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Editors  
Gautam Sarma  
Merry Baruah Bora

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## CONTENTS -

1. Interrogative  
*Sargasso*  
Abanti B
2. Persuasive  
*Ankita L*
3. Gazing through  
Wright's  
*Pronami*
4. "I am the  
non-European"  
*Nilanjan*
5. Alienation  
*Lowlana*  
*Arunabha*
6. Metaphor  
*Fiction: /*  
*Md. Soh*
7. Power and  
Study in  
*Jewelina*
8. Historical  
*Ghasira*  
*Deetima*
9. Sri Lanka  
James G  
*Prasenji*
10. Sri Lanka  
Violence  
*Sweta P*
11. Theoretical  
*Achebe?*  
*Arnab B*

## CONTENTS

1. Interrogating the Canon A Reading of Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*  
*Abanti Barua Bharali/5*
2. *Persuasion*: A Satire on the 18<sup>th</sup> Century England  
*Ankita Deka/ 10*
3. Gazing through the *Black Eye*: A Study of Richard Wright's *Pagan Spain*  
*Pronami Bhattacharyya/19*
4. "I am the darker brother": A Postcolonial Reading into non-European War Poetry  
*Nilanjan Chakraborty/29*
5. Alienation and Assimilation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*  
*Arunabha Bhuyan/38*
6. Metaphors of Water and Waterscapes in Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction: A Study  
*Md. Sohail Ahmed and Prof. Liza Das/45*
7. Power Equation in Contemporary Marital Relations: A Study in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*  
*Jewelina Chowdhury/55*
8. Historicism as Resistance: A Postcolonial Reading of *Ghasiram Kotwal*  
*Deetimali Barua Nath and Merry Baruah Bora/63*
9. Sri Lankan English Fiction: The Experience of Reading James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wajinaieke  
*Prasenjit Das/70*
10. Sri Lankan Fiction: Perspectives of Nationalism and Violence  
*Sweta Pegu and Tora Mahanta/83*
11. Theoretical Dimensions of Crossing the River: Chinua Achebe's *Chike and the River*  
*Arnab Kumar Sinha/90*



12. "A Journey in the Footsteps of Xuanxang": Mishi Saran's *Chasing the Monk's Shadow*  
*Kalpana Bora Barman and Krishna Barua/97*
13. Gender and the Writing of History: The Emergence of Counter-Modernity in Nineteenth Century Women's Writing in India  
*Arpana Nath/111*
14. An Intersection of History and Fiction: Reading *Swarnalata* and Women's Education in Colonial Assam Contiguously  
*Garima Kalita/118*
15. Resisting the Constructed Female: Reading *Neelachalar Gadya* through Postcolonial Lenses  
*Gautam Sarma/130*
16. Narrative of the Decolonized: Spivak in Translation  
*Tandra Das/143*
18. English(es) in the Postcolonial Contexts : Local Rules, Local Roles  
*Anindya Syam Choudhury/149*
19. The Tribes of North East India: Commoditization of Culture and Globalization  
*Namrata Pathak/157*
20. Contributions/167

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ABSTRACT: *Postcolonial literature we were made to read old canonical texts from E. Meenakshi Mukherjee on strategy in postcolonial st Jean Rhys, a West Inc rewrites Charlotte Bront discourse, confronting an in the canonical text.*

KEYWORDS: Can

"Revision - the act of rereading a text from a new critical d an act of survival."

The act of rereading cultural contexts is an i this area of literature w furthermore uses the c Rich says, an 'act of personal history. Jean of West Indies was a f a Dominican Creole i never feel a sense c recalls her lonely ch *Jane Eyre*, the fam traumatized by the Rochester locked up

Interrogating the Canon  
A Reading of Jean Rhys'  
*Wide Sargasso Sea*

Abanti Barua Bharali

**ABSTRACT:** *Postcolonialism makes us interrogate many aspects of the study of literature we were made to take for granted, enabling us, to interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe, from our own perspectives. An observation by Meenakshi Mukherjee on postcolonial rereading and rewriting, a significant strategy in postcolonial studies.*

*Jean Rhys, a West Indian writer through her novel, Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) rewrites Charlotte Bronte's 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, Jane Eyre creating a counter discourse, confronting and contesting forms of hegemony and domination inherent in the canonical text.*

**KEYWORDS:** Canonical, Recreation, History, Rewriting

"Revision - the act of looking back of seeing with fresh eyes of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for us more than a chapter in cultural history, it is an act of survival."

- Adrienne Rich

The act of rereading literary classics in relation to their historical, social and cultural contexts is an important postcolonial strategy. Many writers have entered this area of literature where they interrogate many 'classic' texts. The act of rewriting furthermore uses the classic texts as an important imaginative 'resource'. It is as Rich says, an 'act of survival for it not only recreates cultural history but also personal history. Jean Rhys, writer of many novels, a native of the Dominican island of West Indies was a person of mixed parentage, the daughter of a Welsh father and a Dominican Creole mother. She came to England when she was sixteen but could never feel a sense of belonging there. In her autobiography, *Smile Please* she recalls her lonely childhood and her adult life as one of alienation. After reading *Jane Eyre*, the famous nineteenth century novel of Charlotte Bronte, she was traumatized by the suffering and tragedy of Bertha Mason, the mad wife of Mr. Rochester locked up in an attic was also a West Indian Creole like her. She decided



then that a rediscovery of the character of Bertha Mason was very necessary from many angles. As she wrote to her friend, Selma Vaz Dias: "I read and reread *Jane Eyre* of course and I am sure that the character must be built up." The Creole in Charlotte Brontë's novel is a lay figure..... she must be plausible with a past... I am fighting mad to write her story..." (Litters, 156).

And write she does, Jean Rhys embarks on a journey of rewriting a piece of colonial history of West Indies and in doing so she also writes her own personal story. What emerges in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a highly acclaimed novel for she was awarded the W.H Smith Literary Award and her earlier works also comes into focus after this novel.

Through the recreation of the character of Bertha Mason, the mentally disturbed wife of Mr. Rochester and in rewriting the canonical text of *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys recreates the history of the times of West Indies, the islands of Jamaica during the period after the Emancipation Act of 1834 when slavery was abolished thereby situating the novel in a proper historical time frame. In so doing, Rhys brings in historical truths and relates the events in the novel to actual happenings, providing a logical, truthful realism to her narrative. She thus spells out the details of the historical forces that shaped the life and experiences of Bertha Mason and the likes of her (the decayed Creole community) who live in a state of paranoia. Forced to employ their former slaves (who hate them) living under threat of murder and rape in isolated plantations, they become victims of mental diseases. Thus Antoinette (Bertha) or Annette's (her mother) mental aberration falls into place.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is also a deeply psychological novel where the character analyses of the central figures relates to social truths. *Sargasso Sea* points to social and historical truths of the time of rich Creole women become pawns in the hands of white men who marry them for their money as in the case of Rochester who marry Antoinette (Bertha) in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. They become psychological wrecks, unaccepted, unloved, and lonely in an alien land. This novel is a significant text not only as a socio-cultural account of a marginalized race but also as a narrative exposing the inhuman cruelty to a mentally diseased person. The reasons of the madness of Bertha Mason's madness not only talks about the psychological conflict between a helpless woman and a mercenary opportunist man but the historical and social factors leading to this mental imbalance. This reconstructs the colonial history of West Indies from the Creole point of view. As Ellen Friedman rightly observes:

"Rhys enters and reimagines Brontë's text- glossing, subverting, reversing and transforming it- writing it into her own time and her own frame of reference". (*Breaking the Master Narrative: J. Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea*, 117).

Critics like Ashish Nandy have explored the psychological contours of colonialism in the rulers and the ruled and have emphasized that it impacts both the colonizer and the colonized. The fact that it is a 'shared culture' (Nandy, 2) implied

that it brought to fore, qualities is egotism, feelings of hierarchy, po ways that created particular situatio Bertha Mason (Antoinette) can b

A novel of multiple perspect of history, the history of the tim consciousness". This has led to "enlarging the panorama of hum (Jain, 115) was a rediscovery of of belonging.....a white cock by the blacks, Antoinette is a experienced alienation all her struggle to find herself but also character right in the centre, br of *Jane Eyre* has turned into a as a writer and a human being. lunatic in the 1840s..." (Litters

The recreation of histor Rhys, for the writer has offer cult text (*Jane Eyre*). In recr out from the dark depths of : counters racial hegemony. T oppositional reading with th *Jane Eyre* has been celebrat has often been praised for (Rich, 106). However Jean I and gives the invisible chai In doing so, the "imperial Brontë's complicity with th is a counter discourse to th The connection between t Jane encounters Bertha description of Bertha as shade at the end of the r whether beast or human some strange wild animal

In *Wide Sargasso S* subject of Brontë's text. never speaks but Rhys specific identity. Rhys' same time, the original :



that it brought to fore, qualities in the people hitherto unknown. The mixture of egotism, feelings of hierarchy, power and self esteem allowed them to behave in ways that created particular situations. The cruel behaviour of Mr. Rochester towards Bertha Mason (Antoinette) can be situated as a paradigm.

A novel of multiple perspectives, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is significant as a rewriting of history, the history of the times linked with the personal story, "her personal consciousness". This has led to a broadening of the perspective of the novel thus "enlarging the panorama of human experiences." The rediscovery of Bertha Mason (Jain, 115) was a rediscovery of Jean Rhys herself after 30 years: "never felt a sense of belonging.....a white cockroach..." Rejected by the white world and spurned by the blacks, Antoinette is a woman in conflict like her creator Rhys who had experienced alienation all her life. In the character of Antoinette, Rhys not only struggle to find herself but also rewrite the canonical text of *Jane Eyre* and place the character right in the centre, bringing her out from the margins. Rewriting the story of *Jane Eyre* has turned into a personal saga with the rediscovery of the self both as a writer and a human being. As she says: "eventually I got back to being a Creole lunatic in the 1840s..." (Letters, 156).

