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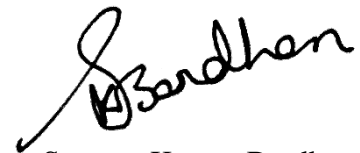
PREFACE

From the Desk of the Editor-in-Chief

It is a great pleasure that we have been able to publish Volume 2, Issue 2 of our coveted journal The Contour. We sincerely thank Dr. Mala Sharma for acting as the guest-editor of the present issue in spite of her busy schedule. 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.

We sincerely express our indebtedness to all involved in this venture. We express a deep sense of gratitude to the members of the editorial board and the contributors for their active support. Special thanks should go to Suman Saha and Samarpan Chatterjee who with their expertise in computer have worked strenuously and sincerely for giving the shape to the journal.

26.10.2015



Susanta Kumar Bardhan
Editor-In-Chief
The Contour

EDITORIAL

From the Desk of the Guest Editor

The Contour, widely read and acclaimed has always been scintillating the gems of literary thought and expression. The present issue too, all set to see the light of day, is no exception. Its radiating creative brilliance will undoubtedly attract the reader's attention. Indeed it is encouraging to see that literary creations from all genres have enriched the journal. We take this opportunity to thank all our contributors for sending in such scholarly, well-researched, thought-provoking works. Rich in content, style and expression these works have opened up new horizons of speculation and observations, appealing both to the intellect and emotions of the readers. In his well-researched article ***The Poisoned Chocolate Case: Humouring crime in Golden Age Detective fiction***, Thoudam Chanu Alpa critiques Anthony Berkeley's art of breaking away from the traditional form of writing detective fiction, while at the same time retain the element of suspense and puzzle all through the work.

The short story by Namitha Varma, Unni & The Unniappam Tree is enriched by rich creativity and makes interesting reading.

Dr. Arpit Kothari's article titled **Faces of the New Eve: Chick Lit and Social Reality in Advaita Kala's *Almost Single*** is a scholarly, well researched work which problematizes the space that women occupy both within the threshold of their homes well as outside and concludes by dwelling on the extremes of 'otherness' that educated, urban women fall prey to.

Sabuj Machh translated by Dr. Susanta Kumar Bardhan keeps intact the reader's attention throughout the short story, and makes the work not simply a literal translation but also a work of art –a trans-creation.

The study on adaption by Krishenendu Ghosh becomes a process of cultural re-location and not just making polarized judgments on the art of adaptation.

The comparative study on ‘Hindu Philosophy and Scientific views of ‘Padartha’ is richly laden with speculative thoughts, and inferences. It appeals to the intellect as well as the imaginative faculties of the reader.

The poems included in this issue are beautiful creations expressing the strong sensibilities of the poet. The translation of ‘Africa’ by Nandadulal Chatterjee stands apart because of its creative beauty.

We conclude with the hope that *The Contour* with its rich and varied publications will continue for a long time and will always live up to the expectations of its ever increasing readers.

Dr. Mala Sharma

Guest Editor,

The Contour, Volume 2, Issue 2

ARTICLE

The Hindu Philosophical and Scientific views of ‘Padārtha’ (Matter): A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Defining basic constituents of matter varies fundamentally for science and Hindu philosophy. In science we try to look for the fundamental building block in the material sense whereas for Hindu philosophy we aim at some fundamental attributes or elementary features that characterize the object. This article attempts a parallel between the two.

Long ago Vaiśeṣika gave an explanation of objects exposed in this material world namely padārtha. This particular definition and the classification of the Vaiśeṣika is comparatively much more enormous from the view of modern science though the basis is fundamentally different from that of modern science. This study will provide with a new direction of the concept of padārtha by a comparative study between the two.

Definition of object in the light of modern science

Matter has many definitions, but the most common is that it is any substance that occupies space and is apprehensible by the human organs. All physical objects are composed of matter, in the form of atoms which are in turn composed of protons, neutrons, and electrons. Photons have no mass, so

they are an example of something in physics that is *not* comprised of matter. They are also not considered "objects" in the traditional sense, as they cannot exist in a stationary state.

Definition of object in the light of Vaiśeṣika

Vaiśeṣika or *Vaiśeṣika* (Sanskrit) is one of the six orthodox schools of Hinduism (Vedic systems) from ancient India. It was founded by *Kanāda Kāśyapa* around the 2nd century BC. In its early stages, the *Vaiśeṣika* was an independent philosophy with its own metaphysics, epistemology, logic and ethics. Over time, the *Vaiśeṣika* system became similar in its philosophical procedures, ethical conclusion to the *Nyāya* school of Hinduism, but retained its difference in epistemology and metaphysics [1].

The *Vaiśeṣika* School gives the unique statement covering all objects whether it may be in stationary state or may not be in this universe. *Tarkasangraha* says in *uddesyaprakaranam*, '*Padasya arthah padārthah iti*'. That means 'the meaning of the word is called as object' or 'The object is signified by the word'. All objects of knowledge come under *padārtha*. *Padārtha* means an object which can be thought (*jneya*) and named (*Abhidheya*). The word which has no meaning can't be defined as object. Only existing bodies could be named with words [2].

Therefore the objects which have no mass but exist in a separate state are included as *padārtha* in the philosophical context. Massless objects have their enormous importance in explanation of construction of the general body in this universe.

Specific characteristics of an object in the view of modern science are

- 1) It is perceivable by the human organs, aided or unaided by machinery. [objective organs (*anus* 'elimination', *genitals* 'procreation', *feet* 'moving', *hand* 'grasping' & *mouth* 'speaking), cognitive organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue & skin) and internal organ i.e. mind]
- 2) It occupies some space.
- 3) It has mass and an atomic structure.

Vaiśeṣika produce their definition regarding *padārtha* on the basis of the first characteristic. All material and metaphorical objects in this universe qualify for it. But the other two properties dictated by modern science do not qualify for the metaphorical '*Padārtha*'. 'Human organs' mean the sense organs (collectively five), objective organs (collectively five) and the inner organ (mind). Therefore the *Padārtha* is named by the word through these organs.

States of matter according to Science

In the study of science matter is classified and described in two principal ways i.e according to its physical state (as a gas, liquid, solid etc.) or according to its composition (as an element, compound or mixture).

A sample of matter can be a gas, a liquid, a solid or a plasma or a combination of any two or few of these states. The states of matter differ in some of their simple observable properties. A gas (also *vapour*) has no fixed volume or shape; rather, it conforms to the volume and shape of its container. A gas can be compressed to occupy a smaller volume or it can expand to occupy a larger one. A liquid has a distinct volume independent of its container but has no specific shape: It assumes the shape of the portion of the container that it occupies. A solid has both a definite shape and a definite volume: It is rigid. Neither liquids nor majority of solids (except porous solids like sponge) can be compressed to any appreciable extent.

All substances are either elements or compounds. Elements cannot be decomposed into simpler substances. On the molecular level, each element is composed of only one kind of atom. Compounds are substances composed of two or more elements, so they contain two or more kinds of atoms. Water, for example, is a compound composed of two elements, hydrogen and oxygen. Figure-1 shows a classification of substances. Mixtures are combinations of two or more substances in which each substance retains its own chemical identity.

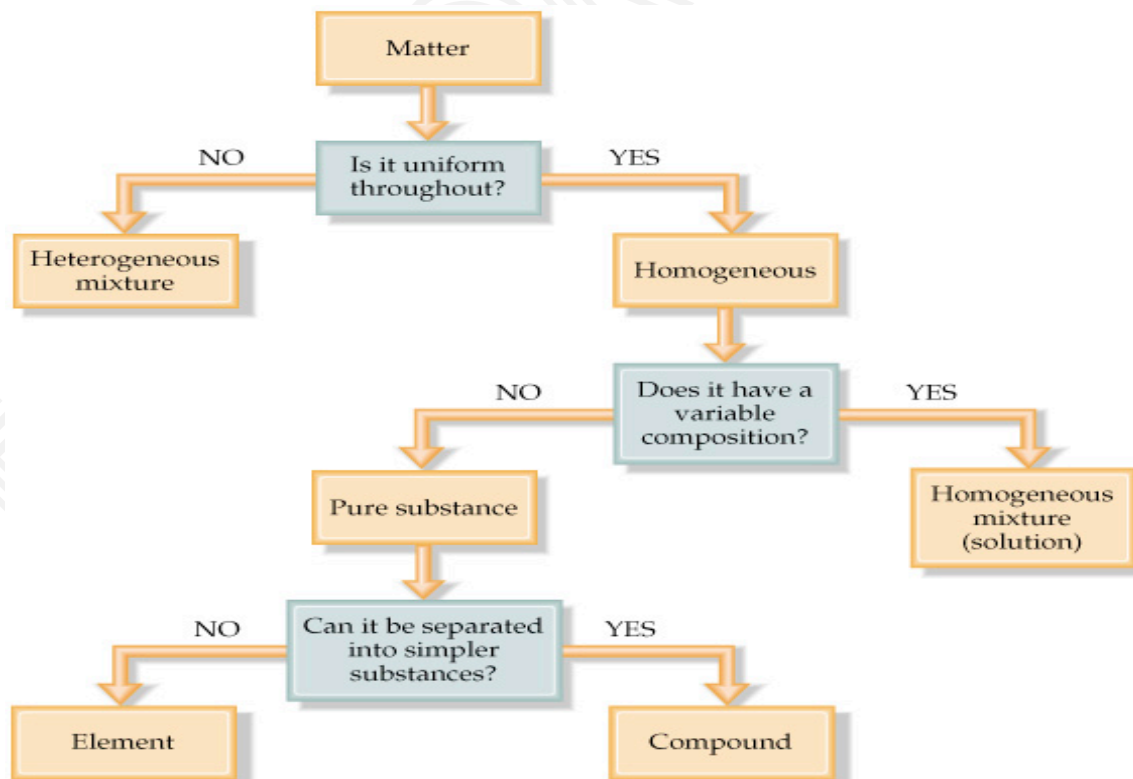
As modern day science says, the smallest unit of any element that holds all the properties of that substance is called an atom. Two or more atoms join to form molecules. Atoms have a central nucleus and extra nuclear electrons. The protons and neutrons that collectively form the nucleus of the atoms of the elements are no longer said to be fundamental. It is known that the protons and neutrons, both being Baryons are made up of three elementary particles called quarks. For another group of particles like the K-meson etc. we get a substructure consisting of a quark and an anti-quark. In the wee hours after creation, say microseconds after the Big Bang, the universe was terribly hot, so hot that atoms could not exist, nor could the protons and neutrons. The particles that existed during that time were the sub-nuclear quarks and anti-quarks along with the mediator gluons, which

is in a way the analogue to the photon. This state of deconfined matter is termed as QGP or Quark Gluon Plasma. We shall return to the story of QGP at the very end of this article once again.

Pure Substances

Most forms of matter that we encounter—for example, the air we breathe (a gas), gasoline for cars (a liquid), and the sidewalk on which we walk (a solid)—are not chemically pure. We can, however, resolve or separate, these kinds of matter into different pure substances. A pure substance (usually referred to simply as a *substance*) is matter that has distinct properties and a composition that doesn't vary from sample to sample. Distilled water and pure Sodium Chloride, the primary components of seawater, are examples of pure substances. The following diagram classifies Matter in general. [3]

Figure-1



States of matter according to the Indian philosophy

According to the Vaiśeṣika school, all things which exist, which can be recognized and which can be named are *padārthas* (literal meaning: the meaning of a word). All objects of experience can be classified into six categories, *dravya* (substantial object), *guṇa* (qualitative object), *karma* (active object), *sāmānya* (general object), *viśeṣa* (particular object) and *samavāya* (combined object). Later Vaiśeṣikas (*Śrīdhara and Udayana and Śivāditya*) added one more category *abhāva* (non-existence). *Naya-Vaiśeṣika* admitted seven categories of object in number. According to Tarkasāgraha '*dravya-guṇa-karma-samānya-viśeṣa -samavāya-abhabah sapta padarthah*' [4]. The first three categories are defined as *artha* (which can be perceived) and they have real objective existence. The last three categories are defined as *budhyapekṣam* (product of intellectual discrimination) and they have their logical categories [2].

1. *Dravya* (substantial object):

"Tatra dravyāni prithivyāptejah vāyūākāsakāladigātmāmanāmsi naba eba" [5]. There are nine substances found in the various objects. They are *prthvī* (earth), *ap* (water), *tejas* (fire), *vāyu* (air), *ākāśa* (space), *kāla* (time), *dik* (direction), *ātman* (self or soul) and *manas* (mind). The first five are called *bhūtas*, the substances having some specific qualities so that they could be perceived by one or the other external senses. These are the basic substances remain in the different objects in different *form* [2].

2. *Guṇa* (qualitative object):

"Dravyakarmabhinnatve sati samānyaban guṇāh" [5]. When the substances represent themselves on the basis of the quality then it is called as qualitative object. Quality can't exist independently. The Vaiśeṣika Sūtra mentions seventeen *guṇas* (qualities), to which Praśastapāda added another seven. While a substance is capable of existing independently by itself, a *guṇa* (quality) cannot exist so. The original seventeen *guṇās* (qualities) are *rūpa* (colour), *rasa* (taste), *gandha* (smell), *sparśa* (touch), *sankhyā* (number), *parimāṇa* (size/dimension/quantity), *prthaktva* (individuality), *samyoga* (conjunction/accompaniments), *vibhāga* (disjunction), *paratva* (priority), *aparatva* (posteriority), *buddhi* (knowledge),

sukha(pleasure), *duḥkha*(pain), *icchā*(desire), *dveṣa*(aversion) and *prayatna*(effort). To, these Praśastapāda added *gurutva*(heaviness), *dravatva*(fluidity), *sneha*(viscosity), *dharma*(merit), *adharmā*(demerit), *śabda*(sound) and *saṁskāra*(faculty) [6].

