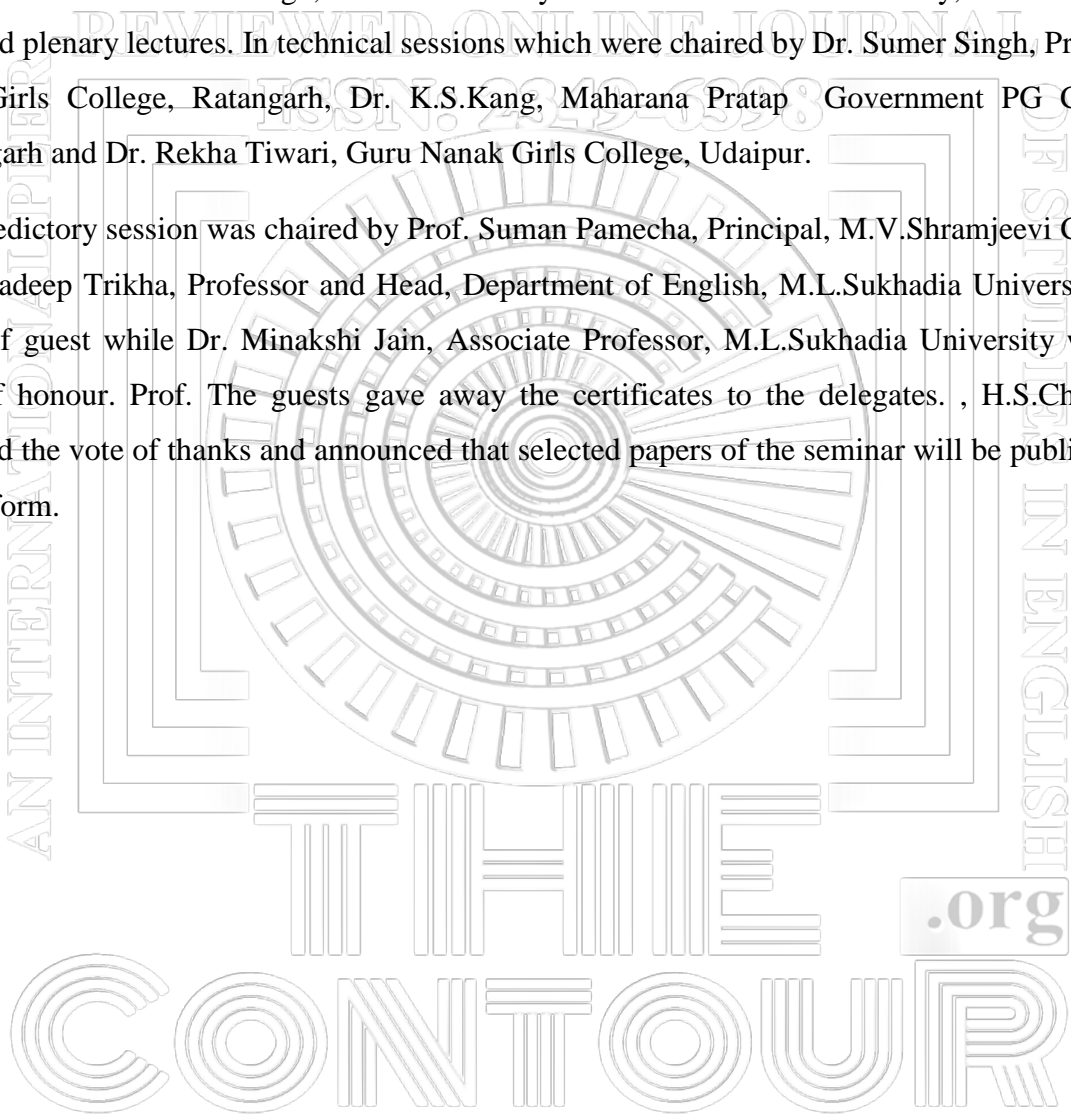
The two -day National Seminar began with the inaugural session in which the Chief Guest Prof. Suman Bala , Professor of English retired from Delhi University made the inaugural address. In her speech she mentioned the influence of Mahatma Gandhi on Indian literature. She referred to the novels *Untouchable* by Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao, *Waiting for Mahatma* by R.K.Narayan, the *Gandhi Quarteret* by Chaman Nahal, *Mrityunjay* by Shivaji Sawant and several other texts from Indian languages to trace the influence of Gandhi on Indian Literature. Prof. Rajul Bhargava, key speaker of the seminar spoke about the place of Kasturba in the life of Gandhi and her depiction by authors on Gandhi. She said that Gandhiji practiced all his novel ideas and principles on Kasturba who accepted his command and followed them all in letter and spirit. But she did not get the desired attention by the biographers of Gandhi. She said that Gandhiji's experiments with truth would have not become a reality had Kasturba not stood by him throughout her life. Special guest Mr. Kishore Saint, noted Gandhian scholar and activist said that Gandhi and Marx can converge at the issues of ecological balance, curbing consumerism and containing violence in the world. He said individually one cannot meet the challenges of our times but if a fine combination of the two philosophies can be struck it may help mankind. He said that consumerism has already damaged the world too much. Opposed to that, Gandhian philosophy advocates limiting one's needs and Marxist philosophy advocates equitable distribution of resources and opportunity among all. This can only sustain the world. Guest of Honour Prof. Sudha Chaudhary, Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy, M.L.Sukhadia University said that no philosophy can be complete in itself. One needs to examine each philosophy in the context of time and then see if that suits the occasion. Presiding over the inaugural session Prof. Suman Pamecha, Principal, M.V.Shramjeevi College stated that the literature related to Mahatma Gandhi is highly motivational and can inspire people to lead a virtuous life. In the beginning of the session Prof. Mukta Sharma, Head Department of English welcomed the guests. Prof. H.S.Chandalia, convener of the seminar gave the concept note and stated that Indian English Literature was immensely influenced by the life and thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi. He also mentioned several English and Hindi authors who had depicted Gandhi and his ideology in their writings. Talking about the reason of organizing the seminar he said that in the present times the parties in power are demeaning Gandhi and elevating Sardar Patel. They are demonizing Nehru and celebrating Godse. In such a situation it is necessary to revisit Gandhiji and his ideology. The session was conducted by Dr. Mehzbeen Sadriwala and Dr. Preeti Rajput proposed a vote of thanks. The special feature of the inaugural session was the felicitation of Prof, Mukta Sharma for