The recreation of history has been a persistent concern in the novel by Jean Rhys, for the writer has often been disturbed by imperialist bias of the otherwise cult text (*Jane Eyre*). In recreating the character of Bertha Mason by bringing her out from the dark depths of a chained beast like existence to the centre stage, she counters racial hegemony. Thus this novel emerges as an important example of an oppositional reading with the emphasis on alternative viewpoint. In recent times, *Jane Eyre* has been celebrated as a powerful feminist tract and the protagonist Jane has often been praised for her, "passionate protest against patriarchal authority." (Rich, 106). However Jean Rhys' novel provides an alternative view to the forefront and gives the invisible chained "creation" of Bronte's text, a voice and an identity. In doing so, the "imperialist bias in Bronte's text stand exposed" and Charlotte Bronte's complicity with the imperialist design become palpable. What now emerges is a counter discourse to the canonical text both at the thematic and historical level. The connection between the two texts take off from the point when in *Jane Eyre*, Jane encounters Bertha Mason kept locked up in a solitary confinement. The description of Bertha as seen by Jane for the first time is significant: "in the deep shade at the end of the room a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was whether beast or human one could not at first tell....it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal." (Bronte, 321).

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys accords the narratorial voice to the non speaking subject of Bronte's text. Bronte's Bertha only groans, screams and mutters but she never speaks but Rhys argues that she reasons and speaks back asserting her specific identity. Rhys' rewriting gives "voice" to the "silenced other" and at the same time, the original story of Antoinette and her mother Annette is revealed. Their

historical tragedy, the sufferings, violence, fear and exploitation both sexual and mental kill Annette and leave deep psychological scars on Antoinette. She is therefore not a mad woman in Rhys' text but a suffering woman seeking love and protection but receiving none. The "bestial mad woman" is revealed by her own narration.

Other postcolonial readings point to *Jane Eyre* as a text where both Mr. Rochester and Jane can be blamed for silencing Bertha, the Creole woman. Jane's complicity in accepting Rochester's explanation of the reasons of Bertha's degenerate, lunatic and bestial state is particularly unacceptable. This is specially so in consequence to her (Jane) image as a suffering woman who is celebrated as a 'proto feminist', struggling for self determination both for herself and others like her. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's monumental work, *Mad Woman in the Attic* provided new dimensions to Bronte's popular novel. Bertha is treated by them as Jane's "truest and darkest double, she is the angry aspect of the orphan child (Jane), the ferocious secret self that Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead (*Mad woman*, 360). Bertha is treated by them always in relation to Jane and never as an individual. In this context, the reading of Bertha's character, her lunacy as well as her racial heritage is obliterated in the personality of Jane Eyre. So Gilbert and Gubar's proto feminist heroine who struggles successfully to achieve female self determination, in an otherwise "patriarchal and oppressive world" (*Mad Woman*) falls short of her promethean role.

It is therefore only natural that post colonial writers of the subaltern group like Gayatri Spivak have highlighted the fact that Jane's journey from subservience to self determination could not have been possible without the total eradication of Bertha Mason and that Jane Eyre's journey towards marriage, fulfillment and self determination cannot occur without the destruction of Bertha Mason. In this context, she outlines the colonial strategy of the transformation of the 'self' for the sake of the successful operation of the colonial enterprise. "Bertha must play out her role, act out the transformation of herself into that fictive 'other', set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction." (*Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism*, Spivak, 270).

The recreation of history already a powerful motif in the text of *Wide Sargasso Sea* emerges in the form of the metaphors and symbols strewn throughout the narrative. Fire is a powerful symbol of resistance of the colonized people throughout the colonial era particularly in the West Indies. Bertha's attempts to set fire to Rochester's chamber while he is asleep and the eventual burning down of Thornfield House can be paralleled to the "fiery resistant" activities of the slaves in Jamaica. A historical fact of the Baptist war of the 1830s to 40s was the resistance by the fire of slaves when erstwhile colonial households were burnt down, spelling their anger and call for freedom. Antoinette in *Sargasso Sea* significantly dreams of setting fire to Thornfield Mansion and leaping to her death; while in the hasten text, Bertha

actively sets Thornfield and Roches candle and walks out with the con brought here and what I have to do.

Rhys' narrative is a subversive contesting hegemony and challenging narrative of psychological and psychic much of which is very personal to the and her adopted land, England, she here and there. As Helen Carr summarises history, even though she can be called Empire...." (Rhys, 1996, 18).

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actively sets Thornfield and Rochester on fire. Though Antoinette holds a burning candle and walks out with the conviction that, "now at last, I know why I was brought here and what I have to do." (Rhys, 1968, 90)

Rhys' narrative is a subversive revision of the canonical text, *Jane Eyre* contesting hegemony and challenging patriarchy. But more than that it is modern narrative of psychological and psychic suffering, of conflict, insecurity and trauma, much of which is very personal to the writer herself. Related by birth to the Caribbean and her adopted land, England, she was constantly in a state of mental conflict both here and there. As Helen Carr summarizes: "Rhys was a colonial in terms of her history, even though she can be considered a postcolonial in her attitude to the Empire...." (Rhys, 1996, 18).

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God had created (Woman  
A good wife should be li  
But receives its stamp fr  
Be lawful for her to will  
Husband should approv

### Persuasion: A Satire on the 18<sup>th</sup> Century England

Ankita Deka

**ABSTRACT:** *The discourse in Jane Austen's novels attempt to reveal the underlying mechanics of the society while foregrounding issues related to the institution of marriage and family. Through the nuanced prism of satire and irony, she reveals the complex dynamics of the family and relationships therein in relation to the situational context of the contemporary English society. Marriage and family emerge as socio-cultural institutions which the novelist critiques through subtle humour and irony while revealing the hypocrisies and double standards of the society that eventually shapes and models such institutions. This paper makes an attempt to look at Austen's novel Persuasion to arrive at an understanding of the dynamics of 18<sup>th</sup> century English society while engaging with the novelist's use of satire as a device that enables her to achieve the desired effect.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Satire, domesticity, marriage, morality, ideology*

#### Introduction:

Jane Austen (1775-1817), the master of comedy of manners, used 'satire' as a tool to criticize the socio-cultural defects of 18<sup>th</sup> century England. She pointed the arrow of satire to attack specially on the real-life sketches like fools, hypocrites, snobs and the petty ideologies of the prevailing society. In *Persuasion* (1817), Miss Austen questions the identity and freedom of a helpless woman whose aristocratic family judges her partner on the basis of promoting her social image and fortune other than her happiness and contentment. Austen also satirizes the empty show-off and the meaningless obsession of the Elliots towards wealth and rank, which ultimately represents Victorian rigidity and the decay of 18<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic society in general.

#### Defining 18<sup>th</sup> Century Woman:

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the woman was held to be a common unit of the family, whose presence needed only to satisfy her master's desires. But her own wishes probably seemed to remain silently in the pages of a mere diary only. A century earlier a Dorset shire clergymen described a similar image of 'feminine propriety'. Addressing to a bride, this clergyman states:

During Jane Austen's time she was restrained by strict code of modest, submissive, masking to perform equally or better than : divorce, nor regarded married renowned English writer John

*Wit is the most dangerous  
With great discretion at  
Your good sense... If you  
Profound secret, especially*

Concerning those petty to the reformation of 'propriety by all. Almost all the heroines unconfined by the social ties governing her feelings and : Woodhouse, while controlling the bold and uncompromising (1813) has broken all the traditional **Marriage as an economic institution**

Jane Austen belongs to a generation that imagined that a girl must get married (not her true love), on her socialization displays her adherence to the codes of prevailing social norms. Her rush of husband hunting may be witnessed in almost every novel. Mary Wollstonecraft strongly advocated *the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft

*Do passive indolent women  
To the present women  
Perform their part? Do  
Accomplishments have  
merely contribute*



*God had created (Woman) for the profit and comfort of man.  
A good wife should be like a mirror which hath no image of its own,  
But receives its stamp from the face that looks into it... it should not  
Be lawful for her to will or desire what she liked, but only what her  
Husband should approve and allow...*

(Poovey, 3)

During Jane Austen's time, the upper class woman of 18<sup>th</sup> century England was restrained by strict code of conduct. Women were expected to be virtuous, modest, submissive, masking their intelligence and abilities and were forbid to perform equally or better than a man. The English law at that time also did not allow divorce, nor regarded married women much like the property of her husband's. As a renowned English writer John Gregory instructed his daughters in 1770s:

*Wit is the most dangerous talent you can possess. It must be guarded  
With great discretion and good nature ... Be ever cautious in displaying  
Your good sense...If you happen to have any learning, keep it a  
Profound secret, especially from the men...* (Gregory, 36-37)

Concerning those petty ideologies, Jane Austen turned her creative energies to the reformation of 'propriety' in the hope of discovering a 'new world' cherished by all. Almost all the heroines of Austen appear as most challenging, unfettered and unconfined by the social ties and emerge to shine equally as man. Elinor while governing her feelings and sensibilities in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Emma Woodhouse, while controlling and meddling in other's affairs in *Emma* (1815) and the bold and uncompromising nature of Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) has broken all the traditional mold of feminine conformity of her age.