3. *Karma* (active object):

“*Somjogābhinnatve sati sonjogasamabāyikaranam karma*” [5]. When the substances get their movement then the moving substances are called as active object. The objects are divided according to their movement. They are like

- 1) Upward active object (e.g. a rocket moving upwards after launching)
- 2) Downward active object (e.g. a freely falling stone)
- 3) Compressive active object (e.g. a sponge that is being squeezed)
- 4) Expansive active object (e.g. a high density smoke that is dispersing into the free environment)
- 5) Free moving active object. (e.g. a tension free, constraint free wanderer)

The *karmas* (active object) like *guṇas* (qualitative object) have no separate existence, they belong to the substances. But while a quality is a permanent feature of a substance, an activity is a transient one. *Ākāśa* (space), *kāla* (time), *dik* (direction) and *atman* (self), though substances, are devoid of *karma* (active object) [7]. We shall talk about active objects once more after we have introduced the modern scientific view of creation of the universe.

4. *Sāmānya* (general object):

“*parama adhikadesabritti*” [5]. The plurality of the substances is found in different objects. Then there will be a relation among the objects. When a property is found common to many substances we term them as general object (*sāmānya*).

5. *Viśeṣa* (particular object):

“*nityadrabyabrittayah viśeṣa*” [5]. When we are able to perceive the substances as different from one another, then the object will be considered as particular object. By means of *viśeṣa*, we are able to perceive substances as different from one another. As the ultimate atoms are accountably infinite so are the *viśeṣas* [8].

Samavāya (combined object):

“*nityasambandhah samavāya*” [9]. *Kaṇāda defined samavāya as the relation between the cause and the effect. Praśastapāda defined it as the relationship existing between the substances that are inseparable, standing to one another in the relation of the container and the contained. The relation of samavāya is not perceivable but only inferable from the inseparable connection of the substances* [10]

7. “*Abhābam bibhajate*” [5]. Non existence is the absence of an object. Nobody can deny the absence of sun during nights. Hence it is necessary to include non existence. There are two main distinctions of non existence:

- a) Sansargābhāba or the absence of one entity in another, such as the absence of sunlight during the night &
- b) Anyonyābhāba or one object not being another just as the moon is not the sun [10]

From a physical standpoint, it is just as the concept of a 'hole' in electronics. A hole is viewed as the absence or 'abhāba' of an electron in that position.

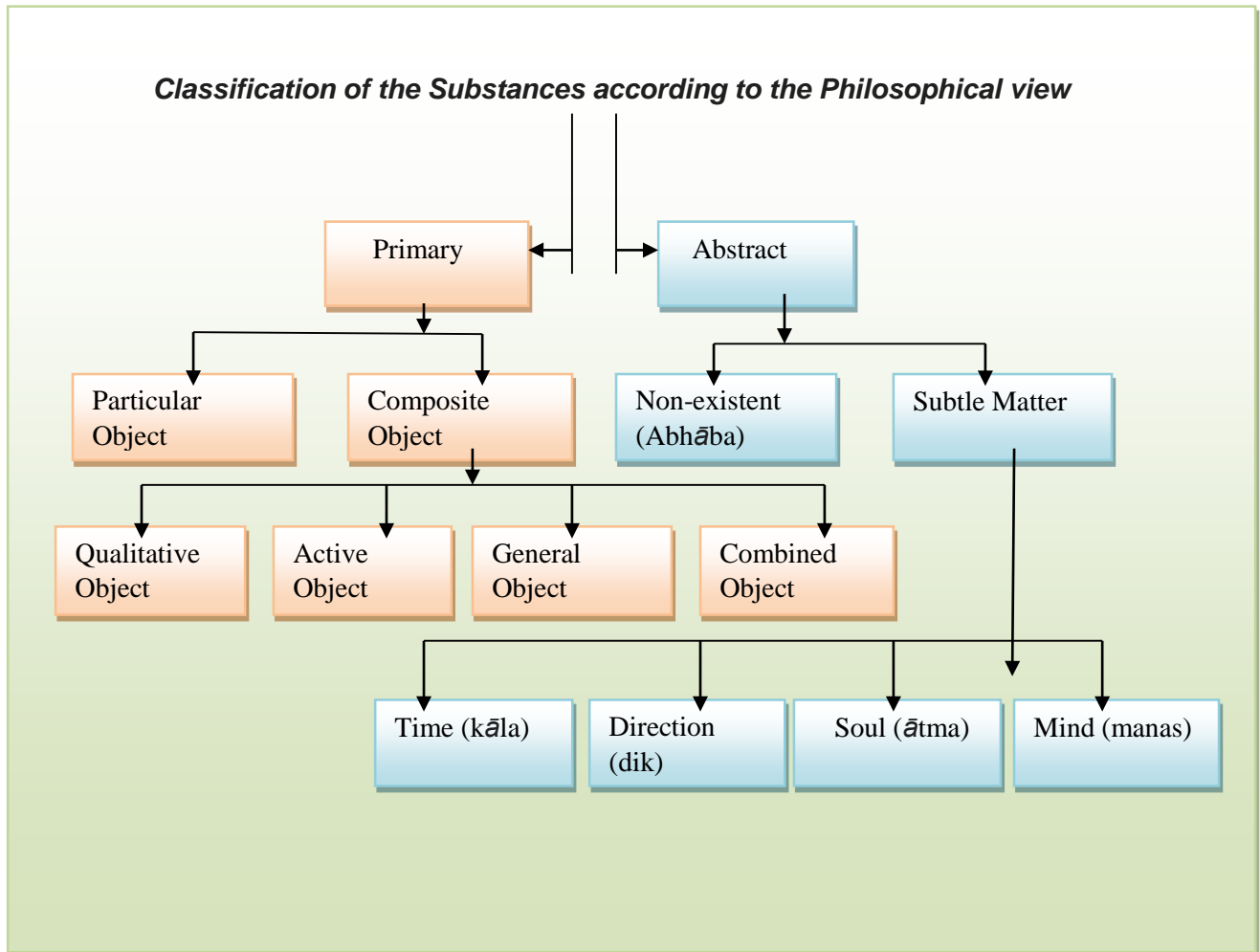
We now describe briefly how the above mentioned substances can be classified from a philosophical standpoint. Primarily substances are of two types – Primary substance and abstract substances. Primary substances are those which can be perceived by the aforesaid eleven organs, aided or unaided by modern machinery. Primary substances are of two types – particular objects and composite objects. Particular objects are made of one type of *Padārtha*(like- *Akāsha*) while *composite objects are made of four categories of objects* namely qualitative objects, active objects, general objects & abstract objects.

Examples of these four categories of objects are as follows:

1. Qualitative objects like: I borrowed a hundred i.e Rs.100.
2. Active Objects like- Upward active object e.g. a rocket at launching
3. General Object like-Humanity
4. Combined Objects like- the word 'Carpenter' indicating both the name attributed to persons with a specific profession and the person himself

Abstract substances are those which we cannot perceive by the eleven organs but can ‘feel’ the existence. These can be divided into two parts namely *Abhāba* and Subtle matter. Subtle matter is again of four types namely Mind, time, Direction and soul.

Figure-2



The *Brahama* sutra says “*ubhayathāpi na karmatah tadabhāba*” [11]. According to this sutra, one can’t claim that at the time of creation, atoms first combine together because they are impelled by some *kārmik* i.e. Impulse of activities adhering in the atoms themselves. But in their primeval state before combining into complex object into complex objects, have no ethical responsibility that might lead to acquire pious and sinful reactions. Nor can the initial combination of atoms be explained as a result of the residual karma of the living entities who lie dormant prior to creation. These reactions are characteristic to each *jīvā* and cannot be transferred from them even to another *jīvā*, what to speak of inert atoms [12].

Returning to the views of modern science, as we had mentioned, the universe was immensely hot, in a state of QGP just after creation. This was a quark deconfined soup and these quarks, anti-quarks and gluons constituted all that existed. As the temperature fell gradually, these particles interacted among themselves to create protons and neutrons which subsequently joined to form nuclei of elements. Then atoms were formed. These atoms later formed matter as we see in the world all around. So, what Brahma sutra says is nothing but a part of the modern day revelations of science, spoken from a philosophical standpoint.

Substances added with the quality, activity, generality, particularity, combination, characterization and nonexistence accordingly get the individuality as a material particle like the quarks, particles, anti-particles etc in the deliberation of the philosophical view of Vedanta. Put in the form of an equation

Padartha + Specific Properties = Definite Material Particles

To conclude let us note the following:

At the time of creation, active objects have an important role to constitute the matter in order to have their movement in the typical or required direction. Actually the elementary particles like quarks in the primordial QGP phase were being activated as the active objects, to interact and create the structural matter and finally the universe.

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Anton Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard and Ajitesh Bandopadhyay's Manjari Aamer Manjari: A Study in Adaptation

Krishnendu Ghosh

ABSTRACT

Adaptation is often understood as cinematic transpositions of literature. Gerard Genette has observed that it is a 'transgeneric practice' – a specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels into films, dramas into musicals, the dramatization of prose fiction and vice-versa. However, talking about Ajitesh Bandopadhyay and his adaptations is a different case altogether. His drama adaptations do not involve generic shifts, but a process of 'cultural relocation'. From Tin Poysar Pala, Manjari Aamer Manjari, Sher Afgan to Bhalomanus – all are adaptations from dramatic works themselves. Although this study makes a close comparison of The Cherry Orchard and Manjari Aamer Manjari, it refuses to identify the adaptation as a 'good' or 'bad' one, maintaining a proximity to Julie Sanders' observation in Adaptation and Appropriation that such studies are 'not about making polarized value judgments, but about analysing process, ideology and methodology'.

Keywords: ADAPTATION, TEXT, INTERTEXTUALITY, *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, *MANJARI AAMER MANJARI*

Art never improves, but ... the material of art is never quite the same.

(T.S. Eliot, Tradition and the Individual Talent)

Any study of literature, especially when it is related to 'adaptation' – a kind of rewriting – inevitably involves a reading of Eliot's theory of art and the artist. This 'rewriting' impulse of adaptation, which is much more than simple imitation, is often articulated in current theoretical terminology as 'intertextuality' – a dialogue among texts. In *Adaptation and Appropriation* Julie Sanders observes

that this process of intertextuality manifested in the form of adaptation shows 'how art creates art or how literature is made by literature'. In fact, adaptation is a process through which any 'particular literature' steps forward to become Literature. As Ajitesh Bandopadhyay himself once said, through adaptation one can either take from another country or justify the uniqueness of one's own country. The underlying implication of this observation may be that adaptation is fundamental to the practice of literature, and that it is only adaptation which brings home the sublime realization that the people of different nations, however diverse their life-styles are, belong to one universal family.

A pioneer of the Bengali group theatre movement, Ajitesh Bandopadhyay is widely recognized as an actor, producer, and writer of adapted plays. In adapting English plays, European dramatists like Tolstoy, Pirandello, Brecht and Chekhov have been his particular favourites. His *Manjari Aamer Manjari* which first came out in 1968, is based on the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. Chekhov's play reflects a time when the Tsarist regime in Russia reached its finale and, as a consequence, there was the decline of the landed gentry. This hurling down of European feudalism, the fall of the century old regime became an interesting subject to the whole world. However, for the landed nobility in India it was a crawling, agonizing end which came by slow torment. In adapting *The Cherry Orchard* into *Manjari Aamer Manjari* this process of social change remains the primary concern for Ajitesh. He successfully draws on the fascination of the Bengali for the old and the antique. It sets a well-defined ground for the emergence of a new class, the proletariat so as to say, in the economic field of an independent country.

As the Forward to its first production reads, *Manjari Aamer Manjari* beautifully describes the painful passing away of a once-proud zamindar family, and so far as the dialect used in the play is concerned, the locale seems to be situated somewhere in the neighbourhood of Purulia in West Bengal.

Just as Chekhov uses the cherry orchard as a symbol of feudal Russia, so does Ajitesh in his adaptation with the mango orchard. Each is a huge natural phenomenon, spanning over a few acres of land. Chekhov's Mme Ranevskaya says, "If there is anything at all in this whole district that's still exciting, even incredible, that one thing is our cherry orchard" (*The Cherry Orchard*, 173), and Labanyaprabha echoes her Russian counterpart, "Sobai ek kothay bole na, ei anchole 100 mile-r moddhe sobcheye boro jinis holo Himsagar-r zamindar-r aam bagan?" (*Manjari Aamer Manjari*, 24). Just as the cherry orchard is named in the 'Encyclopedia', so is the mango orchard in 'Year Book'.

They bear similar significance to the characters concerned. The orchard may not produce enough mangoes to pay off the debts, but to Labanya, as to Ranevskaya, the barren trees are a world of memory, her innocent childhood and happy adolescence; 'the last flickering glow of the feudal sunset'.