her life time achievements and contribution to the world of academics. Prof. Suman Bala and other guests felicitated her with a citation, shawl and coconut, the sacred fruit.

The inaugural function was followed by a plenary session in which Dr. Rajshri Ranawat, Associate Professor, Jai Narayan Vyas University, Jodhpur delivered a lecture. This session was chaired by Prof. Sunil Bhargava, retired Principal, Govt. PG College, Jhalawar. On the second day of the conference Dr. Jaishree Singh, B.N. University and Dr.Kshamta Chaudhary, VMOU, Kota delivered plenary lectures. In technical sessions which were chaired by Dr. Sumer Singh, Principal, Govt. Girls College, Ratangarh, Dr. K.S.Kang, Maharana Pratap Government PG College, Chittorgarh and Dr. Rekha Tiwari, Guru Nanak Girls College, Udaipur.

The valedictory session was chaired by Prof. Suman Pamecha, Principal, M.V.Shramjeevi College. Prof. Pradeep Trikha, Professor and Head, Department of English, M.L.Sukhadia University was the chief guest while Dr. Minakshi Jain, Associate Professor, M.L.Sukhadia University was the guest of honour. Prof. The guests gave away the certificates to the delegates. , H.S.Chandalia proposed the vote of thanks and announced that selected papers of the seminar will be published in a book form.





Photography

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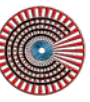
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