#### **Marriage as an economic institution:**

Jane Austen belongs to an age in which it could be universally believed and imagined that a girl must get married and should marry a rich man (even though the man is not her true love), only to change her social status and to secure her future. Her socialization displays her in such a way that she starts to expose herself under the codes of prevailing social ideologies and is spontaneously wrapped up in the rush of husband hunting March. And such scenes of husband hunting system can be witnessed in almost every novels of Jane Austen, which the proto feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft strongly opposed. In her most cited book, *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft states:

*Do passive indolent women make the best wives? Confining our discussions  
To the present moment of existence, let us see how such weak creatures  
Perform their part? Do the women who, by the attainment of a few superficial  
Accomplishments have strengthened the prevailing prejudice,  
merely contribute*

*To the happiness of their husbands ?*

(35)

Like Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen was also acutely aware of marriage as an economic institution. And her stories deal with the above hidden realities of women's lives, which for women, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century meant 'living in a straightjacket of propriety' (Wollstonecraft, 10). And women's education consisted of a smattering of 'accomplishments', a variety of ultimately some useless skills that Wollstonecraft said only to "sacrifice women's strength of mind and body in exchange for libertine notions of beauty." (Wollstonecraft, 10)

Austen's letters to Fanny Knight acquaints us with her comic skepticism about marriage as the institution of constituting unavailable feminine grace and of financial security, and her *Persuasion* crystallizes that skepticism:

"...single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor-  
which is very strong

*Argument in favor of matrimony...*"

(To Fanny Knight, Chawton, Thursday, March 13, 1817)

She also suggested Fanny regarding her marital affairs in the same letter as:

"Do not be in a hurry; depended upon it, the right man will come at last, you  
Will in the course of the next two or three years, meet with somebody more  
Generally unexpected than anyone you have yet known..."

(To Fanny Knight, Chawton, Thursday, March 13, 1817)

The position of Anne Elliot in Austen's *Persuasion* highlights those incredulities of Austen regarding marriage. She portrays the situation of Anne more inhospitably than that of Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* and of Fanny in *Mansfield Park* (1814). The family opposition and the advice of her friends forced her to abandon Frederick Wentworth for his unmatched social status, to whom she was engaged and the only man she ever loved. Humiliated and agitated, Wentworth left Anne in pain and despair. But very soon he raises his profession and becomes a rich man and overcomes his past grief. While Anne stepped in regret remains the same, losing youth and beauty day by day. Eight years later when they meet again, Captain Wentworth is found still handsome and agreeable, and is in search of a wife. Anne Elliot, wan, sad and youth less observes everything silently in front of her eyes. She can see the fresh smiles of the younger beauties hunting for him. Here Anne is depicted as a silent victim for not being able to get her love back. Her situation makes us feel how the social idealism tortures her silently and condemned her to suffer like that, because she is a woman and must not utter anything in favor of her. As in the words of John Gregory:

*You cannot plunge into business, or dissipate yourselves in pleasure and riot,  
As men too often do, when under the pressure of misfortunes. You must bear  
Your sorrows in silence, unknown and unpitied.*

(Gregory, 13)

***Persuasion and the other novels of ?***

Marriage as the 'institution of the novels of Miss Austen. In *Persuasion* a wrong thing- indiscreet not deserving it" (Hopkins, 143-58) deserving Wentworth and encourage to social status and financial security.

Similarly in *Pride and Prejudice* daughters that how the only "business (Chapter 1) Austen satirically reveals chapter throughout the conversation:

*Is he married or single? Oh! Man of large fortune; four or five For our girls!"*

Similarly Emma Woodhouse, concerned Harriet's thought from an honest proposal to Harriet; only because she than Martin having a charming son. Harriet's marriage with the vicar, not Emma herself instead of Harriet.

Self-knowledge through self-novels. In *Emma*, Emma attains her business of match-making and then and was always in love with Mr. Knight. In *Persuasion* the imposition of her deserving suitor, and then the perseverance in patience and force of experiential self-knowledge in her status. Although in many ways she her self-knowledge. Similarly in *Pride* the pride of Darcy keep them apart. been corrected and Darcy's pride is realized that they are perfectly suited. **Rank, wealth and consequences!**

The story of *Persuasion* also shamelessly occupying all the aspects of polishing, projected wealth and status the equal or higher rank. Austen's Elliot household- vanity of one!



(35)

**Persuasion and the other novels of Miss Austen:**

Marriage as the 'institution of financial security' always plays a vital role in the novels of Miss Austen. In *Persuasion* Anne was persuaded "to believe the engagement a wrong thing- indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success and not deserving it" (Hopkins, 143-58) and hence was discouraged to break with the deserving Wentworth and encouraged to marry with the undeserving Mr. Elliot due to social status and financial security.

Similarly in *Pride and Prejudice* we find Mr. Bennet, the mother of five young daughters that how the only "business of her life is to get her daughters married." (Chapter 1) Austen satirically reveals her skepticism about marriage in the same chapter throughout the conversation of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet:

*Is he married or single? Oh! Single, my dear to be sure! A single  
Man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing  
For our girls! "* (Chapter 1)

Similarly Emma Woodhouse, out of her aristocratic snobbery diverts the simple minded Harriet's thought from an honest farmer Mr. Martin, who has made a marriage proposal to Harriet; only because she thinks Harriet must deserves someone better than Martin having a charming social status. And thus forms a plan to bring about Harriet's marriage with the vicar, Mr. Elton, who actually paying attention towards Emma herself instead of Harriet.

Self-knowledge through self-deception is another common theme in Austen's novels. In *Emma*, Emma attains her self-knowledge towards the end through her business of match-making and through deceiving her own self that, she is in love and was always in love with Mr. Knightley, which gives her tremendous happiness. In *Persuasion* the imposition of Lady Russell on Anne, that Wentworth is not her deserving suitor, and then the long wiling separation, Anne herself exercises perseverance in patience and forced cheerfulness in Mary's company, develops an experiential self-knowledge in her that love never demands deserving, fortune or status. Although in many ways she remains silent unlike Emma even after attaining her self-knowledge. Similarly in *Pride and Prejudice*, the Prejudice of Elizabeth and the pride of Darcy keep them apart forever. But when Elizabeth's prejudices have been corrected and Darcy's pride is softened both attained their self knowledge and realized that they are perfectly suited to each other.

**Rank, wealth and consequences in *Persuasion*:**

The story of *Persuasion* also germinates around the Elliot family, who lives shamelessly occupying all the aspects of life – veiled with superficial vanity, artificial polishing, projected wealth and status, image and the insulting of any people lacking the equal or higher rank. Austen satirically represents the vanity and pride of the Elliot household- vanity of one's personal appearance and pride in one's social

(Gregory, 13)



position. The novel opens with the theme of pride in the character of Sir Walter Elliot, and his eldest daughter, Elizabeth. The Elliot pride is also seen in Mary Elliot and in Sir Walter's heir Mr. Elliot. It is a pride which rests on social distinctions and empty show-off. Even Lady Russell, the old friend of the family, suffers from the same fault of pride and vanity. About Sir Walter Elliot, Austen says at the very beginning of the novel that:

*Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character:  
Vanity of person and of situation...* (Austen, 2)

He is a man who gives much emphasis on his physical appearance and his social status, and thus we can claim him to be one of the most narcissistic portrayals of Austen. In chapter 3, the snobbery of Sir Walter Elliot is reflected when Mr. Shepherd refers to the curate, Wentworth, as a gentleman, Sir Walter replies:

You mislead me by the term gentleman, I thought you were speaking  
Of some man of property: Mr. Wentworth was nobody, I remember...

(Austen, 21)

He showed the same snobbery, when he disapproved of the match between Anne and Frederick Wentworth, because he had no fortune. And the final summing up of Sir Walter is also satirical, where he no longer objects to Anne's marriage to Captain Wentworth, because he has twenty-five thousand pounds and is well placed in his profession.

Part of the novel, we also recall that the Elliots are forced to leave Kellynch Hall because they could no longer maintain the living standard required to lead a life in such an aristocratic house. And when they rent out Kellynch Hall to the Crofts, they decided to move to Bath, where they "*might be important at comparatively little expense*" (12). Their treatment towards the Dalrymples is also ridiculous. We can recall how the Elliots seek their attention desperately as the Dalrymples belong to a Viscount family. Here we must not forget Mr. Elliot, the heir of Sir Walter, who chooses to marry a woman of low-born, rather than Elizabeth only for the sake of money.

But the ironical tone in each of the character portrayals, ultimately suggests that all those clinging pursuits of maintaining an image and social importance are entirely hollow and superficial. And this is shown by Miss Austen with the appearance of the Musgroves, who are wealthy enough to live quite comfortably almost ignoring their personal image and rank. They are in all respects plausibly happier than the Elliots as they don't seek others' attention to be happy. While, characters like Sir Walter, Mr. Elliot, Elizabeth and Mrs. Clay- are depicted as too manipulative, blemished and frivolous one. Even a sensible woman like Lady Russell is also portrayed as flawed when she terminate the deserving Captain Wentworth and recommends the greedy Mr. Elliot to Anne. But Anne finally proves that there

is nothing like being educated, w  
**Morality, Modes and Manners** is

Unlike her other novels, *P* manners can merely be a façade being unveiled. Throughout the n good manners almost manipula  
Wentworth:

*His manners were so exact  
So particularly agreeable,  
Only one person's manner.  
Perhaps, equally good."*

But very soon his veiled in where Anne realized that "*Mr. E*

*man, who has never had any bet*  
Equally remarkable the ar spite of being a widow and a r intimacy with Sir Walter Elliot, c Elliot. But her overall identity is she elopes with Sir Walter's heir

Apart from Mr. Elliot and maintaining a social image, his of 18<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic soci enjoys with people brooding ov the Dalrymples, or by flattering own daughters on the basis of t the character of Sir Walter Ellic for his dear daughter's sake, w private disappointments in his the Kellynch, yet he continued dreadfully into debt. Equally re Sir Walter, still centering on ra Baronetage- he has not change

But part of the novel, w Hartvilles and the Musgroves, altogether indicate lack of m outward elegance. Austen's po perfect blend of morality an m sweet enough without being s

**Domesticity:**

Another striking satirica

is nothing like being educated, wealthy, titled and sensible at one time.