To some of the contemporary audience, Chekhov's play bore an anti-revolutionary ideal. Nemirovich-Danchenko, the first director of his play at the Moscow Art Theatre, expressed his anxiety as it was "a play which is seen to lament the lost estates of the gentry". Even contemporary critical reviews claimed that Chekhov's sympathy went with the decaying aristocracy, not with the rising proletariat. As a result of such an outcome Chekhov had to somehow tone down the elegiac mood of the play, although denying any such intention of his. But adapting that play in a post-independent democratic set-up, Ajitesh had hardly to bother about such compulsive issues. It is a temporal-spatial liberation that he certainly enjoys.

In Chekhov the class difference between the aristocrats and the underlings is not shown so much through their use of language as in Ajitesh, who gives standard Bengali to the master-class and regional dialect to the lower class as such. Ranevskaya and Varya use the same English:

"Varya: I must go and see if they've brought in all the things..."

"Lyubov Andreevna: It can't really be me sitting here, can it? [Laughs] I want to jump up, leap around and wave my arms...." (171)

But the language of Labanya and Vutu is not the same,

"Vutu: Ke jane sob malpotto gulan uthan hoite samaile sumaille ughore raikheche to? Iyader aabar ja kando?"

"Labanya: O ma! Ei je bose aachhi. Ei ki aami? Sotti, aamie to na? Mone hochhe bno kore ek pak aani mani-r moto ghure jai". (22)

Thus a language-based hierarchy is apparent with Labanya, Girindra, Anima and Tapas on one side and the rest on the other. Here, of course, Sricharan's position becomes problematic.

Chekhov's sub-title to the play "A Comedy in Four Acts" invites us to an important area of discussion. Chekhov's Comedy is a vital part of his philosophy – the point where content and form meet. And this in turn relates to the subject-matter of his work – the daily lives of ordinary people.

As Vera Gottlieb points out in "Chekhov's Comedy", the playwright's view of comedy entails a "sociological survey", perhaps equalled by Zola in France and Dickens in England. It marks a point where fact and fiction blend to produce the particular kind of "heightened realism"-a special feature of Chekhov's comedy. The element of implicit 'morality' in his comedy is not simply defined by Henri Bergson's *Laughter* or George Meredith's *Essay on Comedy*. It must be seen within the context of Russian literature and the arts in general -a context which placed on the artist a kind of responsibility. The following one is a significant observation from Chekhov:

All I wanted was to say truthfully to people: 'Have a look at yourself and see how bad and dreary your lives are!'What is there to cry about in this?

For Chekhov the philosophical core of his comedy is that of a doctor who knows there is a cure. As Gottlieb further says, 'It is not the fear of death which concerns Chekhov, it is the fear of life which he exposes and presents as 'comic' in that the cure potentially lies in our own hands'. In *Manjari Amer Manjari* Ekkari perhaps means this same 'fear of life' when he says, "bnaiche je ki sukh ta kuno boi-e lekha deikhlam nai" or "bhagaman aamake benai dhenai liye, ekat ya batkhara maire kopalta dilek fataie, boillok 'ja re byata duniyay janma liye zoile pure moirga ja!" (32). The moral of his story is that life is an endless journey of misery and pain; time passes by, opportunities are lost, unhappiness and disappointment pour in.

Ajitesh seems to have resorted to the basics of Chekhov's philosophy of 'comedy'. From the very beginning of the play, Lalmohon, the emerging economist, keeps on telling Labanya that the sale of her estate and the mango orchard is inevitable if she does not consent to his plan of building up a colony in its place. It is he who comes like a doctor to the patient (Labnaya) with the cure (his plan), but the latter remains adamant on not taking the medicine until the catastrophe becomes an actuality. Therefore, what constitutes the 'comic' here is that Labanya easily lets her orchard go, doing practically nothing to save it. Thus, at the end it becomes very significant what Lalmohon says, after he buys the estate for himself, "...kyane tokhon aamar kotha kane tullen na maa? Aami je hazar bar boile chhilam ekhon, ekhon hater dhil ekbar chhure diechhen, aar je hate ghurbe na maa." (56)

Ajitesh, very much in the manner of Chekhov, shows how everyday life holds its incongruities. There he finds sufficient materials to create the comic attitude in the audience and sufficient materials to sound the echoes of tragedy as well. Side by side Lalmohon's joy for being the new owner of the mango orchard lies his sad affection for those who have so long been his masters. He

does not get that much happiness in buying the orchard, “Maago aami sotti boilchhi maa, aamar sukh hoilo na, jodi kunodin aamader kaaro kichhu na thaikto to sei chhilo bhalo.” (56)

Such ambivalence is said to be the true source of Chekhovian comedy. After she loses the orchard Ranevskaya takes a last look round her nursery, “Good bye, my home. Fare thee well, dear old house of our fore-fathers”. With simple words Chekhov paints a picture of generations, while directly expressing the character's emotions. It is usual to expect an emotive sequel to this sentimental expression. Yet there is an ironic edge to the gesture which follows her remark. Anya, her daughter, unaffectedly sees no past standing over her like a judgement as her mother does. “Anya: Really! This is the beginning of a new life, Mama!” (205)

Ajitesh catches this exact mood and tone in Anima's reply to her mother,

“Labnaya: ... Aamra je chole jachhi, tor bhalo lagchhe mamoni, tui je bolehhili tor satti bhalo lagchhe?” “Anima: Hnya, Maa, aamar sotti bhalo lagchhe.” (62)

Thus our reception of the play is carefully put under control. What could have been a more successful use of Brechtian 'alienation effect' than this?

Ambivalence is also there in the character portrayal. There is an engagement of sympathy for Ranevskaya, whose actions may seem reprehensible. She is a woman who allows her sexuality to lead her into problems. Her modest aim for success was a happy love affair. However, the negative traits of her character seem to be compensated by the fact that for three quarters of the play she is presented as a victim of circumstances beyond her control. In his *The Dark Comedy*, J.L.Styan argues that the romantic centre of the modern drama, i.e. the hero, is replaced by a pattern of feeling which he or she may not be able to understand because it is part of them. Only the observer, i.e. the audience may see the whole pattern. Styan uses a beautiful imagery: "The beetle has a narrow view of the garden, the gardener can observe all his stupid motions, can admire his efforts, laugh at his failures, help him to safety or crush him with a touch of his toe". This is the dark comic attitude. At the centre of such attitude lies the disparity between the aspiration of the characters and the reality of their situation. In most cases there is little to stop the characters from doing what they want except themselves, and herein lies the keynote of Chekhov's comedy. Ranevskaya returns to her home to save it from being sold in auction; she cannot let the orchard mix into dust. Yet, at the end, she fails to do anything and the orchard is ready to be cut down. She has to return to Paris. Thus the whole story of *The Cherry Orchard* seems to unfold between two ordinary events- the arrival of

Ranevskaya and the departure of Ranevskaya; the *purpose* of her coming is smashed in between - the reality of the situation. It feels that she could have easily saved her estate by adhering to Lopakhin's proposal. But it was *her* decision not to lose the cherry orchard, even if it entailed the loss of the whole property.

This tension between the opposite poles of 'aspiration' and 'reality' is carried on with equal vividness in *Manjari Aamer Manjari*. Labanya continually insists on keeping the mango orchard unharmed, although knowing fully well that she is certain to lose it. Lalmohon wanted Labanya to keep the estate (the monetary value of it, of course), but he ends up buying it for himself. Similarly Durga's dream of passing for an aristocratic lady remains only a dream.

The sad comicality of everyday life in Chekhov has some strong dose of the comic as well, and Ajitesh nicely transforms them into the Bengali sense of humour. The character of Ekkari provides a good sense of humour in *Manjari Aamer Manjari*. Yepikhodov's nickname 'Two-and-Twenty Hard Knocks!' – as he suffers an endless series of farsical physical misfortunes, like stumbling over objects – is translated into Bengali as 'Ekkari-r dukkhu pnachkuri'. In case of Ekkari, our evocation of laughter works at a primary level -as Meredith says, we are prone to laugh at others' misfortunes. We even hardly sense anything serious when he consistently threatens Durga with committing suicide if she does not marry him. It is significant how Yepikhodov's 'revolver' becomes Ekkari's 'aafing' in the Bengali text.

Another of the most farcical moments in *The Cherry Orchard* takes place offstage in Act 3 where the eternal student Trofimov's pompous reaction to Ranevskaya's teasing is to march off, offended, only to fall down the stairs. Ajitesh very well takes out the humour of the situation, and the audience laughs with Anima, "Tapas da sniri te pore gachhen, Ekkari-r gaye-" (50)

Again when Vutu mistakenly hits Lalmohon on the head, the latter utters in pain, "Tui byash shokto samottha aachhis".

In "The Scenography of Chekhov" Arnold Aronson observes that for Chekhov the settings are virtual roadmaps to the psyche, and the identification of the character with the decor is so complete that if the setting were taken away, the characters would cease to exist. He quotes Chekhov:

The stage demands a degree of artifice...you have no fourth wall. Besides, the stage is art, the stage reflects the quintessence of life....

Ranevskaya's remark in Act 3 seems bear this idea of Chekhov: "Without the cherry orchard my life would lose its meaning, and if it must really be sold, then go and sell me with the orchard." (195)

If we concentrate on the setting of Act 1 of *The Cherry Orchard*, it is described as "A Room that still goes by the name of the nursery. One of the doors leads to Anya's room. It is dawn and the sun will soon come up. It is May. The cherry trees are in flower, but in the orchard it is cold, there is morning frost. The windows in the room are closed". It is not simply an identification of the locale, we are also told where the door leads. If it were Ibsen or Shaw there would be detailed description of furniture, carpets, wall coverings and the like. Commenting on this aspect of Ajitesh Bandopadhyay's *Manjari Aamer Manjari* Pabitra Sarkar in "Ajitesh Bandopadhyay: His Theatre" observes that when Labanya finally leaves her estate, sold in auction to Lalmohon, the sofas are turned upside down over one another in front of the house, and thus it becomes quite apparent that the house is no longer a place of living, but a place for buy-and-sell.

Ajitesh puts considerable emphasis on the old aristocrats' fascination for the past, "the tradition". The simultaneous action of the passing away of tradition and the attempt at clinging to it constitutes the paradox of the situation in *Manjari Aamer Manjari*. Labanya and Girindra are full of admiration of their age-long tradition, the mango orchard, yet practically they do almost nothing to save it. They can only express their shock at Lalmohon's suggestion of cutting down the orchard, in a manner similar to that of Ranevskaya and Gaev.

"Andreevna: Cut down; My dear, forgive me, but you don't know what you are talking about?"(173)
"Labanya: Aambagan? Aambagan kete falte hobe. Tumi bolchho ki Lalu!" (24)

The sentiment of a Russian mistress becomes one with that of a Bengali zamindar-patni. On finding a hundred-year-old book case, Girindra can hardly hold his sentiments back. Thus, this might be taken as another stroke of bringing forth the Bengali sentiments for what has gone by.

Ashok Kumar Banbopadhyay in "Rupantare Ajitesh Bandopadhyay" opines that Lalmohon's age stands firm at the end of Falaram's age; a strikingly incredible fact (the cutting down of the orchard) replaces an age-old system. It is a result of the conflict between the old and the new. Lalmohon, the harbinger of the new economy, speaks of this dichotomy between the two:

Puran kaal sob tortor koire paltai jeichhe. Aage ee tollate chhilo zamindar aar hashha, du-chayr ghor bamon-kait. Ekhon deshe chayrdige sob chhoto-boro kol-karkhana hoichhe.

Idhare udhare koto lotun colony goire uythchhe. Bochhor kuri bade isob jaiga aar chinay jabek nai...aami sposto deikhte pechhi -bish bochhor baade ee jaigatir upor dia aye chowra pitchdhala rasta choile geychhe, ee jhorjhoira ghortar kuno chinnha nai....

Chekhov uses a concrete metaphor to show the replacement of feudalism with capitalism - the chance-purchase of Pischik's white clay by some astonishing Englishmen. In *Manjari Aamer Manjari*, the buying of Sricharan's land by some Marwadi, for the acquisition of fire-clay, is a foreshadow of the sale of the mango orchard. The poor condition of the feudal society is evident in the speech of Anima, the last descendant of that society: "ei sara deshe aamader nijeder bolte ek chilte zami nei". (19)

What is most interesting to note here is that Lalmohon, who bears the Change in himself, thinks of living beside feudalism as such. He constantly offers his help to Labanya and seems to oppose the competitive capitalism. Hence, on Labanya's losing her orchard, he regrets, "Aamar sukh hoilo na!". Infact, a close look at the writings of Ajitesh - *Manjari Aamer Manjari*, *Tin Paisar Pala*, *Sher Afgan*, *Bhalo Manush*, *Paap Punya* or *Soudagarer Nouka* - reveals this kind of affection for the lost life.

Since *Manjari Aamer Manjari* is a work in adaptation and Lalmohon's is a very important character, Ajitesh could well have made him the instrument of saving feudal economy. But his Communist and socialist ideology seemed to stand in his way to do that. And this proves that however an artist tries to evade, the ideological forces make themselves felt by him. Ajitesh, just in the manner of Chekhov, presents a symbolic situation under a wholly naturalistic guise. Neither Labanya nor Lalmohon seem to be aware of the forces present with them on the stage at moments of decision.