#### Morality, Modes and Manners in *Persuasion*:

Unlike her other novels, *Persuasion* demonstrates how the superficial good manners can merely be a façade, where the veiled characters are disdained after being unveiled. Throughout the novel we recall how William Elliot put on a robe of good manners almost manipulating Anne that he is 'equally good' as Captain Wentworth:

*His manners were so exactly what they ought to be, so polish, so easy, so particularly agreeable, that she could compare them in excellence to only one person's manners. They were not the same, but they were, perhaps, equally good.*" (Austen, 133-134)

But very soon his veiled immorality is unveiled by Mrs. Smith in chapter 21, where Anne realized that "Mr. Elliot is evidently a disingenuous, artificial, worldly man, who has never had any better principle to guide him than selfishness." (198)

Equally remarkable the artful flattering of Mrs. Clay towards the Elliots. In spite of being a widow and a mother of two children, she develops a scheming intimacy with Sir Walter Elliot, only to fulfill her cunning pursuit of becoming Lady Elliot. But her overall identity is revealed almost ridiculously towards the end when she elopes with Sir Walter's heir Mr. William Elliot.

Apart from Mr. Elliot and Mrs. Clay, Sir Walter's vice of vanity, his manner of maintaining a social image, his artful polishing ultimately reflects the overall decay of 18<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic society. Throughout the novel we find how Sir Walter enjoys with people brooding over his vanity either by reflecting it like Elizabeth or the Dalrymples, or by flattering it like Mrs. Clay. He even discriminates between his own daughters on the basis of their physical appearance. Austen satirically reveals the character of Sir Walter Elliot again, when he claimed that he has not re-married for his dear daughter's sake, while apparently the fact is that he has had one or two private disappointments in his efforts for a second marriage. His vanity costs him the Kellynch, yet he continued to wear the façade in Bath too even after getting dreadfully into debt. Equally repellant the situation in the last chapter, when we find Sir Walter, still centering on rank and status, as he sticks Wentworth in the circle of Baronetage- he has not changed at all.

But part of the novel, with the moral upright of Anne, Admiral Croft, the Hartvilles and the Musgroves, Austen suggests that unpolished manner does not altogether indicate lack of morality and that one cannot judge one by his/her outward elegance. Austen's portrayal of Anne is the real epitome of ideal woman, a perfect blend of morality and manners. Unlike Elizabeth she is virtuous, elegant and sweet enough without being superior and condemning others.

#### Domesticity:

Another striking satirical example in the novel is the lack of familial love and



support received by the protagonist from her family. And this is not only a blatantly evident on the part of the protagonist, rather, throughout the novel, Austen sets out to attack the hypocrisy enduring in Anne's encompassing domestic life. And also to show, how empty, how vacuous the entire concept of aristocracy at that time was! Marilyn Butler, in her book, "*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*", chapter 12, *Persuasion and Sedation*, states:

*Anne's pain at the vanity, selfishness and inutility of her father and sister have to be*

*Lightly touched upon, because a daughter's enunciations would be hardly be in good Taste...*

(Butler, 284)

Of course Anne was less valued by her family. Her own father certainly devoted to his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, but he cares little for his youngest daughter, Mary, and even less for his second daughter, Anne- in whom he finds very little to admire:

*So totally different were her delicate features and her mild dark eyes from his own..*

(Austen, 4)

In chapter 1 it is clearly mentioned how Anne was totally ignored by her own family:

*Anne, with an elegance of mind an sweetness of character, which must have placed*

*Her high with any people of real understanding was nobody with either father or sister:*

*Her world had no weight; her convenience was always to give way; - she was only Anne..*

(Austen,4)

And Elizabeth, like her father, also has absolutely no sisterly attachment either for Mary or for Anne. In chapter 5, when Mary says that she needs the company of Anne, Elizabeth's reply is:

*Then I am sure Anne had better stay, for nobody will want her in Bath..*

(Austen, 30)

And Anne, who is too kind and sympathetic by nature feels "*glad to be thought of some use, glad to have anything marked out as duty*" (Austen, 30)

The remark reflects the inner isolation that Anne is suffering, for not being the part of her own family. But the irony is revealed when Anne quite intelligently attended to save Louisa's life, proving herself that she is something different from anyone and equal to any man in the time of crisis.

Unlike the aristocratic obsession and the cold formality of the Elliot household, Austen also acquaints us with the Musgroves household replete with cozy and

clattering ambience. Anne observes needs and desires of their children between the Musgroves and the friendship, enjoyed by Elizabeth Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility* rather made her character quite the artful Mrs. Clay to her own to you. (145). Anne however Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove

*Anne always contemplated creatures of her acquirement But ... (she) envied their perfect good understanding Agreement together, the of which she had known so little herself with either*

Anne also noticed how disagreeing Henrietta's union with promoting their daughters' fortune:

*Such excellent parents should be happy in their Marriage. They do even your father and mother Totally free from all the which have led to so much and misery...*

#### Conclusion:

In this way, in *Persuasion* male dominated society, in which the conservatism, pride and vanity only react to men' (Austen, 30) and hollowness of her world like Lady Russell, Mr. Elliot etc. and Captain Benwick, who, by disposition which is based on the less Utopian versions to their her 'elegance of mind' and

clattering ambience. Anne observed how the Musgroves are too attentive to the needs and desires of their children. From Anne's perspective, the greatest difference between the Musgroves and the Elliots is the level of familial love and support between the family members. Anne missed the kind of sisterly affection and friendship, enjoyed by Elizabeth and Jane in *Pride and Prejudice* and Elinor and Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*. Elizabeth's unsisterly attitude towards Anne rather made her character quite antagonistic to the readers. She always preferred the artful Mrs. Clay to her own sensible sister Anne: *she is nothing in comparison to you.* (145). Anne however often envied observing the sisterly communion of Louisa and Henrietta Musgroves:

*Anne always contemplate them as some of the happiest creatures of her acquaintance,*

*But ... (she) envied them nothing but that seemingly perfect good understanding and*

*Agreement together, that good-humored mutual affection, of which she had known*

*so little herself with either of her sisters.*

(Austen, 41)

Anne also noticed how the Musgroves are quite different from her family in agreeing Henrietta's union with her curate cousin and Louisa's with Captain Benwick promoting their daughters' happiness and comfort rather than promoting their fortune:

*Such excellent parents as Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove...*

*should be happy in their children's*

*Marriage. They do everything to their happiness...*

*your father and mother seem so*

*Totally free from all those ambitious feelings*

*which have led to so much misconduct*

*and misery...*

(Austen, 218)

#### Conclusion:

In this way, in *Persuasion* Austen satirizes the conservative, constricted, male dominated society, in which she herself lived. It is a satire on the social hierarchy, the conservatism, pride and vanity; and the world where 'women can never act but only react to men' (Austen, vii). Although, Austen acquaints us with the hypocrisy and hollowness of her world through the characters like Sir Walter Elliot, Elizabeth, Lady Russell, Mr. Elliot etc. still she also created characters like Captain Wentworth, Captain Benwick, who, by dint of their hard work and perseverance win wealth and position which is based on merit rather than inheritance. Austen thus adumbrates less Utopian versions to these characters unlike the Elliots; even Anne herself, with her 'elegance of mind' and 'sweetness of character' is able to gain her true love



finally. Austen's *Persuasion* thus can be regarded as quite exceptional, because it is different from Austen's previous novels in the sense that she emphasizes on the rise of a new class of people reflecting the gradual changes occurring in the society around her, bringing about integration and brighter hope to the English society.

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#### Gazing through the Wrig

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**ABSTRACT:** *Blackness is an essential human life besides racial, national attempt at classifying and analyzing American travelers through a strictly black gaze has been a presence; beginning of the concept of travel relegate to the margins and be Americans are an important shade continuing to be black at their tone too. Moreover, the typically have experienced over the century outlook towards life.*

**KEYWORDS:** *blackness,*

Prejudiced I certainly am  
treated by my fellows.

"It is a peculiar sensation,  
one's self through the eyes  
American, a Negro; two  
warring ideals in one  
being torn asunder."

W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Souls*  
American literature and is an  
"the problem of the Twentieth  
of life behind the mask of race



Gazing through the *Black Eye*: A Study of Richard Wright's *Pagan Spain*

Pronami Bhattacharyya

**ABSTRACT:** *Blackness is an essence that pervades and regulates all aspects of human life besides racial, national and gendered ideologies. This paper is an attempt at classifying and analysing the coloured or black gaze of the African-American travelers through a study of Richard Wright's Pagan Spain (1957). This black gaze has been a presence parallel to the dominant white gaze since the very beginning of the concept of travel itself, but color politics has made the former relegate to the margins and become almost invisible. Nevertheless, the African-Americans are an important shaping factor of the American milieu at large while continuing to be black at their roots (African), a point reiterated by their skin tone too. Moreover, the typically discriminated social experience that these people have experienced over the centuries, have made them garner an even strong black outlook towards life.*

**KEYWORDS:** *blackness, gaze, travel, social experience*

Prejudiced I certainly am by my twisted life; by the way in which I have been treated by my fellows.

—(DuBois)

"It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of the others... One ever feels his twoness,- An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts; two unreconciled thriving; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

- (Du Bois, *The Souls*, 351)

W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) is a seminal work in African-American literature and is an American classic. In this work Du Bois suggests that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line." His concepts of life behind the mask of race and the resulting "double-consciousness, this sense

of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," have become benchmarks for thinking about race in America. Du Bois examines African-American life in the States as it is created through a white gaze. In the last chapters of his book, he even mourns the loss of his baby son, but he wonders if his son is not better off dead than growing up in a world dominated by the color-line. In general, blacks have suffered from a damaged self-image shaped by the gazes and prejudices of white people. Black life in turn easily becomes shaped by stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream culture. In such a milieu, it becomes absolutely fresh and unique to look at a world through the gaze of a black person and also how black aesthetics tries to understand and reformulate the identities of Africans in the American context. How would an African-American behave once they are given the power to "see"? In what way is/are their gaze/s different to the dominant, age-old and established white gazes? And most importantly, do they look at the world and develop perceptions similar to the white strategies or do they have a unique brush to paint the world? This paper attempts to delineate these questions through a study of Richard Wright's *Pagan Spain* (1957).

At this point, it is important to define the genre of African-American travel writing and sketching its quintessential features, which are, however, more complex than it may seem. Europeans reached Africa with the so-called "white man's burden" concept to civilize the tribes, and ended up being colonizers, enslavers and oppressors. The indigenous Africans turned slaves as they were captured, sold and transported to the New Land of America which became a site of resistance between the oppressor and the oppressed eventually. The stories of enslavement, dehumanization arose as the cultural discourses of Africa and the New World clashed. Africans, being oral based people, passed on their slavery and travel anecdotes as stories from one generation to another. With time, as the slaves learnt the master's tongue, not only gave their stories to the world in a written form, but also steered clear the way for a typical genre of writing, called the slave narrative. Now, the life of a slave or her/his lineage's history rotates around a single most important activity, travel. Thus, slave narratives cultivated their own sub-genre of travel writing.

Now, African-American Travel writing is clearly distinguished from their "white-authored" counterparts. The white travelers mostly penned down European-type leisure class entertainment travel narratives which are often individualistic in their narrative patterns. But in the case of African-American travel writings one could see a relationship between individual and group experiences. It was a relationship in which the voices of the group or the entire race enabled themselves to be heard or echoed through an individual narrator who acted as the representative, and this representative could also be a symbolic figure. Butterfield in *Black Autobiography in America* says, "...the self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in

the self." (3).

To this gaze, one can also see the politics of slavery which brought even the power of their gaze. For a dynamic in power relations and He says knowledge is power. In a metaphorical, gives one an edge. The gaze can be found predominant in the male-colonizer went to a colonized. He is armored with a powerful gaze, "knowing". Due to the continual otherwise too, the African-American has a disobedient desire of an "opposite" myth created around them by white men. White men consider themselves men want to prove to white men the value of their intellect." (Fanon already the racially marked but knowledgeable, meaningful, as in his *Narrative*, "...for they like sports, than to see us behaving" (113). On the other hand, white world and produce multiple operations of white bodies on polemics and eventually port individual archetypes.

African-American travel barriers and donning the attire been a masculine and white for power to see and thereby. Eventually, however, rather than travel writing became fundamental. From the rhetorical devices of passage, its atrocities and remnants of the New World, a new rhetorical American travel narrative model of Richard Wright, in the two

Richard Wright (1901



the self." (3).

To this gaze, one can also attribute a power, the power that lies in looking. The politics of slavery which brought about racialized power relations, denied the slaves even the power of their gaze. Foucault elaborated on gaze to illustrate a particular dynamic in power relations and disciplinary mechanisms in *Discipline and Punish*. He says knowledge is power. Being at an elevated position, whether literally or metaphorically, gives one an edge over those at the lower strata. This aspect of the gaze can be found predominantly in the travels of the colonial era when the white-male-colonizer went to a colonized-oriental country. The former was predominantly armored with a powerful gaze, a gaze of racial superiority, a gaze that was "all-knowing". Due to the continual denial of the right to "see" and rigorous oppression otherwise too, the African-Americans developed a strong longing to look back, a disobedient desire of an "oppositional gaze". With a rebellious gaze the black people embarked on to write back to the Empire, the Whites, and break the aura of a false myth created around them by the whites. As Frantz Fanon says, "There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men... There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect." (Fanon, 3). African-Americans, because they are Black, are already the racially marked body that is not expected to be able to say something knowledgeable, meaningful, and important about race. As Frederick Douglass says in his *Narrative*, "...for they had much rather see us engaged in those degrading sports, than to see us behaving like intellectual, moral, and accountable beings." (113). On the other hand, when blacks render knowledge and look around at the world and produce multiple layers of gazes, that knowledge renders the racist operations of white bodies on the one hand, and engages the black in a series of polemics and eventually portrays black viewpoints, aesthetics and cultural and individual archetypes.

African-American travel writing, thus, instituted itself with first crossing the barriers and donning the attire of traveling and writing about it which had so far been a masculine and white form. Blacks, like the females were altogether denied the power to see and thereby move around and write about those movements. Eventually, however, rather than occupying a marginal role, in its diverse forms travel writing became fundamental to African-American life and literary history. From the rhetorical devices of "ship" and "black hole" symbols marking the middle passage, its atrocities and removing the black bodies to the distant foreign lands in the New World, a new rhetoric of "black body discourse" arose within the African-American travel narrative mode. To this rhetorical narrative mode, the contribution of Richard Wright, in the twentieth century, remains unparalleled.

**Richard Wright (1908-1960)** - Wright was born at a farm near Natchez,

Mississippi in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Wright matured and began to understand his circumstances as a black person in Mississippi, he came to know the fear and dread associated with racism and its narrow circumscription of black lives. He is frequently aware of the possibility of being killed or otherwise injured because of anything he might or might not say or do and which might inadvertently violate the "ethics of living Jim Crow". And thus, what he sees in Spain perhaps rings back to him through his Jim Crow upbringing. The most frequent mood in his early life is tension, if not the tension arising from direct contact with whites, then tension resulting from the pressures brought to bear on African-Americans stemming from the racial climate. The 'blacks' were subjugated and circumscribed strictly under the Jim Crow ethics on racial line because of their supposed barbarity and lowliness in all fronts by the whites. In defining social relations in America, especially in South, race was an omnipresent factor. Wright escapes South, and comes to Chicago. One of the major developments in his life here was his involvement with the communist party. But subsequently he became disappointed with the Communist party and Marxism. With his 1944 article in *Atlantic Monthly*, "I tried to be a Communist", extracted from *American Hunger*, Wright made his final break with the party. In 1947, he left America for France with his family. Despite his success as a most famous black author ever to be published, Wright still felt beset by racial tensions in America. In New York, he was not an author, but a black author. Paris had been home to other disillusioned American writers, perhaps it could become home for him too. In such a milieu, it was, but natural for Wright to travel places with a *black* gaze.

Spain, during Wright's visit, was under the absolutist regime of Franco. At the start of *Pagan Spain*, Wright remembers Gertrude Stein encouraging him to visit Spain: "You'll see what the western world is made of. Spain is primitive, but lovely." (1). Wright meditated on his fascination with that country, an obsession rooted in the civil war's political upheaval: "The fate of Spain hurt me, haunted me; I was never able to stifle a hunger to understand what had happened there and why." (Wright, 10). Thus, he visits Spain with a purpose of understanding the country's after war scenario, which might have mirrored to him the scenario of America after the civil war that the blacks had fought for their rights in America. The Franco regime could have been gazed at by Wright as the atrocious slavery establishment under the whites in America.

*Pagan Spain* takes its context in literary and scholarly climate formed by literary and artistic avant-garde embodied by Gertrude Stein, Robert Motherwell and Earnest Hemingway. But Wright also came to a country which was pathetically trapped in its glorifying 'past'. He found it a place of tragic beauty and dangerous contradictions. America, the New Land, was also trapped in a past, which, however, was not glorifying enough. The America of Wright had made great strides during

his times towards modernity and stigma of the practice of slavery whipped or bartered, but mental. With the statue of liberty proudly beauty and dangerous contradict Spain is a blistering, powerful, yet people in turmoil, caught in the storm. Wright saw as an undercurrent of reportage, dramatic monologue as a pointed and still relevant comment on governmental corruption.

Richard Wright starts his journey did one live after the death of the indicates that he had come to gaze Franco's regime which he actually rampant prostitution and the like, prostitution, illiteracy...I who were they were ashamed and angry." (2 skin, a supposedly superior race and, peace-loving one. And Richard American was dissecting and judging. Here Wright is engaged in asserting. He is throwing a kind of "opposite them, and this gaze is essentially

For Wright, it was the "paganism" Wright left for Spain in 1954, he Africa, the land of the 'dark', his encounters with what he (now being as tribalism and paganism. He, the "antediluvian" and historically many of his encounters turn on the a heathen. He was being seen as

I was a heathen and these rescue. In their spontaneous that had been implanted in stranger, but a "lost" one in But, later in the text, Wright perhaps, has to take up the task of lot, "...now it was I who was fit



his times towards modernity and progress, but these carried along with them the stigma of the practice of slavery all along. The blacks might not be physically whipped or bartered, but mentally they were still being ravished and assaulted. With the statue of liberty proudly standing there, it was still a place of "tragic beauty and dangerous contradictions". In *Pagan Spain* the portrait he offers of Spain is a blistering, powerful, yet scrupulously honest depiction of a land and its people in turmoil, caught in the strangling dual grip of cruel dictatorship and what Wright saw as an undercurrent of primitive faith. An amalgam of expert travel reportage, dramatic monologue and arresting social critique, *Pagan Spain* serves as a pointed and still relevant commentary on the grave human dangers of oppression and governmental corruption.