A study of *Manjari Aamer Manjari* focusses on specific areas of translation, such as dialogue between characters without any apparent ideological implications. The names of Chekhov's characters are translated into well-matched Bengali ones: Lyubov is Labanyaprabha, Lopakhin is Lalmohon, Yasha Ishwar, Trofimov Tapas and Firs is Falaram. Their names resonate with class-difference among them. Although Vutu is Anima's cousin and also her mother's adopted daughter, the name 'Anima' speaks well of the difference between herself and Vutu. There is this implicit working of the politics of translation.

Deviation from the source is quite natural in a work of adaptation. The major intervention in the Bengali text is the omission of Charlotta who played an important function in Chekhov. Cynthia Marsh in "The Representation of Chekhov's Women" says that Charlotta's function is to raise a

question mark over realist theatre as much as over femaleness through her cross-dressing, her uncertainty as to who she is, her rootlessness. She also questions the naturalist framework 'where character is deeply dependent upon environment and women regarded as particularly contained within it'. Another significant alteration occurs in Scene 2. In *The Cherry Orchard*, a passer-by, slightly drunk, enters and recites, "Oh my brother, my suffering brother...come out to the Volga, whose moan..."(188) In *Manjari Aamer Manjari*, the passer-by becomes Shuklal, but he is not given any of such song to recite. Here the change, alongwith that of Charlotta, does not seem to be a qualitative one. The passer-by's song in Chekhov's play had serious implications of the change of social order in Russia.

There may also arise a talk over the politics of locale. The industrial growth in Chinsurah of Bengal makes it a point of happy comparison with Chekhov's Moscow. Ranevskaya's place of refuge, Paris, becomes Beneras or Kashi in *Manjari Aamer Manjari*. An adaptation is a re-reading of the original and here the character of Labanya is worth studying. Ranevskaya leaves Kharkov to stay with her libertine lover in Paris. The amoral, if not immoral, side of Ranevskaya is also focused during her teasing of young Trofimov on the question of love. Labanya's character is not given any such shades. Beside, whenever her stay in Beneras is spoken of, there is always a sense of religiosity attached to it. The change is significant, and so the station master's singing of "The Sinful Woman" finds no place in Ajitesh's reading.

This study finally makes an attempt to compare the characters of the plays, an aspect dealt in little with the character of Ranevskaya/Labanya. The character of Lalmohon is portrayed with as much subtlety as Lopakhin's. His owning of the orchard and his rational planning betray his capitalist mind-set. Despite the moral touch added to her character, does Labanya appear as impressive as Ranevskaya? After having two children Ranevskaya falls in love with another person when her husband dies; to forget the memory of his drowned son, she leaves her house and stays away; there she falls in debt as her lover falls ill; to pay off the dept she mortgages her house and goes to Paris; there her lover deserts her with another lady; she stays there alone until her daughter brings her home. Such an expansion of a tangled life is hardly felt in Labanya, who only leaves her house to forget the dreadful memory of her son. Hence, the liveliness felt on her return to her old home does not match with that of Labanya. Of course, it's the dramatist's own reading of the character of Ranevskaya.

Therefore, what basically remains the focal point that Ajitesh bases his translation on is the dynamic aspect of 'social change'. The Marxist critic and philosopher Georg Lukacs finds the concept of Brechtian epic theatre in such depiction:

Even without alienation effects, the writers have succeeded not just in surprising the audience, but in moving them profoundly by dramatizing the contradictions of a given social order.

This is how both Chekhov and Ajitesh seem to guide 'the viewing' of their audience. Living in a time when the 'work' is replaced by the 'text' (in order of importance), and the exclusivity of 'the author' is put under a question mark, it would perhaps be all right to say that Ajitesh Bandopadhyay's adaptation adds to 'the text' of 'social transformation', represented or rather 'written' by Chekhov in *The Cherry Orchard*. An adaptation always remains truthful to the original, yet it becomes a work of a true artist only when it frees itself from the shadow of the source text. The debate that has raged around canon formation in literary studies in recent decades is also inescapable in this context. As Julie Sanders says, 'Adaptation both appears to require and to perpetuate the existence of a canon, although it may in turn contribute to its ongoing reformulation and expansion'. In this sense the canonical status of *The Cherry Orchard* is veritably marked by its adaptation, *Manjari Aamer Manjari*; they become, in Eliot's terminology, the signifiers of 'tradition' and 'individual talent'.

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Julie Sanders' appropriation of Eliot's iconic line from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" at the outset of her book is also incorporated here at the very beginning.

THE CONTOUR

The Poisoned Chocolate Case: Humouring crime in Golden Age Detective fiction

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Abstract

*Anthony Berkeley breaks away with the spoon-fed tradition of writing detective fictions while writing his work *The Poisoned Chocolate Case*. He not only challenged readers' certain assumptions about detective stories, but also their credulity. The essay is an examination of how his detective novel with a touch of humour defies the various detective fiction commandments prevalent during his time. He puts to test the readers' blind belief that detectives are infallible, that their work can only be marvelled at and also that detective fictions are unquestionable or perfect. Berkeley has cleverly critiqued the classical detective conventions without betraying their primary function as popular entertainment by keeping the 'puzzle-element' alive through the book.*

The appetite for crime and mystery stories during the Golden Age Detective Fiction reached such a height that the period saw the largest number of production and sale of detective fictions in 1920s and 1930s. While some of them became huge commercial successes, some were of mere disposable value. The detective fiction genre attained the zenith of its success with its publication as the 'yellowbacks', cheap but popular novels so called because of their yellow covers. The popularity of the sub-genre even gave rise to certain standardized conventions and golden rules on how to write a good detective fiction. So in 1929, we have Ronald Knox who came up with his 'Decalogue' of rules, the ten rules of Golden Age Detective Fiction, which further solidified the cultural and generic assumptions common among writers and readers of detective fiction. Some of his rules state: No Chinaman should figure in the story; no accident should help the detective; supernatural agencies should be ruled out etc.

Breaking away with this spoon-fed tradition of writing detective fictions, one has Anthony Berkeley (1893-1971) who not only challenged readers' certain assumptions about detective stories, but also

their credulity. Berkeley wrote under several pen-names, including Francis Iles and A Monmouth Platts. He has published many detective novels and short stories as well. To mention a few: *The Silk Stocking Murders* (1928); *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* (1929); *The Second Shot* (1930); *Top Storey Murder* (1931); *Murder in the Basement* (1932). In this essay, I will examine how his detective novel *The Poisoned Chocolates Case*, defies and breaks away from the various detective fiction commandments prevalent during his time.

In *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* there are six amateur, over-zealous detectives who are members of the Crime Circle run by Roger Sheringham. The club launches what inspector Moresby calls a ‘massed-detective attack’ to solve the case of the death of Mrs Joan Bendix who died of poisoning. So, one has Roger Sheringham a novelist; Alicia Dammers, a novelist again; Sir Charles Wildman, a barrister; Mrs Fleding Flemming, a playwright; Mr Ambrose Chitterwick, a self-proclaimed fan of detective stories and another detective novelist writer Percy Robinson who writes under the name Morton Harrogate Bradley. Against the single Great Detective, here in this book, Berkeley provides the readers with multiple detectives to solve a crime. None of the characters in particular, unlike the Great Detective, is attractive or likeable. There is a certain oddity about each one of them. Berkeley seems to take malicious fun in creating his ‘flawed’, ‘unheroic’ detectives. Sheringham is rather snobbish, Chitterwick diffident, and Sir Charles is introduced with sweeping irony: “There was no one at the bar who could so convincingly distort an honest but awkward fact into carrying an entirely different interpretation from that which any ordinary person would have put upon it...The number of murderers whom sir Charles in the course of this career had saved from the gallows, if placed one on top of the other, would have reached a very great height indeed” (Berkeley, 2010). Thus, the readers are introduced to a group of highly unlikely detectives who do not conform to any traits of a great detective.

The detective novel so far has appealed to the readers by interpreting what GK Chesterton writes in his essay “A Defence of Detective Stories” (1901), “There is no stone in the street and no brick in the wall that is not actually a deliberate symbol- a message from some man, as much as if it were a telegram or a post-card.” Reading and finding message, putting them together to form coherent narrative has been the crux of detective work and the readers are expected to follow suit. Berkeley takes a dig at this illusion that everything in the world is significant and comprehensible, that the universe is full of meaning. To him, this point of view is at naive and self- satisfied. He puts to test

the readers' blind belief that detectives are infallible, that their work can only be marvelled at and also that detective fictions are unquestionable or perfect. He challenges the general presumption of the detective hero's goal is to correct the wrongs by uncovering facts. Thus, Berkeley has openly modified the most conservative features or rules of the detective fiction in order to question the readers' assumptions about the sub-genre and the world and to free them of their blinkered way of looking at things or events.

In *The Poisoned Chocolates Case*, the readers are provided with six individual perspectives, six different solutions, and most surprisingly six different murderers of the same case. Different characters come up with different solutions, theories and verify their hypothesis supported by various findings they have made, and from the facts provided by Scotland Yard. Each character has a different 'voice' with particular exaggerations and eccentricity akin to their professional lives. The solution that each character comes up with somehow seems to correspond with their characteristic eccentricity. In fact, professional life seems to branch over the process of investigation. Interestingly, however, all the theories and findings they make sound credible. Without doubt all the members of the circle have knowledge in criminology, interest in various branches of science, possess knowledge of history of all cases and have constructive ability as are expected in a great detective. Each proposes a watertight case, both reasonable and convincing. At the first look, one cannot find fault with anybody's logic. But the book is structured in such a clever way that cases are built and then demolished. The book shows how easily writers can steer the reader one way or the other, based on the information provided. Berkeley has deliberately provided is a set of detectives who possess almost all the qualities of a great detective but do not succeed in solving a case. Thus, the idea of the 'Great detective' is highly undercut in the book.

Many writers of detective fiction became popular by conforming to their readers' self-serving ideas. And it has amused critics like W Stowe who writes in *Convention and Ideology in Detective Fiction* that the sub-genre (detective fiction) which is "an endlessly reduplicated form, employing sterile formulas, stock characters, and innumerable cliches of method and construction, should prosper in the two decades between the World Wars and continue to amuse readers even in the present day." He further says that, "Detective fiction tends to affirm rather than to question, to take social structures, moral codes, and ways of knowing as givens, rather than subjecting them to thorough, principled criticism." Charles J Rzepka too points out in his book *Detective Fiction* that detective

fiction has almost been conservative, and to use the words of Dennis Porter it is ‘a literature of reassurance and conformism’. Berkeley then breaks away from this tradition by confirming and then by breaking down the benchmarks of a good detective story and the great detective.

Instead of the single detective based fiction *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* has multiple detectives. The members of the club work independently and keep certain facts to themselves, but as each of them come up with their report, truth is unfolded layer after layer and a form of coordination is achieved. So, instead of a linear story, there is a repeated going-over of the same case, each time adding a little more detail. The progress of solving the case is not circular or linear but spiral as one by one each member’s theory is repudiated or torn to pieces, innocent suspects eliminated and the case gradually gets closer and closer to home. Each member uses his own methods; inductive, intuitive, deductive. Each report appears at first to conclusively incriminate a new suspect and each time the readers and the members are convinced of the case being solved until the theory is demolished by one or the other loophole. And what began as an amusing intellectual exercise begins to have frightening emotional implications. What was claimed by the police as a motiveless murder, the handiwork of a lunatic finally turns out to be a meticulously planned crime of passion.

The book is also ridden with humorous remarks and situations. For instance, everyone in the club is more worried about their colleague solving the case before them and at one point it seems nobody is really concerned about finding the truth but rather cracking the mystery one way or the other. This negotiating or bartering of truth, is pointed out by Peter J Rabinowitz, in his article *How Did You Know He Licked His Lips* when he says, “Sometimes the search is not for some empirically verifiable ‘truth’ but rather for some coherent story, preferably one with enough persuasive power to gain acceptance from whoever needs to be convinced.” So, there is the pompous Sir Charles relying on his oratory skills to convince his audience rather than his facts. Like a court proceedings he goes about explaining his theory in weighty legal tones. Then there is Mrs. Flemmings whose theory arises from what she calls ‘one of the oldest dramatic situations’: eternal triangle. In an overly dramatic manner, she accuses Sir Charles. "Thou art the murderer!" she cries, which seem to come directly from some Shakespeare’s onstage play. And Sheringham, the only character on whom the readers have high expectations, who is confident of solving the case ends up with huge goof ups. He turns out to be a detective who has a strong belief in chance and coincidence for solving a case. He cites to Moresby a list of cases which have been solved thus. His reliance on chance not only belittles

the work of many detective works but also puts a question mark on the functionality of reason and logic.

There is great deal of fun and humour in the exchange of dialogues between the Circle members. The club turns into a mini-battlefield whenever there is repudiation of someone's theory, gaps pointed out, and the member comes down almost to insults. So here are a supposedly like-minded people of a club with no commonality. Berkeley seems to be in complete command, be it the hilarity or the mystery or the depth of the characters. Inspector Moresby's struggle with his cigar, his grappling with it reminds one of Sherlock Holmes. He is almost a caricature of him. Mrs Flemming looks like a 'superior cook'. There is also abundance of dry wits at the expense of the sub-genre. For instance, all that Chitterwick could recall about real detection is that, "a real, real detective, if he means to attain results, never puts on a false moustache but simply shaves his eyebrows" (Berkeley, 2010). Miss Dammers too makes some scathing remarks on the favourite tricks employed by detective-writers. Her statement that "You state a thing so emphatically that the reader does not think of questioning the assertion" shows how a detective-writer influences and determines the direction of the reader's thought process.