Richard Wright starts his journey in the text with this question in mind: "How did one live after the death of the hope for freedom?" (2). This question initially indicates that he had come to gaze at the daily life of the people in Spain under Franco's regime which he actually dissects and digs out past political scars, poverty, rampant prostitution and the like, "...in one half hour I had brought up poverty, fear, prostitution, illiteracy...I who was feeling the tissue and texture of their lives and they were ashamed and angry." (21-22). It was a life in a world dominated by white skin, a supposedly superior race to non-white skins and a better ordered, civilized and, peace-loving one. And Richard Wright, 'negro' at his original roots, an African-American was dissecting and judging the decadence of a white Christian nation. Here Wright is engaged in asserting power by his gaze, as there is power in looking. He is throwing a kind of "oppositional gaze" at the whites, one that documents them, and this gaze is essentially black, besides others.

For Wright, it was the "pagan" that constituted a Spanish ideology. Before Wright left for Spain in 1954, he had just returned from a trip to the Gold Coast of Africa, the land of the 'dark', his ancestral land, where he had a number of disturbing encounters with what he (now being a part of the educated, western world) regarded as tribalism and paganism. He, the black explorer, will now write a 'report' on the "antediluvian" and historically marooned culture of Spain. For example, at the start, many of his encounters turn on the stereotypical image the Spanish have of him as a heathen. He was being seen as an *atheist* who needed to be rescued.

I was a heathen and these devout boys were graciously coming to my rescue. In their spontaneous embrace of me they were acting out a role that had been implanted in them since childhood. I was not only a stranger, but a "lost" one in dire need of being saved. (9).

But, later in the text, Wright mentions that what he feels is, it was he who, perhaps, has to take up the task of refining and saving the Spanish- "white"-heathen lot, "...now it was I who was feeling the tissue and texture of their lives..." (22).



Thus, there is the exchange of gaze between the black ethnographer and his objects of gaze. Wright is often created by the gaze of the wondering Spanish; but equally, he himself decodes and interprets the Spanish. Wright and his reader are positioned as more knowing, more sophisticated; and in their ideological naivety, the Spanish become modern equivalents to the Native Americans. And in their divided social imagery, oppression, miserable economic condition, and the like, the Spanish resembled the present day blacks in America. Exploring Spain in the midst of his tours to Africa and Indonesia, Wright found an ironic lesson for the white colonizers, the supposed civilized and a superior race to the non-whites of the world. The original imperial power, Spain, had become a bizarrely antiquated society, locked in a medieval ideology. Through Wright's gaze we find Spain's superficial civilization is actually resistant to modernity.

There were no signs whatever of Industrial or farm life and when, later, when I did see a rare stack pipe, black or red, lost and lonely in the scaly hills, it resembled an exclamation point, emphasizing how far Spain had fallen to the rear of her sister European nations. (117)

Here we find Wright gazing at landscape to find milestones of either progress or decline, and the dominant picture we get is a white society in decline.

It was the poverty and undernourishment that Wright takes as the first and foremost factor for the rise of prostitution in Spain. The white civilized society abhors the sexual nuances of a non-white, tribal society. But, in Spain, Wright has found an atmosphere of rampant prostitution. Wright found Spain to be a large brothel. There hung in the air a deep aura of sexuality.

In Spain sex had been converted into a medium of exchange for almost all kinds of commodities... (150)

...well-functioning system of prostitution of women on almost all levels of Spanish life. (150)

Spaniards simply do not get enough to eat...Undernourishment is universal... (151)

Wright's visit to Gibraltar made him witness yet another blow to the ethical world of the white civilized. He encountered a group of hardy, daring Spanish women. They were smugglers.

The picture before me now became quite clear. These women were working against time to secrete these items about their persons. Right before my eyes I saw a consumptive looking woman grow into a fat Spanish matron as she lifted her skirt shamelessly and stored merchandise into the nooks and crannies of her body... (177)

Another woman was pulling a pair of rubber boots onto her naked feet and legs; she opened a bag of coffee and poured the contents into the top

of the boot. I counted ten pots and wondered just how much of the rubber and sweaty foot odors

The pathetic economic condition of all sorts of vice in Spain. Smuggling was the hand in it. Hunger and survival had become accomplished in such an

In the field of civil administration, the 'actual' western world but at the same time, in Algeciras, Wright found the smuggling which was "undoubtedly efficient and somewhere high above." In another that after having had his passport examined, he asked to see it again. Even the soldiers... Most of them were unshaven and of a sleazy material resembling their posture slouched and built like that of a peasant lumberjack or worse troops? (15)

Franco regime had covered the country which was a complete mismatch to

There was even chaos in the streets of Barcelona, one of the foremost cities. Down the broad, modern avenue was a place, Wright found people sitting on the road after dinner at night. It was these whites behaving in a completely unsophisticated, interior places in

The political scenario of Spain which, like the people of Hiroshima, the people could hardly recover from. The war, fought between Franco and the society into two trenches. Both the lives during the war, but in the post regime of Franco, supporters of the to a position of confinement and suffering. Jim Crow ethics for the blacks in communists. Wright, also established Protestants and African-American

of the boot. I counted ten pounds of coffee sliding into each boot. (I wondered just how much of the coffee drunk in Spain was flavored with rubber and sweaty foot odors.) (177)

The pathetic economic condition after the civil war had given the platform to all sorts of vice in Spain. Smuggling was no exception. Both the sexes were trying a hand in it. Hunger and survival had become so intense a problem that even women became accomplished in such an act.

In the field of civil administration Spain was not only a caricature of the 'actual' western world but at the same time it was a very 'sloppy' one. In port at Algeciras, Wright found the smuggler women being covered by lower police officials which was "undoubtedly efficiently organized and sponsored and protected from somewhere high above." In another example at the very beginning, Wright tells us that after having had his passport examined and stamped at the border, no one ever asked to see it again. Even the soldiers were the caricature of a modern army.

...Most of them were unshaven, their uniforms baggy and crinkled and of a sleazy material resembling mattress ticking, their shoes unshined, their posture slouched and bent, and their gait loose and uncontrolled, like that of a peasant lumbering over a plowed field. Were there ever worse troops? (15)

Franco regime had covered every street with its troops. But it was an army which was a complete mismatch to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There was even chaos in the middle of the most sophisticated cities of Spain. Barcelona, one of the foremost cities of the world had vast flocks of sheep ambling down the broad, modern avenue where Wright was holding for a night. At another place, Wright found people sitting on chairs brought out of their homes everywhere on road after dinner at night. It was to do away with the heat. Thus, Wright finds these whites behaving in a complete unmindful manner as those in the most unsophisticated, interior places in Africa.

The political scenario of Spain is further gloomy. The civil war has left scars which, like the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan after the bombardment, the people could hardly recover from even after the war ended almost 5 years ago. The war, fought between Franco and the communists, has divided the Spanish society into two trenches. Both the trenches suffered heavy loss of material and lives during the war, but in the post war scenario, with the coming of the absolutist regime of Franco, supporters of the communists have been segregated and relegated to a position of confinement and suffering, much like the blacks in America. Like the Jim Crow ethics for the blacks in America, here was the ethics of Franco for the communists. Wright, also establishes a correspondence between Spanish Protestants and African-Americans. Thus, his gaze mirrors the plight of African-



Americans in these suffering Spanish people.

Wright sees deep scars in the mind and soul of people in Spain left by the civil war. In Barcelona, he met with a sibling couple, Carmen and Carlos.

... You don't know what it means to be a girl in Spain.

I'm supposed to stay home and have babies.

... A woman alone is lost in Spain. — Carmen (16)

Laws are not passed here. The government issues decrees.

No effective protest is permitted. — Carlos (27)

The after-war life had made Carmen rebellious and Carlos bitter. Whether a man or a woman, the oppressive and vicious atmosphere has turned the masses in Spain helpless and thus a bitter attitude towards life.

Another moving anecdote given by Wright was that of Lola. A war victim, but a sufferer on Franco's front. Her father was supposedly a Franco supporter. He was taken away by the supporters of the communists during the war and didn't return. And now, after five years Wright was lodging at his home. His elder daughter, Lola underwent a shock due to his sudden disappearance and the effect of which could be felt by Wright even now. "I'm waiting for father..." (53). Lola could not recover from the trauma and she is waiting for her father to return even now. Physically she had grown to be a woman, but mentally she regressed. Wright views Lola as a mirror of the traumatized blacks under the white domination and their unjust laws in America.

But some critics today see *Pagan Spain* as more critical of the oppressed than of the oppressive regime in the 1950s. In the words of De Guzman, Wright produces Spain as repelling and fascinating enigma south across the border from a more or less civilized North, namely France; "land of fetish objects and bloody sacrifices... a wasteland and a back water" (225-26, 230-31). Nevertheless, Richard Wright's narrative contains and articulates the predicaments and experiences of oppression that far surpasses the knowledge about these matters contained in abstract "theoretical discourse" derived from the dominant "western" philosophy. Despite knowing very little of the Spanish language and spending less than six of his time there, Wright as a travel writer claims to possess an insight denied to more experienced travelers. This might also be attributed to his cultural insiderness being a person belonging to a subjugated race besides other reasons. The evidence of his superior perception is given through the words of a Catalan barber who congratulates him thus,

"Ah, you have eyes! You can see! ... Most tourists come here because it's cheap, no? but they do not see; they do not care to see." (92)

Wright sees that even the Spanish Protestant had to suffer an unnatural and utterly barbarous nature of psychological suffering at the hands of the Church and State Officials and his Catholic neighbor.

For that exquisite suffering and profound sympathy.

I am an American Negro stemming from my previous minority. What drew me in Spain was the undeniable they held in common with oppressed minorities (13) ... psychological problem *white Negroes* whom I am Negroes because the Thus, Wright looks at the

Americans. He realizes that dominated or ill-treated, do gazing at *white Negroes*, a te

Slavery was a practice of masters and Negroes as slave Spain as well. At Seville, the night club. It seemed more like

I've never in my life seen market at such cheap prices

S. in reality was a white Africa next week, "This was was!" (185).

The blacks in Africa were in bed. Spain seemed one very unusual *white slave market*.

Understanding Spain or It was a pathetic mixture of part of the western world, western world. Spain was irrational. In Spain, there was no lay, no state as sacred and irrational. At the same time, the man or Thus, through his black/racism which is still gripped which has an absolutist religion suffers, as communists, as "Beleagued by modern ideas

For that exquisite suffering and emotional torture, I have a spontaneous and profound sympathy. (138)

I am an American Negro with a background of psychological suffering stemming from my previous position as a member of a persecuted racial minority. What drew my attention to the emotional plight of the Protestants in Spain was the undeniable and uncanny psychological affinities that they held in common with American Negroes, Jews, and other oppressed minorities (138)

...psychological problems and the emotional sufferings of a group of *white Negroes* whom I met in Spain, the assumption being that Negroes are Negroes because they are treated as Negroes. (138)

Thus, Wright looks at these sufferers as undergoing the plight of the African-Americans. He realizes that Negro is a construct. To be someone who is to be dominated or ill-treated, doesn't require one to be black. In Spain, Wright was gazing at *white Negroes*, a term which breaks the established concept of slavery.

Slavery was a practice which was not only in operation between the whites as masters and Negroes as slaves, but Wright discovered some form of Slavery in Spain as well. At Seville, the capital of Andalusia, Wright, with his S., visited a tiny night club. It seemed more like a brothel to Wright.

I've never in my life seen so many young and pretty girls on the sexual market at such cheap prices (183)

S. in reality was a white slaver. He was arranging for the girls to be taken to Africa next week, "This was white slavery, and how simple and open and jolly it was!" (185).

The blacks in Africa wanted white women. Wright felt it to be a racial revenge in bed. Spain seemed one vast brothel to Wright. This was a direct contact with an unusual *white slave market*.

Understanding Spain or at least defining it in any particular way was baffling. It was a pathetic mixture of political, social and religious contradictions. Spain was a part of the western world, but it was nowhere near to even the precincts of the western world. Spain was irrational at core, it had a reality, but which was irrational. In Spain, there was no lay, no secular life. Spain was a holy nation, a sacred state—a state as sacred and irrational as the sacred state of the Akan in the African Jungle. At the same time, the maw of paganism was buried deep in the hearts of the people. Thus, through his black/racial/colored gaze, Wright has painted Spain as a white nation which is still gripped in its past, far from the rings of modernism; as a state which has an absolutist regime; and as a divided society, and a part of which suffers, as communists, as women, and Protestants at the hands of the other. "Beleagued by modern ideas, stormed by the forces of social and political progress,"



Wright reports Spain is the kind of place that "had to withdraw, had to go back and find some acceptable form of endurable life that could knit its poetic-minded people together again." (190). The established myth of white superiority and the fact of being 'civilized' get a shudder at the report of this black traveler, Richard Wright.

The social world is saturated by narratives that stick down blacks and whites into antithetical dimensions which finally lead to "ontological fortification". The *white* becomes incapable of seeing a black point of view because white identity is dependent not only on the irrelevance of a black perspective but also its impossibility. Moreover, a *white* does not undergo a typical "double consciousness" that the blacks carry all along. A *black* thus, has this ability of looking at the world from the eye of a *black* and *white* at the same time. Thus, the *invisible man* with a black gaze paints the world around, a systematic vision of the world giving one the sense of being immersed in all the concrete materiality of Black experience.

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"I am the darker broth  
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ABSTRACT: *War poetry has and the Continent, with their are poems written by Indian, politics of Europe to construc Millions of soldiers from the their narratives have been prominence to the 'idea' of paper proposes to look into t to read the poems of Harlee McKay and Indian poetess Sa and questions the Eurocentric angst of the dislocated subjec the representation to partici from the "margins".*

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## "I am the darker brother"<sup>1</sup>: A Postcolonial Reading into non-European War Poetry

Nilanjan Chakraborty

**ABSTRACT:** *War poetry has always been traditionally associated with England and the Continent, with their tales of "sacrifice" and "nobility". However, there are poems written by Indian, African or Black American poets who critique the politics of Europe to construct War from the perspective of Europe as the centre. Millions of soldiers from the colonies had fought for the British in the War, but their narratives have been silenced in history for the sake of giving more prominence to the 'idea' of valour and masculinity to European soldiers. This paper proposes to look into this "silenced" space of war narrative and attempts to read the poems of Harlem Renaissance like Langston Hughes and Claude McKay and Indian poetess Sarojini Naidu from a postcolonial gaze that challenges and questions the Eurocentric documentation of the War. The paper looks into the angst of the dislocated subjects in a colonial set up who are not given the voice or the representation to participate in the narrative of the War because they hail from the "margins".*

**KEYWORDS:** *postcolonial, other, stereotype, hegemony*

Any postcolonial dissemination of texts has an intrinsic quality of contradiction- that is of an ideological belief that the "postcoloniality" of the text must be a result of an anti-colonial stance taken by the author, thereby constructing a pro-nationalist paradigm with the text. As much as this is true with many authors across cultures, there are voices who do not participate in overtly nationalist politics while countering the claims of colonial stereotypifications and exercise of violence. War poetry of the twentieth century, coming out from British literature is engaged in the hyper glorification of Western constructs of heroism, masochism and sacrifice at the altar of "saving" the world from the forces of Fascism. However, what does not come out is the fact that millions of soldiers who actually fought as a part of the British army during the Great War were recruited from the British colonies. Almost 1.2 million soldiers were employed<sup>2</sup> by the British from the colony of India to fight



battles not only in the Continent, but also in East Africa, South-East Asia and the Middle East. This number rose to 2.5 million in the WWII and yet the contribution of these soldiers to the British cause remains a silenced space in literary and artistic representations of the War. Across the Atlantic, America had a different politics of silencing the marginalised in the War. They had a racial profiling in place; the Blacks were not allowed to serve in the U.S army perhaps because their racial origin not only made them "inferior", but also their commitment towards Nationalistic politics was looked at with suspicion. However, with the onset of the War, U.S realised that such a massive strategic deployment of the army was not possible if the racial profiling in the army was kept. Jami Bryan observes:

"When the United States declared war against Germany in April of 1917, War Department planners quickly realized that the standing Army of 126,000 men would not be enough to ensure victory overseas. The standard volunteer system proved to be inadequate in raising an Army, so on 18 May 1917 Congress passed the Selective Service Act requiring all male citizens between the ages of 21 and 31 to register for the draft. Even before the act was passed, African American males from all over the country eagerly joined the war effort. They viewed the conflict as an opportunity to prove their loyalty, patriotism, and worthiness for equal treatment in the United States.

Following the Civil War, the Army disbanded volunteer "colored" regiments, and established six Regular Army regiments of black troops with white officers. In 1869, the infantry regiments were reorganized into the 24th and 25th Infantry. The two cavalry regiments, the 9th and 10th, were retained. These regiments were posted in the West and Southwest where they were heavily engaged in the Indian War. During the Spanish-American War, all four regiments saw service.

When World War I broke out, there were four all-black regiments: the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry. The men in these units were considered heroes in their communities. Within one week of Wilson's declaration of war, the War Department had to stop accepting black volunteers because the quotas for African Americans were filled" (Bryan, web).

From Bryan's article, it becomes clear that that America's racial prejudice against the Blacks were removed, keeping in mind the compulsions of the War, where strategy was as important as the ground presence of soldiers. However, despite such a huge presence of the non-European and the non-White in the War, literary representations of them is hardly found in the corpus of War literature of the twentieth century. The politics of silencing is clearly aimed to create a subaltern status for the soldiers who are deemed "unfit" to fit into the scheme of either glorifying the War, or to detest it. So, there is an obversive relation between these soldiers and literary representation—they are politically "facile" to be regarded as icons of the War or otherwise. In fact,

the anti-War poets like Owen soldiers, which is even more an in the War and it is very unlik soldiers. Is it because his "pity of who are undeserving of a literat

The "silencing act" follow colonial megalomania for cont construct the West as fulfilling colonial setup used literary pro allegation of use of violence a were no less in using the same gr holds with history is because o needs constant re-voicing thro observes:

"If we catalogue the cruc [the text of *Empire Writes Back* literary history functioning as postcolonial is a ghost that sta 288).

The objection that can b any "countering" of history stereotypify through allegatio card. In fact, stereotypificatio the European self or the non-I of the Other. Take for examp *Thousand Days and Nights*:

"Out of all the cities of: midsummer harbours, at just because we needed four thousand clays of compassion you and I killed by ass Remember!" (Tamura W

This is a case in point suffering and urban violence t to the Japanese society, tl humanitarian crisis is also to However, at the same time it comes out of the European ci

the anti-War poets like Owen and Sassoon chose to remain silent about these soldiers, which is even more an act of ideological Othering since they had take part in the War and it is very unlikely that they wouldn't have known about these soldiers. Is it because his "pity of war" is "doomed" as a "failed anthem" for soldiers who are undeserving of a literary voice?