The naïve use of probability comes in for a serve as Mr Bradley uses it to convict himself, claiming he must have committed the crime in a moment of amnesia. Berkeley also takes a swipe at the sub-genre through observations made by Chitterwick. He exclaims, "In books of that kind it is frequently assumed that any given fact can admit of only one single deduction, and that invariably the right one. Nobody else is capable of drawing any deductions at all but the author's favourite detective, and the ones he draws (in the books where the detective is capable of drawing deductions at all which, alas, are only too few) are invariably right" (Berkeley, 2010). Chitterwick even has a chart used by detective story writers, tabulating each suspect and their salient features.

In the end it is poor diffident Mr. Chitterwick who reveals the truth. He keeps the readers in suspense for a long time, but his ending, the kind of 'thunderbolt surprise ending' when it comes, is totally unexpected and well worth the wait. Moreover, it presents the Crimes Circle with an awful dilemma of its own. And that Berkeley should make Chitterwick of all others to be the one to solve the crime is a big blow to the figure of great detective and the readers' expectations.

Knox's rule number seven, 'The detective himself must not commit the crime' is completely toppled as one of the detectives turns out to be the murderer. Even at the end, when the murderer has been revealed, the case does not seem to end as the murderer proudly walks out of the room saying, "I very much doubt whether you will be able to prove it" and the club is left in complete chaos. No actual proof could be furnished to take up legal proceedings against murderer. One isn't sure if the so called 'state of grace' that WH Auden talks about in his essay, "The Guilty Vicarage" is attained or not. However, Rabinowitz points out that 'novels that appear to trifle with conventions end up firmly wedded to them'. He explains that there might be subversion of conventions by suggesting that more than one solution might fit the available facts and that one might be tricked by the false stories, but there is always an ultimate difference between true and false accounts, and they can be distinguished in practice. Similarly, Berkeley might multiply the number of possible explanations, but ultimately determines one to be the true story. Thus, Berkeley seems to have critiqued the classical detective conventions without betraying their primary function as popular entertainment by keeping the 'puzzle-element' alive through the book.

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Faces of the New Eve: Chick Lit and Social Reality

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Abstract

This paper is about the urban women of this era who are bold and beautiful and ready to achieve any goal either with talent or with charms. These women are enjoying the fruits of the liberty which they have found after a long struggle against this patriarchal world and are still moving on. In this postmodern era, these post-feminist women challenge the conventional system by accepting the challenges for their rights. But this time the challenges are a bit different from the previous ones. This paper has taken two bold women writers Shobha De and Advaita Kala to illustrate the endeavors through their writings.

Keywords: Urban women, Power, Dominance, Liberty, Chick Lit, Feminist discourse, Subalternity, Stereotype, Indian Womanhood, Education

The roles that the women are playing in the twenty first century India are phenomenal. They have come a long way from being just a daughter, a wife, a mother, two potent forces that are shaping the country. They have crossed the threshold of their homes and stepped out into different professions that are significantly important for the economics of the country. Everyone is aware of Indira Nooyi, Swati Piramal, Falguni Nayar, Chandra Kochar and their likes who have carved niche for themselves and are taking full advantage of the fruits of globalization. This has been possible because of education which has given this new found independence. They now have a room of their own from the vantage point of which they speak a language of Independence. This was echoed many decades ago by Simone de Beauvoir, who had said that “the independent women is one who like men can move from immanence to transcendence in her public life activities and avoid sadomasochistic relationships in her personal life” (670). This comes from her feminist treatise *The Second Sex* (1949) in which she has ripped apart the veneer of the prevailing social order and has tried to instill that sense of grit and rebellion in women that is needed to fight against male hegemony. Culminating the

long standing debate begun by writers such as Margaret Fuller in the nineteenth century, Beauvoir also asserts that women can only free themselves by “thinking, taking action, working, creating on the same terms as men” (727). It is obvious that thought is changed by education and the ability to work and create comes from the power that is thus generated.

Earlier, because of unawareness and primarily due to traditional bondages women had willy-nilly agreed to subordinate themselves; and because of their lack of resources had taken the unequal distribution of power between man and woman as being predestined. Susan Moller Okin in *Justice, Gender and the Family* (1989) sums this up very succinctly

When we look seriously at the distribution between husbands and wives of such critical social goods as work (paid and unpaid), power, prestige, self-esteem, opportunities, for self-development, and both physical and economic security constructed inequalities between them, right down the list.(136)

What has happened today has been a redistribution of resources which has enabled a woman to gain a semblance of equality and shaken the shackles of dominance. Due to their strident endeavor to get out of the subaltern syndrome, women today are also breaking the walls between the object and the subject position. It was this that was the root cause of their oppression and clearly, linked to their body and to sexuality. Such notions are now being reconceptualized. But this is true of urban, middle class working women alone and we restrict to those and the texts referred to are by and about this seeming minority. We say *seemingly* because the reality of new India is that a much larger percentage of women are working than is statistically recognized.

Women continue to play a marginal and peripheral role despite constituting almost half the population with a critical role in production and social processes. The initiative taken by the early social reformers did resolve certain basic issues about the socialization process which resulted in better opportunities for education, employment, earnings, empowerment and entitlement to property, but still there is a long way to go and the fight against the long standing prejudices has yet not been resolved. Women in India still face enormous pressure to conform to social mores and the need to conform to traditional roles within families poses a barrier. Though women have made great strides in the corporate world in the last three decades, they are still too often discouraged from having careers that infringe too much on family life. On the other hand, it is also true that women who have achieved academically and economically are seen to be smart and savvy, often not in a positive way. Working women from the lower classes often take their economic independence too literally and

fall a prey to violence, but harassment at the work place is a pan-global phenomenon and India have its share of the evil. However, there is another side to the question. It is widely observed that earning power has allowed women to find a voice and form opinions of their own; women are increasingly becoming aware that a career will not cost them the neglect of their family and children but allow them greater power to spend not only on others but on themselves as well.

The new situation in which Indian women are now finding themselves in has made them more vocal about their experiences and writing about their felt worth has changed over the years. Gone are the days when women had to write under pseudonyms or write what was expected of them. Today, women can talk about anything and write it as easily. From Baby Halder, a domestic help who transcribes her life (*A Life Less Ordinary* 2006), the harshness of growing up- oppressed to Ravathi, a hijra telling the truth about herself, to Sagarika Ghosh, a journalist (*The Gin Drinkers* 1998) who writes about her experiences as does Barkha Dutt to others from different professions the writerly scape is growing every day. There are those who have received acclaim as novelists in their own right such as Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapoor, Gita Hariharan, Jaishree Mishra, Kiran Desai, and those who are in different professions and translate their experiences into the printed page for the world to recognize their being and becoming.

Women writers are a major force to reckon with and form a good seventy per cent of English writing in India. This was largely because of the opportunities that women have been given and the reforms enacted in the past couple of decades, especially in the field of education. As a result of promoting women's education more and more girls belonging to the middle class graduated and entered into the job market. Undoubtedly, they were subjugated and not only were the women's jobs considers secondary to the men's but also they were economically not at parity with the men's job- Nurses, teachers, stenographers and bank clerks was what they began with but gradually the new working woman made her mark and today through several years of agitation, litigation and gender sensitization as well as sexual harassment she has acquired a status of her own and at parity with her working counterparts. Today it seems that in India gender has become irrelevant in the new professions and as the world opens up wider and wider opportunities are increasing for those who have made ambition their prime goal in life. The old struggles are now irrelevant to the new age women and it seems that the Indian woman has definitely come of age. If we look at the writing and the publishing industry in India we witness a sea change, a complete face-over. Women are gathering

more laurels and their work are being appreciated for the precision, the meticulousness and the added humane touch which has delivered more goods than even before.

Travelling down the history lane from a Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt through the wide-reigning realm of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande to the now overly popular Diasporic writers on the one hand and 'chick lits' like Shobha De on the other, one is appalled by the quantum of output. And today in the era of *Metro Reads* one finds women from different professions trying to make a new mark through the narration of their diverse experiences- a woman from the media writing her reportage, a bank CEO, a head of a food industry, from the science and technology sector, from those in the upcoming call centers, everyone has a lot to lend to the feminist discourse of the day.

Shobha De is perhaps the first woman writer to write about the man - woman relationship with our inhibitions. Of Course there is Kamala Das who, through her poems and her *My Story* brought out the hypocrisy that pervades all human relationships. De differs from Das in the sense that De is more familiar with the darker side of the so called sophisticated section of society which parades as a decent crowd when there is sunshine. The sunset brings about a great transformation in social actions and cosmetics take over in bright lights or in more fashionable candle lights. Morality takes a back seat and people become shadows. De is familiar this world and she watches everything and writes beautifully about the women who have decided to refuse to continue with the conventional patterns of sexuality, subalternity and gender specific roles and attains sexual independence by moving against sexual subalternity.

Whatever Shobha De has portrayed, she has done it with a conviction that the readers may have a real feel of the life of people who are rich and powerful. In fact De's women are contemporary, urban; middle-class Indian ladies who are not out with a sole aim to overthrow the establishment or the social system in order to grab power. They are a set of well-equipped women- filthy rich, well-educated, talented, and unbelievably ambitious. These women are calculative and use men as means to an end, the end being a fulfillment of their aim to become rich, famous, and independent, as her novel *Snapshots* has rearranged the equation of the power game wherein woman either controls power or is in a position to ignore the prescriptions of male authority. The drama of the novel has the backdrop of Bombay in the last decade of the present century. None of the critics have analyzed the novel in light of Shobha De's women struggles of attaining economic independence while

moving against economic subalternity. Historically, thematically, economically and culturally *Snapshot* depicts woman against subalternity.

A very striking group of new modern women is emerging stealthily in Indian aristocratic society, which De presents in her novels with enthusiasm and creative energy. Her women in the novels show a continuation of similar behavioral traits of the new women. They are all daring women and have lots of stamina to face the stress and strain of the high society they live in. They are not afraid of facing every brick thrown in their way in their endeavor to lead lives on their own terms. Power, money, and fame are the three biggest aspirations of these women.

Let us extend the argument raised by Shobha De to women who are working and single as in the case of Advaita Kala's novel *Almost Single* which takes up the issues related with the hotel industry of today. The book is a racy rehash of the Bridget Jones' Diary, where the life of a twenty-nine year old career woman battling weight, wavering between self-esteem and hangovers and woefully complicated love life, captures the imagination of the readers. She typifies the hyperactive single woman in a big city who has to 'make it' in a man's world. She drinks, smokes, takes up challenging assignments is always on the verge of nervous breakdowns, and is a very conceivable stereotype of a guest relations manager in a five star hotel. Though almost irreverent of Indian womanhood, it is a reflection of the growing confidence of women working in metropolitan cities. The very fact that they are away from home and inhabit two worlds- the cosmopolitan city and the absolutely westernized ambience of a five star hotel- gives them a freedom that very few in India can think of. Their motto seems to be 'to enjoy life is empowerment'.

Like Pope's heroine Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*, eleven o'clock is too early to get up after a particularly dense hangover. This is Aisha Bhatia, Guest Relations manager who's 'most nights these days are girl's nights out'. She is an avowed alcoholic. She simultaneously tolerates her job, hates her boss, annoys her X, bonds big time with friends Misha and Anushka and routinely suffers umbilical cord whiplash. As part of her work she meets the rich, the bold and the beautiful (ugly as well), dines at five star luxury hotels, stays in them during her travels, can name old and new world wines with élan. Though well paid, her salary gets sucked by her breezy lifestyle.

The case that Advaita Kala's novel *Almost Single* makes though indirectly is that a good, profession oriented education is a key to a better life. The social, political, filial and even biological wrongs done to women which the women accepted and tolerated quietly not because they were not gritty or

defiant, but because, being ignorant, illiterate and uneducated they had not been able to recognize these as wrongs at all. A woman can recognize her own worth, can identify her need to be an individual in her own right, and assert herself in her own independent capacity only when she is educated. Education is the weapon she can use to fight the war of inequality between the illiterate and the educated. Education is the ornament that beautifies a woman forever and knows no barrier of age, race, class, or status. Education is the ticket that allows a woman to proceed on the journey towards economic independence. Education helps in raising the status of women in four ways. Education helps a woman to (1) earn an income in later life; (2) participate actively in public life; (3) determine her own fertility; and (4) achieve personal autonomy. The educated woman has both the choice and the bargaining power in getting a job and salary, unlike her uneducated sister. She can also exercise a choice about the location of the job in the sense that she may or may not choose to go out of the home in order to get productive work. The fact remains that the higher the level of education attained by a woman, the more likely is she to enter and remain in employment for a longer period.

Getting back to the polemics that Simon-de-Beauvoir floated with *The Second Sex* (1949) about women not being biologically but socially the other, chick lit dwells largely on the extremes of otherness that educated, urban young women can fall a prey to. In order to profess difference gendered entities like Aisha, Misha and Anushka flaunt their sexuality, which becomes the hallmark of women in 'show' spaces. They affirm to the notions projected by the French feminists regarding sex and sexuality, the cultural agenda of radical feminism.

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CREATIVE WRITING

SHORT STORY

Unni & The Unniappam Tree

Namitha Varma

Six-year-old Unni was in gloom. He had nothing to do, and his mother would not allow him to catch butterflies. He sat on the verandah peering at the road beyond the walls of the house, and imagining how much fun it would be to scale the wall and walk on its rim. The old tamarind tree in the compound had a beehive and ever since Unni was stung on his nose by a bee during one of his tree-climbing expeditions, he has kept away from it. Not that he was afraid of being stung again. But because his mother would bring hell down if she found out that he was bitten.

Unni's mother was a distressed lady. She had to run the whole house on nothing literally. His father, apparently, died when he was a baby, and he did not remember his father at all. It was kind of sad, but it did not bother Unni – he could not imagine how it would have been if he had to listen to both a mother and a father. Instead, he had a kindly grandfather who sat on his reclining chair and chewed *vettila paakk* all the time, except when he was sleeping.

Unni had an important job, though. He was a provider for the house in a way (so he told himself). His grandfather used to take him to all the Namboothiri functions that happened in and around the town. This was a time when it was essential to feed lunch to a certain number of Namboothiris to ensure that your *pooja* or *homa* or *yagya* went well. Unni's grandfather and he were among the Namboothiris who frequented these free food offerings since they had hardly any other way to quell their hunger. They would eat their fill, and a bit more (to last through the day or days, in case there were no functions the next day), and carry one person's lunch home. That packet would be for mother.

This was one of those days when there were no functions, and Unni was bored to death. He wished he could play with the other boys in the field, but his mother would not allow him to. “Filthy *aashaari* and *ezhava* kids. You have no shame. We may be poor, not yet *adharmi*. How dare you ask me permission to play with them. *Shiva shiva!*” she would say.

Plus, he was getting hungry. He looked up at the sun, which was burning right over his head, and decided that it was around noon. He tried not to think of food, but the more he tried, the more difficult it was to keep the hunger pangs away. He dragged some mud from the ground to the verandah and started fiddling with it, just to pass time. He looked in and saw his grandfather snoring away – that was his way of countering the hunger pangs; and his mother was patching up the kitchen with cowdung – keeping busy was her way of forgetting hunger.

Just then, he heard the gate of his house compound open. He ran to the gate – it was Pallavan Namoothirippad from the neighbourhood.

“*Hai, hai*, Unni, where is your grandfather? Tell him it is urgent. Come out, hey!” Pallavan Namoothirippad was obviously in great hurry. Unni ran into the house and shook his grandfather awake.

“Namoothirippad, get ready fast!” Pallavan Namoothirippad said, walking about the verandah in obvious urgency. “Our Shukran Namoothirippad’s mother has died early this morning. Didn’t you hear? They are not waiting long for the funeral. They want Namboorthiris for the *karmams*. There is going to be a lot of food also. Unni, you too go clean up and come!”

That announcement led to a flurry of activity in the household. Unni and his grandfather rushed to the well, drew three buckets of water and poured it over themselves. They took less than 10 minutes to get ready.

Having tied the *poonool* tighter around himself, Unni’s grandfather hurried out with Pallavan Namoothirippad. Unni followed them as fast as his little feet could take him. Unni’s mother stood behind the door and watched them leave.

After two long hours, when the sun had moved over to the west of the sky and shadows started getting longer, Unni and his grandfather returned. Unni was bouncing in unconcealed glee.

“*Amme... amme* look what we got!”

Unni’s mother came out of the house after having made sure that no other Namboothiris were accompanying her family. Unni ran into her at the door and showed her the small pack he held tight to.

“*Unniappams!*” The child’s joy was insurmountable.

Unni’s mother smiled. She looked at grandfather, who gave her rice and *sambar* wrapped in banana leaves. “The food was a treat,” he belched in content.

Unni counted the *unniappams*. There were four in all. He gave one to his mother – his grandfather nodded his head in rejection of Unni’s offer of one – and he knew he would have the three others to himself. He quickly gobbled up one, and covered the other two in a banana leaf plucked from the backyard. He can eat them tomorrow, and perhaps even the day after. Oh joy!

Unni was glad to have killed his boredom with food and long rituals. The rituals may appear boring, but it was Unni’s learning ground. He wanted to be a priest when he grew up. He looked up and noticed that the sun was far in the west now. It must be past three o’clock. He thought he might take a nap. He rolled a mat on the floor in grandfather’s room – his grandfather was already snoring! The rhythmic sound of the snore slowly put him to sleep, and he dreamt of *rakshasas* and *devans* and magic.

When Unni woke up, the sunlight was dim. Kneading his eyes, Unni thought it must be past six o’clock. His mother was taking bath – he could hear the sound of water behind the house. He mulled on an idea that occurred to him in sleep. If he sowed one of his *unniappams* in the backyard, would it grow into a tree? He dared not ask his mother – she would find in it a new reason to yell at him. His grandfather would not be able to reply to him through his *vettila*-packed mouth. It was worth a try anyway – even if it did not grow into a tree, he would still have one *unniappam* to eat the next day.

He waited until his mother was out of the bathroom and lighted the lamp. As she walked to the porch with her evening chant of “*deepam*”, he ran to the kitchen and picked out one *unniappam* from the package. He stealthily walked to the backyard and started digging with a small picket kept for

digging out yams and tapiocas. He buried the *unniappam* about one foot into the earth, and covered it with soil. He got one mug of water from the bathroom and poured over the place. “*Daivame*, let this grow into a tree!” Unni muttered.

The next day morning, Unni woke up and ran directly to where he planted the *unniappam*, ignoring his mother’s screams. There seemed to be no progress in the *unniappam* seed. Unni was disappointed. “Maybe I need to scare the seed a bit,” Unni wondered. He went to his grandfather’s room and opened his *vettila paakk* box. He picked out the penknife from it – the one that his grandfather used to scare him with when he was younger – and ran to his seed.

“Look here, *unniappam*. I have my grandfather’s penknife with me. If you do not germinate by tomorrow, I shall hack you to pieces with this!” Hoping that the *unniappam* was sufficiently scared, Unni went back to the house and carefully replaced the penknife. He may need to use it again!

He passed his day doing this and that, annoying his mother, catching butterflies, playing pranks on his grandfather, gleefully consuming his second *unniappam* (and wondering how tasty the fruits should be), and sleeping. The second day of the *unniappam*-planting dawned soon, and Unni woke up with a jolt. Would the penknife-scare have worked? He was curious to know.

He ran to the spot again, and there it was, a tiny shoot out of the earth. Unni was overjoyed, and did a little twirl in the air. “Aha! So you are scared of the penknife. Good! Let me teach you a lesson!”

He went and retrieved the penknife from the betel box again. He kneeled down at the shoot and bellowed, “Look here, *unniappam* shoot. If you do not grow taller by tomorrow, I shall hack you to pieces with my grandfather’s penknife!” He hoped the shoot would be as scared as the seed was.

Day Three: Unni’s morning started with a visit to the backyard again. Imagine his joy when he saw the shoot had grown into a plant bigger than himself! With more flutter in his steps, he ran to get the penknife. He looked the *unniappam* shrub in the eye and hollered, “Look here, *unniappam* shrub. If you do not grow into a tree by tomorrow, I shall hack you to pieces with my grandfather’s penknife!” Satisfied with the belligerence he had shown, he secured the penknife in the betel box and went out for the day’s play.

Day Four: Unni's now-ritual morning peek at the backyard resulted in a loud whoop. There stood a huge tree at the spot he had planted the *unniappam*. It was bigger than the tamarind tree. But there were no fruits on it yet! How many days would he have to wait! And then he remembered the penknife, and fetched it immediately.

“Look here, *unniappam* tree. If you do not bear fruits by tomorrow, I shall hack you to pieces with my grandfather's penknife!” Unni screamed at the trunk of the tree. There was a sudden pour of dry leaves from the tree, and Unni thought the tree must have quivered from the scare of his threat. *Aha!*

Day Five: And there stood the tree, in full bloom, laden with bright green *unniappams*. Unni's mouth remained frozen in an ‘O’ for a long time before he could believe the sight. For a moment, he wondered why they were green, but unable to resist the sight of kazillions of *unniappams* hanging from each branch, he climbed up to the nearest branch and picked out a large fruit. However, he frowned as soon as he bit into it – “Urgh! They are sour! *Daivame*, now I have to wait one more day for it to ripen?” Unni was getting tired of the ritual. It had been five days. But at the thought of all the boughs of this large tree filled with ripe brown *unniappams* he decided it would be worth the wait. He rushed to the *vettila paakk* box once more.

He gave the tree his best angry stare, and said in a calm manner that his grandfather used on him to emphasise the gravity of the threat – “Look here, *unniappam* tree. If your fruits do not ripen by tomorrow, I shall hack you to pieces with my grandfather's penknife!” Praying that he should not need to take out the penknife again the next day, Unni went back to his chores.

Day Six: Unni woke up with butterflies in his stomach. It was the D-Day. He no longer doubted if the penknife-scare would have worked – he knew now that the tree was a sissy. The anticipation was what he would do with the bounty of *unniappams*. If his mother came to know – it was a surprise that his mother had not yet spotted the giant tree in the backyard, but then she wouldn't notice it until it fell on the house, and Unni was sure such a disaster could easily be averted with his penknife-scare – but if his mother came to know, he might not be allowed to eat the fruits every day. She would say sweets are bad for teeth. However, he did not want the anxiety to be resolved easily. He brushed his teeth with a slender neem-branch, washed himself profusely, fetched a pail of water for his mother – making sure he would have enough time with the *unniappam* tree later. Finally, as the sun shone in its brilliance, Unni legged it for the backyard. As soon as he turned the corner, he smelt

air full of the sweet aroma of *unniappams*. His eyes bathed in the view of ripe brown *unniappams* hanging by dozens on the branches.

Unni lost no time and hopped on to the nearest branch. He could see the road on the other side of the wall – for the tree was very near the rear wall – and he mused if any of the other boys would see him on his *unniappam* tree and demand a share of his precious fruits. Determining not to give them any if they did, he plucked a beautiful-looking fruit, smelt it until his entire body tickled in its sweetness, and bit into it. Oh, the joy of a long wait! Rich, sweet savour melted in his mouth, and he took a deep breath. And plucked another, and gobbled it, and another, and another, and another....

Now, on the road near this tree, an old lady was passing by. She looked like a courteous Namboothiri woman, but don't we all know that Namboothiri women do not walk on the roads at this time of the day? She was, in reality, a *rakshasi* in disguise. Her name was Kuroopi. Kuroopi was hungry. The last meal she had was a feeble old Brahmin she picked up from a night sojourn three days ago. In this old age, it was becoming more and more difficult to lure people and provide sustenance for herself and her daughter, Raatra. Her daughter, though one of the ugliest young *rakshasis* in their realm, was a total dunderhead. Kuroopi could hardly expect Raatra to fend for herself, let alone for the two of them. Musing on how to get the next meal, the old woman, bent by age and worries, walked almost right into the wall surrounding Unni's compound. She returned from her thoughts with a jolt, and looking up, saw Unni munching on *unniappams*.

If Kuroopi was surprised by the *unniappam* tree, she did not show it. All she noticed was the young, tender Brahmin boy relishing *unniappams* as if they were mere nuts. Her eyes danced in delight at the possibility of having tender Brahmin met for lunch and dinner. Oh, and the blood! There's nothing, except perhaps blood of leeches that usually suck on a variety of human bloods, that comes so close to tasting the best as a young Brahmin's. Kuroopi had to think on her feet to lure Unni down the tree.

“Unni?” The old woman hollered feebly, as old women were expected to holler, at the boy. Unni was momentarily surprised, and dropped the *unniappam* he was nibbling at. *Who could be calling out for him?* He looked hither and thither, and spotted the bent old woman across the wall. He looked at her curiously.

“My child, I have had nothing to eat in two days. Would you be kind enough to give this old lady one of your *unniappams*?” the *rakshasi* pleaded.

Unni thought for a moment. He had decided he would not share his bounty with the boys, but this was an old woman. All old people should be respected and helped. Sighing, Unni picked up a large fruit and hurled it at the old woman. Unfortunately, the fruit rolled right over the wall to the sewage drain along it.

“Oh Unni, it fell into the drain! Can you drop another one?” the old *rakshasi* pleaded again.

Unni picked up another *unniappam*, a smaller one this time, and threw it down as carefully as he could. The *rakshasi*, however, contrived so that it fell into a ditch. Unni became a little impatient as the senile woman cried again, “Oh curse the ditch!”

Unni said, “I won’t have my *unniappams* wasted like this! Do you have a basket you can catch the fruits in?”

The old woman broke into tears. “We are very poor, Unni. Do I look like I would have baskets?”

Unni took pity on the woman. He was not allowed to go out to strangers, but if he could just lean down the branch and over the wall, he might be able to reach the old woman!

He did so, and as soon as Unni was within hand-reach of the *rakshasi*, she dragged him down the tree, and turned into her original form with hurling tresses, a pair of hungry red stares, and large canines – the ugliest female form Unni had ever lain eyes on. He was momentarily shocked out of his senses, and the *rakshasi* took advantage of that to tie him up into a sack dragged from her waistcloth, stuffed a piece of cloth in his mouth, and started walking home with the sack on her head.

Trapped inside the sack, Unni was following the track on which the *rakshasi* was carrying him. He was thinking of ways to escape, and more importantly, return to his *unniappam* tree, when the *rakshasi* stopped and leant the sack containing Unni to a wall. Unni heard her saying to herself, “Oh, the way is long. I need to attend nature’s call! Good to see a *kulam* here.”

Unni listened to her retreating steps, and tested the strings on the sack to see if he could escape. Being an old woman, she had not tied the sack very tight. Unni pried open the strings with his sharp nails (thank God he did not cut them despite his mother yelling at him every day to trim them) and

hustled out of the sack. He saw that the demoness was taking her own sweet time down at the *kulam*. He gathered muck, slushy leaves, thorny rotten plants and everything around the *kulam* as far as he could go without being discovered, and filled them into the sack until it looked as fat as if it contained him. He tied it up securely. Then he took to his heels, went back the track that the *rakshasi* walked with him, scaled the wall of his house and climbed up his tree. Only after he plucked an *unniappam* did he rest for a breath.

Kuroopi returned from her ablutions and hoisted the sack on to her head. She felt the sack heavier than before, and she muttered to herself for having to carry such burdens for a living. No sooner had she walked a few metres than the slush started seeping out of the sack on to her face. She muttered, “Oh Unni, stop urinating on me!” A few more furlongs, and the thorns started hurting her scalp. Kuroopi muttered indignantly again, “Oh Unni, stop poking me with your nails!” Almost a mile, and she was weary again, her sack growing heavier with the rotting sluice. She dropped the sack and realised that it sounded nothing like a tender, juicy young Brahmin boy being dropped. Hurriedly, she opened the sack and found that Unni had given her the slip. Enraged, she decided to bring the boy back into it, by hook or crook.

A tired Kuroopi walked back to Unni’s house. This time, she disguised herself as a male mendicant. Attired in saffron and twirling the long grey beard, Kuroopi walked around Unni’s house singing *bhajans* in praise of Shiva. She noted Unni munching on *unniappams* on his favourite tree, but pretended not to notice him. Unni, on his part, saw the mendicant and thought: “Ah, another of those *sadhus* from the north. Amma may give him something.” Unni’s mother too heard the gruff-voiced bhajan, but after scouting through her larder, decided that there was nothing the family could afford to give off; so she decided to ignore him. Unni noted with impatience that the mother was not coming out with anything to offer, and the annoying bhajans were destroying the sanctity of his time with the *unniappams*. He must have eaten almost fifty of the juicy-sweet fruits by now, but he wasn’t in the least bit tired or suffocated, and he had no intention of spoiling his mood for anything other than the *uchapooja* at the temple nearby.

The mendicant continued singing, and Unni’s patience was running out. He decided that he must do something. And what had he to offer the mendicant other than his juicy *unniappams*? With a heavy

heart, duty beckoning, Unni plucked four *unniappams* from the tree and walked to the door of his house.

“Here’s something for you,” he said to the mendicant. The saffron-clad sadhu leered at him, and before he knew it, he was back in the clutches of Kuroopi and in her sack, tied securely this time.

This time, Kuroopi had decided not to stop anywhere on her way home. She hauled the sack on to her head, cursing Unni’s weight, and walked as fast as she could. She took the easiest route through the woods, and avoided the major thoroughfares. Morphing from her real form to the common *ezhava* woman form within seconds in case someone came along on the roads would be difficult to achieve with such a huge weight on her head.

She rested the sack, with Unni squirming inside it tied and gagged, at the door of her house and took a deep, long breath. Oh devils, she was exhausted. She could hear her daughter Raatra working in the kitchen. Silly as she was, she was a hard worker. Kuroopi smiled indulgently before hollering to Raatra: “*Mole*, I’ve got a juicy Brahmin boy to eat today. You come here and take this sack from me!” Raatra came running out to see what her mother had brought.

“Take this boy and brew him into a nice stew. Keep one bucket of blood for me to wash my hands and legs in the evening. And another bucket for us to drink. Now, take care that you don’t open the sack until you are in the kitchen! He’s a slippery one. And close the door of the kitchen too. I’m going for a bath - you have no idea how tiresome it was to bring this one here!”

Raatra stared after her mother. Of course she had no idea how tired mother was. It was a marvel how she got new things to eat every day. Raatra had no idea how to do that. Perhaps there are trees bearing juicy boys, tender girls, withered old men? She would have stood there absent mindedly forever, but Unni squirmed in his sack and she was jolted out of her day-dream of human-bearing trees. She hauled the sack through the floor (and Unni screamed as loudly as his gagged mouth would permit it from this inhuman treatment) and stopped in the kitchen. She bolted the door, and carefully undid the sack.

In front of her stood the most beautiful human being she had ever seen. She was only sixteen years old and she’d never gone out of the house, but she had seen a large variety of humans her mother

brought home for food. Of course most of them would be already dead and some would also have started to stink - most older varieties of the human species did not survive the thought that they were in a *raakshasi*'s clutch. Yet, this Brahmin boy was so pretty that she almost did not want to eat him. She suddenly had the urge to pack him in a transparent box and keep in her room to play with every day. But she overcame that urge when Unni got up from the sack and started shaking his bound fists at her. She took off the gag-cloth and expected the boy to scream. But Unni did nothing of the sort. He stared hard at the dark, fat and uglier-than-his-grandfather girl. He knew he had to get out of the house, but there was no point trying to fight this girl. He was puny compared to her and he did not want Kuroopi to come after him again. He was thinking of the best way to win over the situation.

Raatra melted in his look, but did not show it. She went over to the stove, put wood in it and started lighting fire. Unni could only hop around, with bound feet, but Raatra kept an eye on him and he dared on test her strength.

“You work so hard. Harder than your mother,” Unni said suddenly, and Raatra dropped a pan.

“What?!”

“I said you work harder than your mother.”

“No... no... mother gets the food. I just stay in the house,” she stuttered, unsure of herself. Was it really easy to get food? Was she really working harder? She found it hard to believe.

“No, really. It's so easy to catch us humans. And your mother knows how to make us light as a feather when she picks us up. She doesn't have to do any hard work. But look at you - you have to cut us up into the right-sized pieces, cook us, keep aside the blood, oh, just so much to do! Poor you, you must be really tired, isn't it?”

Raatra held back a sob. So her mother really made her work hard while doing the easier parts herself? Was this the truth? Oh, this divinely pretty boy could not be lying. Such a nice round face, polite words, so much sympathy...

“I know an excellent way to relax after a hard day's work,” Unni continued. “May I show you? May be you can practice it after you cook me, and then you won't be tired any more. I feel so bad for you.”

Raatra looked unsure. What if mother came in while he was showing her the relaxation technique?

Unni sensed her thought. “Oh don’t worry about your mother. She is going to take a long time in the *kulam*. She won’t come in until all your hard work is over, so that she can just sit and eat the tasty dishes you cook!”

Now Raatra felt angry at her mother. Yes, this boy was telling the truth. That’s what mother did every time she went out - she’d say she’s tired, and take a long bath and not return until she is done with the cooking. How mean of her!

“Okay. Show me the relaxation technique,” she finally said.

“Oh you’ll have to undo the knots on my hands and legs.” Raatra did not look confident. “Don’t worry, I promise you I won’t run away. I just want to help you. And I hope you’ll enjoy eating me as much as I’ll enjoy helping you!”

When she’d opened the knots, he stretched himself well before he turned to her. “Come, lie down on this stone,” he said, pointing to the butchering stone in the corner of the kitchen. Raatra looked at him quizzically. “This technique needs lying on a stone, and that one’s the easiest to reach without having to go out,” Unni reasoned with her. Convinced, she lay on the butchering stone, as Unni came and stood next to her. “Now close your eyes and count to thirty.” The *rakshasi* teenager blinked - “You’ll run away when I close my eyes!” she wailed, almost in anger, her voice half-shattered in a realisation of trickery. But Unni checked her right away. “Oh no I won’t. It’s a promise. Hold my hand as you close your eyes then. That way you’ll know I’m right here,” he said.

Raatra was assured. She wiped the half-tear that had welled up in her eyes and held Unni’s left hand. She closed her eyes and began counting.

The moment the *rakshasi* girl closed her eyes, Unni clasped the butcher knife lying next to the stone and hacked at her neck. The naive little girl could not even open her eyes before she died.

Unni picked up two buckets and collected the dripping blood from the gross body, lining them up against the dining hall as Kuroopi had instructed Raatra. What he really wanted to do was run back to the *unniappam* tree, but he felt like he should end this *rakshasi*’s menace for once and for all. All

the great hero tales his mother had told him through his life came to him in snatches, and he knew he should stick it out and ensure that Kuroopi never bothered him or his family again.

Cutting up the *rakshasi* girl was not easy at all, but he did it as best as he could. He did not know if there was a right way to separate flesh and bones, but he went by instinct, calling on the spirits of all the gods and heroes in mythology who had to cut people up. Someone in the small of his mind told him to just go home, but someone else told him that if he left a dead daughter with a fierce *rakshasi*, she would be impossible to defeat. He loaded all the pieces of Raatra in a huge wok, added water, spices and salt, and put it in the stove that Raatra had already lighted. He closed the lid and ran up to the attic of the house, waiting for Kuroopi to return.

Kuroopi returned from a refreshing bath at the *rakshasa kulam* a few furlongs away. She called for her daughter at the door, but no reply came from inside. There was a sweet fragrance wafting through the air in the house, however, and she knew the food was ready. Good old Raatra! Silly she may be, but she was a dainty homemaker. The little girl might have gone for a bath behind the house, the indulgent mother thought.

In the dining hall, she found the buckets of blood ready, and the mere sight of them made her mouth water. She took a sip from a bucket, and “Oh my devil! This is the sweetest blood I’ve ever tasted in my life! All that *unniappam*, I’m sure!” she thought. She went into the kitchen and saw that a wok of Unni stew was simmering on the stove. She opened the lid and smelt the best dish of her life. She was contented. “Oh, I could die right now. This is diabolical!” she screamed in delight. She wondered if she should wait for Raatra - but then she’d be in in a few moments, *and how hungry I am!* Without further delay, Kuroopi poured out the stew into a bowl and started slurping away in pure joy.

From somewhere far away but near enough, words of a chant flowed into the house. “Eat, eat, eat your daughter, eat, eat, eat your daughter, eat, eat, eat your daughter, eat, eat, eat your daughter...”

What was that voice? What is it saying? Kuroopi wondered, reluctant to stop relishing the stew. Just as she was about to dismiss the voice, it became clearer, “Eat, eat, eat your daughter, eat, eat, eat your daughter, eat, eat, eat your daughter...”

What? Eat your what?

Clearer still, and louder, “Eat, eat, eat your daughter, eat, eat, eat your daughter...”

Eat your daughter!? *What?* Kuroopi stared at her bowl in livid terror, and frantically ran outside the house to the bath area. Raatra wasn’t there. She ran into all the rooms of the house - there was no sign of Raatra. Where was the girl? The chanting continued, driving her mad. “Eat, eat, eat your daughter, eat, eat, eat your daughter, eat, eat, eat your daughter, eat, eat, eat your daughter...”

She ran out of the house, tearing at her hair, she banged her head on the ground, she bawled at the sky. And there, at the attic window, was the head of the Brahmin boy. She grew red with fury, and ran up the attic, wailing inconsolably. “You pagan saint, you killed my daughter! You fed her to me! You made me eat the fruit of my own womb! You cooked her! You depraved soothsayer! You odious creature! You killed her!”

Unni jumped out of the attic window and crash-landed on the hay-bale he had already marked. And then he ran. It would be stupid to pretend to be brave now - the old hag was really really unhinged, and she was superhuman. Unni ran for his dear life, and all the hero tales he had heard offered him no solace. He tried to remember if *rakshasis* could fly. *No, I don’t think so.* But he looked behind him to ascertain the thing - and he saw Kuroopi running at him as fast as she could, which wasn’t much, and he did not turn back for a second look.

He took a turn on the path and ran into a well. In a split moment he decided that he should pretend to have fallen into the well. Maybe she’ll go back thinking him dead. All his heroic thought of ending a menace had left him the moment he saw her raging red visage. Kuroopi had not reached the turn yet. He took a huge stone and dropped it into the well, and hid behind the parapet of the well just in time. Kuroopi turned the corner to the sound of the stone dropping into the well, and when she looked in, all she could see was ripples. “You vile human, you think you can hide from me inside a ditch?” she screamed. Unni, from the other side of the well, thought he had heard it wrong. *Has the old crone gone mad? It’s a well!* But before he could finish the thought, the *rakshasi* had jumped into the well.

Luckily for Unni, deep waters can kill anyone who didn’t know how to swim - even *rakshasis*. After what seemed like eternity, he dared to peek into the well, and all he could see was a head of grey hair bobbing up and down. In a few minutes it stopped bobbing altogether.

Unni walked and walked and walked in the direction he thought his house lay. Of course he got lost a few times, but he figured it out in the end. It was late evening by the time he reached familiar territory. And as soon as he realised that he was in his town, he started running, huffing and panting, and shot through the house door in an instant.

Unni's grandfather was sitting on his leaning chair in the verandah chewing *vettila paakk* as usual. When he saw the boy running in, he yelled to Unni's mother, "Savitri, here comes your son! Ask him where he was!" But before his mother could see him, he ran to the well and drew out buckets of water to wash off the dirt and grime from himself.

"Where do you think you were! Do you know how worried I was! You're taking bath - you went out to play with those *ezhava* kids, didn't you! *Shiva shiva!* What do I do with this boy! He'll get rid of the only asset we have - purity!"

Unni let his mother rant. He glanced towards the backyard - his *unniappam* tree had risen to its full height and was beckoning him. Heaving a huge sigh, he dried himself, ran to the tree ignoring his mother and started munching on its delicious fruits.

Glossary:

Unniappam – a fried sweet made of rice flour, banana and jaggery, round in shape

vettila paakk – paan, betel leaf combined with tobacco, areca nut and slaked lime paste. Generally eaten after food as a digestive, but also serves as an intoxicant

Namboothiri/Namboothirippad – An upper caste (Brahmin) Hindu community, which fell to poor times with the end of feudalism

Pooja/homa/yagya – Various offerings and ritualistic deity worship performed according to Hindu scriptures

Aashaari – a lower caste in Kerala, literally carpenters

Ezhava – a lower caste in Kerala

Adharmi – without ‘dharma’ or righteousness

Karmam – rituals

Poonool – white thread worn by Brahmins around their body that they believe to be sacred

Amme – the way children call their mother in south India, variation of amma

Sambar – A vegetarian curry popular in south India

Rakshasas – ogres

Devans – Gods/divine entities

Deepam – a chant that accompanies the evening lighting of the brass lamp. Literally, lamp.

Daivame – an exclamation amounting to “Oh God”

Rakshasi – ogress

Kulam – pond

Bhajan – hymn

Sadhu – saint

Uchapooja – afternoon prayers

Mole – O daughter

 **POEM**

Latent Agony

Vijay Kumar Roy

Assistant Professor of English, Northern Border University, Arar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Unable to enjoy dogs' fights for bones in streets,
Crows' fights for flesh on roofs,
Scarce of open array of hanging beef for sale
No long muddled and terrible beards
Develop a fiery tinge of envy in their tone
Against the demeanors of natives.

Distinction in practices between them and the natives
Makes them realise immaturity in their changed faith,
Resulting in religious zealotry, empty boasts,
Vigorous enmity towards other faiths
And altering in true bigots.

Liability for improving their global image
Does not hint their deep rooted conviction,
Instead pernicious effect on brotherhood intensifies
And hinders in earning trust everywhere
Heightening their artificial boundaries of minds.

Social Animal

Vijay Kumar Roy

Assistant Professor of English, Northern Border University, Arar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Character of a social animal is a blend
Of the spirits of many animals
Built on the basis of required volume of appetite of his nature;
Dominance of one is displayed through his actions
While dealing with his friends and foes.
Feeding more to a dog within him
Bolsters his loyalty to a perception
That all strangers are intruders in his realm
Whose presence can shake his throne
Forged for earning phoney fame.

THE CONTOUR

Dreams - The world of Sleep

Ashif Hussain

Around midnight in my early teens,
I woke up panting and sweating in terror,
After being consoled by my parents, I realised
It was just a dream,

In this world with so much things,
Lies a phenomenon which may not exist
In reality but occurs with closed eyes,
A different world in sleep called – Dream,

Ages of all are affected by it,
During the course of resting hours,
When our body is inactive yet our mind choses to remain awake
And see many illusioned things

Dreams are hilarious, dreams are nightmares,
Some are euphoric, some are wicked,
Some makes us horrified, some fulfil a wish of reality,
Some we remember, some vanish from our memory,

I hit a six of Brett Lee's delivery,
I jumped of the twentieth floor and died,
I drove a locomotive engine on the road,
Though all in my dreams,

It might well be that dreams aren't reality,
Yet due to reality there are dreams.

TRANSLATION

Short Story

Sabuj Māchh (Green Fish)ⁱ

Ramkrishna Mandalⁱⁱ

Translated by Susanta Kumar Bardhanⁱⁱⁱ

Standing on the bridge at Lachhmanjhola, I am busy in throwing pitter-patter the food palettes on the river Gangā. It is the clean and transparent river. Fishes are appearing on the surface water in rows. Those are pecking at the food palettes; then making violent flaps with their tails they dip in the deep water. I have been overwhelmed with the sight. My *grihini*^{iv} is having *thākur darshan*^v in the nearby temple.

All on a sudden, I feel the soft touch of someone's hand on my back. Looking back I have a surprise-mixed-amazement. It seems to me to be a shoal of astonishments. That Mohini. It is the *simantini*^{vi} of black and grey hair. Her smile upholds her as a *kundakali*^{vii}. She asks, "Can you recognize me?"

2

With her affection and affection-generated-command, the wife of my colleague Banshida made Ma near-relative of their family. It was she who traced Sumitra and put her on my shoulder^{viii}. Mohini is the cousin of that boudi(sister-in-law) . She came from Jamsedpur and it was the flash of enticing beauty that struck a sudden violent deep chord in my mind.

There was a *sāl-sonājhuri* forest near our quarters. We two went walking together in the forest and in silent solitude Mohini kept her hand in mine. She clutched and pressed my hand softly and mildly said she, "In my life the married man is one and the only one". I insinuated, "This means that there are many unmarried men in your - -". Mohini brightened with soft smile said, "If any man offers love to me, I cannot refuse that. My heart feels for it."

3

The fish-related hobby is with me for a long time. Observing the fishes in my aquarium she uttered, “Fishes are very beautiful. Make me identify the fishes, please”. I replied, “You will be able to identify them automatically. See, the big golden fish is pecking the green one and also chasing it”.

My guest (Mohnini) was standing in close contact with my body. Having come to serve us tea, Sumitra said with insinuation, “As is the demeanour of the green one, it should get pecked. Throwing at Mohini such an arrow of speech and staring at her in askance, she left.

There was a trace of the torrent of chaos in the house. Even after Mohini’s departure, storm had been blowing for some days. Then Mohini - - - -

4

After the expiry of thirty years it is a sudden meeting with her. The world suddenly feels brimming with joy. While enjoying the play of the fishes in the river water, she asked ---“Is still the green fish still there in your aquarium?”

---“It is.” Immediately after uttering this, I pressed her hand on my breast. Due to the touch of a beautiful woman of fifty, drum beating started an old man’s breast.

Looking in the left, startled hind said in fear, “Boudi may be coming”.

I released her hand.

She said, — Let me go. Forget me not, *Joyda*^{ix}. The full moon suddenly seemed glum.

The green fish in my aquarium keeps on violently striking me with its tail.

- i) Ramkrishna Mandal’s short story *Sabuj Māchh* was published in his anthology named after this in 1407 (in Bangla calendar). It was published by Karunamoyee, Howrah.
- ii) Ramkrishna Mandal is Retired Reader in Bengali, Suri Vidyasagar College, Birbhum. He did his Ph. D from Visva-bharati, Shantiniketan, India. He has established himself as a literary figure in the Bangla. He has published several volumes of short stories, literary critical essays and humorous stories. He edits *Abakāsh: SahityaPatra*, a literary journal in Bangla.
- iii) Susanta Kumar Bardhan is an Associate Professor of English at Suri Vidyasagar College. West Bengal.
- iv) *Grihini* means *housewife* who looks after the family affairs. Here the speaker Sujoy refers to his own wife.

- v) *thākur darshan* means visiting and glimpsing the image of god or goddess in a temple and pay homage.
- vi) *Simantini* means a woman whose husband is alive.
- vii) *Kundakali* means a bud of a jasmine-like multi-petalled flower seen in India. Here this expression refers to the very beauty of Mohini during her laughter.
- viii) In the text the expression is *ghāre chāpiyechhen*. It is derived from *ghāre chāpāno* (literally means *putting someone on other's shoulder*) is a proverbial expression meaning *forcing to marry a girl*.
- ix) *Da* is the short form of *dada* meaning elder/older brother.

 **POEM**

AFRICA

Rabindranath Tagore

Translated by Nandadulal Chatterjee

Ecstatic were those primeval days
The Creator, when disgruntled with His own self,
Had been destroying the new creation again and again,
In those days of His impatient nodding every now and then
The tumultuous arms of the sea snatched you off, Africa,
From the bosom of Mother Earth that She was in the orient,
Bound you up, girdled in the tight embrace of vigilant majestic woods
Inside an inner retreat lighted miserly.
There, in the secluded hours of leisure.
You had been strong the mysteries of what is bard to penetrate
Acquainting yourself with signs of scarcely knowables
Spread on lands, waters and skies,
The invisible spell of nature inspired incantations
In the core of your heart, senses failing to comprehend
You had been hurling ridicules at the terrible
In the guise of the hideous.
What you wanted was to triumph over fear making yourself fierce
Attired in the top most glory of horror,
The trumpet of destruction rhyming destroyer's dance

Shadowed damsel, ah!
Under the veil of darkness, the human identity of yours
Was unknown to the eyes jaundiced with contempt

Those people came with steel hand-cuffs.
They – whose claws are sharper than those of your wolves,
The gang of those who kidnap man,
Blind in arrogance who are, and
More so than your dense forest impervious to the sun.
The barbarous lust of the so-called civilized
Exposed naked its shameless lack of humanity.
At your mute wailings, too much for tongue to express
Your steaming wooded paths littered with your blood and tears,
Clods of earth – ghastly disfigured,
Smarting under the spiked boots of the bandits,
Left marks indelible to last for ever
In the annals of your dire humiliation.
Beyond the seas, that very hour in morning and at dusk
Temples were resounding with church-bells in every quarter of theirs
In the name of kindly God,
Children were at play in their mother's laps,
The minstrel's rapture swelled in adoration
Worshipping that which is Beauty.

And now, that the evening stifles in thunderous gale,
In yon western horizon,
Now that the brutes dart from their hide-outs
Declaring in ominous howls the day's coming to a close,
Come ye, oh Poet! Ye who transcend the ages.
Take your stand, in this waning twilight of the night impending,
By the poor woman bereft of all honours;
Do say, "Pardon,"
Be that your message – the final say of your civilization
Amid the ferocious delirium,
Be that your last benediction.

About the Translator

Nandadulal Chatterjee was born in one of the noble families of Bankura District of West Bengal in 1923. As a young freedom fighter he was jailed in 1942 in Midnapore Central Jail.

Nandadulal worshipped Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore as his cherished idol and source of inspiration. He believed that the writings of “Gurudev” constitute an ocean to connect all the continents centring around ‘Sonar Bangla’. A teacher by profession and social worker by nature, Nandadulal embarked upon translating the writings of Rabindranath in English from 1978. The poem ‘Africa’ was translated by Mr. Chatterjee in 1978. The first collection of his translations was published in 2004 in the name of The Golden Barge of Poems & Songs by Rabindranath Tagore posthumously. Nandadulal completed his earthly journey on 06.05.2004.

The Changeover

Prof. Subodh Sarkar

Translated by Kalyan Bhattacharya

None talks about him but an assassin
Comes and peeps away every day, stooping
Whom do you belong to
And feathers scattered all around but you exist nowhere
Adamant by removing all traces of the corpse
The fried grains of accounts are vanished.

The river has mingled, so many rivers mingle, all natural
Take it for granted brethren, it's better to take it for granted, this is accurate
Air is nobody's brother or father, it's devoid of mercy and sympathy
We're secretly murdered in the kingdom of bloodshed
We're independent.

The Little Magazine

Prof. Subodh Sarkar

Translated by Kalyan Bhattacharya

Water is gradually rising from feet to chest
And from chest to throat
The simpleton bell rings across the doors
Yet my feet fails to remove a little from this room.

I know the story of Cassabianca
I know the story of Aruni and Uddaloke
But there's no such story that doesn't exist in aqueous' mourn
The turbid eddy current from the outskirts of the city
Gushes swiftly, bursting out with a tumultuous grudge.

From feet to chest and from chest to throat
The water rises up to the throat
All are boarding on a safe water-vessel
I'm all forlorn
Standing amidst the water up to the throat, on a sentinel
This symbol of relief, the dilapidated proof-sheet
Along with our little magazine.

How to be a Good Communist

Prof. Subodh Sarkar

Translated by Kalyan Bhattacharya

Walk over the grass bare – footed in the morning
Sit beside your old mother for while
Who sits quietly in the darkness of the evening.

Throw away the stickle at the sky for some days
And the hammer to the womb of the river
Let the star go back to the star – spangled.

Listen to the cry of birds,
You've damaged your left side on hearing the slogans
Lower your voice while talking
One can talk precisely lowering the voice
You won't have to think of thousands of boys
Take a little care of your own son
That leads him to be a decent human – being.

The Bio–Data of a Dog

Prof. Subodh Sarkar

Translated by Kalyan Bhattacharya

The father was a German
The mother resided at a lane of Entally
During her birth she weighed two and a half pound
Her nickname was Jeena
The women of the house would fondly call her
By the name Futchu, Futchumoni, Futchuan
She has a pitch – black coat, no tail.

She has her meal with eight pieces of beef at day – time
And a bowl of milk at night.
Now she is three years old
She hasn't bitten anybody till today.

It was only last year before election
When a gentleman clad on a dhoti has arrived
With folded hands begging for votes,
Jeena had chased him right upto the road
But she hadn't bitten him
If she had done so, her bio–data says
She herself would have gone mad.