The "silencing act" followed in the popular propaganda designates a certain colonial megalomania for controlling the intelligentsia in the post-war period to construct the West as fulfilling the dual role of the sufferer as also the saviour. The colonial setup used literary production as a machinery or apparatus to combat the allegation of use of violence at an unprecedented scale, though the Axis powers were no less in using the same gruesome methods. The dialectic relation that literature holds with history is because of the fact that both have spaces of the 'below' that needs constant re-voicing through new discourses. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge observes:

"If we catalogue the crucial features of postcolonialism as advanced by *EWB* [the text of *Empire Writes Back*]- we find that we are drawn... to propose a counter literary history functioning as the underside of the dominant literary history. The postcolonial is a ghost that stalks the parent literary history... (Mishra and Hodge, 288).

The objection that can be raised against such a theoretical assumption is that any "countering" of history might have the same tendency to hegemonise or stereotypify through allegations and complaints of violence, playing the 'victim' card. In fact, stereotypification is the counter of prototypification and in both case the European self or the non-European self negates the possibility of the existence of the Other. Take for example a Japanese poem by Ryuichi Tamura called *Four Thousand Days and Nights*:

"Out of all the cities of falling rain, smelting furnaces,  
midsummer harbours, and coal mines,  
just because we needed the tears of a single hungry child  
four thousand clays of love and four thousand nights of  
compassion  
you and I killed by assassination.  
Remember!" (Tamura Web)

This is a case in point that we are trying to discuss here. The images of suffering and urban violence that is depicted in the poetry of Tamura is not exclusive to the Japanese society, the same representation of violence and massive humanitarian crisis is also to be had in European War poetry of Sassoon and Owen. However, at the same time it is also undeniable that in the discourse that generally comes out of the European circles is that such suffering is exclusive to the European



public, although caused by the implosion of its own democratic ideals. The representation of non-European war poetry has remain silent due to this politics of keeping Europe as the "sufferer", though the irony is that the entire War was fought as an inter-European conflict to establish itself an anti-communist, anti-fascist bloc. The complexities of the situation are captured in a more matured manner in a poem called *When I was Most Beautiful* by Ibaragi Noriko:

"When I was most beautiful,  
Jazz overflowed the radio,  
I broke the prohibition against smoking  
Sweet music of another land!  
When I was most beautiful,  
I was most unhappy,  
I was quite absurd,  
I was quite lonely" (Noriko, web).

In this particular poem by Noriko, there is a tone of internationalism, as cultures coalesce and merge to present a statement of universal humanism. Jazz is of European origin, belonging to "another land" and yet it is "most beautiful". The poem is set at the backdrop of "People around me were killed" and yet the poet does not lose sight of the vocation in art that crosses all cultures and politics of hatred to force a sense of sanity in a world caught up in the crossfire of war. The undertones of international humanism that we get in British poets like Owen and Sassoon is hinted at this poem as well. So, it becomes clear that the exclusivist principle that the literary field of Europe in general and the British in particular is dismantled by such representations of literary voices who also talk of establishing a new world order, challenging the global capitalism that led to the War in the first place. The Anglophonic dismissal of anything outside Europe being "unfit" for representation is challenged through such poetic statements that talk of the Other as also being the victim of violence as also being the agents by which Britain has been able to fight the Axis powers since the colonies have supplied "His Majesty" with soldiers, money and strategic inputs for Britain to surge on with its politics of the War.

It is indeed surprising that in any discussion of War literature, the only Eurocentric canonical authors and works are brought to the fore. However, it must be recalled that during the Great War, England was still a formidable colonial power and hence many soldiers from the colonized countries were coerced into it. Representation of War literature therefore should not be unfairly only focused on European/English narratives because there are artistic representations from the colonized spaces that resist the War not only in terms of a loss of socio-political fabric, but also a force that is used to further de-engage the colonized subjects from their right of identity formation. This paper will briefly look into cross-cultural

narratives from the poets of Harlem R of the colonizers to not to acknowledge countries in the larger War narrative.

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A Nordic belly with a thrust  
Of bayonet, had taught him ho  
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"Culture embodies... moral, e eyeglasses, through which they com Values are the basis of a people's ide the human race... language as cultu experience in history" (Thiong'o, 15

Sterling's resistance is again: Europe and America to completely narrative of War history, and in ge places. The poet then introduces a jail, perhaps being charged with s between a dog and Sam, who travels the social ostracisation of the Blac battered soldier is treated no differ and total identity obliteration from

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Hunted and penned in an ing  
While round us bark the mac

narratives from the poets of Harlem Renaissance and India who question the attitude of the colonizers to not to acknowledge the role of the soldiers from colonized countries in the larger War narrative. Sterling Brown in his poem *Sam Smiley* shows how the 'subject' of a Black soldier feels dislocated from the narrative of War:

"The whites had taught him how to rip  
A Nordic belly with a thrust  
Of bayonet, had taught him how  
To transmute Nordic flesh to dust" (Sterling, web).

The above extract is reminiscent of the poems of Owen and Sassoon in the gory images depicting the politics of violence in the War, but as a Harlem commentator, Brown infuses the tinge of racial discrimination. The phrase "the whites had taught him" has an implied tone of being forcefully coerced into the battlefield without any consent from the Black soldiers. The poet adds that the "shrapnel bursts" and the "poison gas" are essentially "colour blind", implying that violence kills without taking skin colour into cognizance. Though such an anti-popular stance of universal dissonance against the humanitarian crisis is already there in the English War poets, yet the question raised by Sterling is that of identity and dislocation. Talking about culture and history, Ngig) Wa Thiong'o notes:

"Culture embodies... moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses, through which they come to view themselves and their place in universe. Values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race... language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" (Thiong'o, 15).

Sterling's resistance is against, what Thiongo notes, the politics of White Europe and America to completely silence off the presence of Blacks from the narrative of War history, and in general, the larger "national history" of the two places. The poet then introduces a persona of Sam, who sees his girlfriend in the jail, perhaps being charged with sedition and then there is a poetic parallelism between a dog and Sam, who travels at night through the "shanties", clearly depicting the social ostracisation of the Blacks in the ghetto of Harlem town. Even a war battered soldier is treated no differently, left to make his way through shame, filth and total identity obliteration from the discourses of War and nationhood.

Claude McKay, another notable poet of the Harlem Renaissance uses protest poetry to voice the exclusionist principle of the White dominated discourses vis-a-vis the Black contribution to the War. Not only is McKay's poetry a "pity on war" but a pity on the condition of the Blacks too. He writes in the poem *If We Must Die*:

"If we must die—let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,



Making their mock at our accursed lot" (McKay, web).

There are two aspects to be highlighted over here. One is the politics of mainstream American society to send the Black soldiers into a space of being absent motifs, where they are nothing but an "inglorious spot" to the nationalistic discourses which seek to project America as the "ethically right" nation in their fight against Fascist forces, but the Black sacrifices do not make their way in that narrative. Another protest is against perhaps the anti-War poets, who only talk of a White population getting decimated in the unprecedented violence, but fails to accommodate the Black voices in their representation of tragedy. Alain Locke, who coined the term 'The New Negro' observes:

"The Negro mind reaches out as yet to nothing but American wants, American ideas. But this forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions" (Locke, 4).

This concern of Locke that Blacks have only been made to subscribe to 'subjecthood' rather than 'citizenship' spills over to the War narrative, where Black soldiers are obliterated from the popular space since they are not 'legal/ethical subjects' to either receive glory or pity in War. McKay raises his pitch to protest the politics of dichotomy, saying "oh let us nobly die", calling for a larger sacrifice so that Blacks get integrated in American national consciousness. The poem ends with the final assertion:

"Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" (*ibid*).

The Anglophonic gaze looks at the war as an assertion of "civilisation" over Fascism, critiqued by the anti-War poets, but in either case, the Blacks' identity has been kept as an epistemological silence which the Harlem poets try and give an artistic space to.

Langston Hughes, perhaps the most popular face of Harlem poetry, writes a poem *Will V-Day Be Me-Day too*, the title itself being quite symbolic. Langston Hughes alleges that the nationalistic discourses leave out the Blacks from the narrative of "victory", thereby denying the rights of the Blacks to claim equal citizenship in America. Hughes speaks in the persona of a low graded US marine worker (thus representing the social and racial bias against the Blacks) and says:

"I wear a U. S. uniform.  
I've done the enemy much harm,  
I've driven back  
The Germans and the Japs,  
From Burma to the Rhine.  
On every battle line,  
I've dropped defeat

Into the Fascists' laps" (Hughes, web).

The above extract shows the identity of the Black soldiers, America, but are not deemed fit to tone of resistance and anger against as the line "I wear a U.S. uniform" becomes a case of not being 'the nationalistic oeuvre nor are they in sense of "duty", in the racial sense since as the "inferior race", they without asking for their dignity in the myth of Uncle Sam, the person for subverting the wave of "nation



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Langston Hughes writes in "On the return Sam Smiley c The dirty steerage with his d The image of "Sam Smiley" Hughes goes onto attack the fact t Black recruits will not be 'located' i therefore constructing an exclusiv out to save the world against the fascism" that is simply kept under "Getting beyond... national [for] the urgent obligation to reevi political, economic, and cultural ur Gilroy's dismissal of treatir

Into the Fascists' laps" (Hughes, web).

The above extract shows the overt use of the first person pronoun to assert the identity of the Black soldiers, who are expected to "sacrifice" their lives for America, but are not deemed fit to be "eulogized" in the War narrative. There is a tone of resistance and anger against the politics of segregation and marginalization, as the line "I wear a U.S. uniform" is almost made in a jest. For the Black soldiers, it becomes a case of not being 'there' since they neither find a location in the nationalistic oeuvre nor are they not used in the battlefield. There is a compulsive sense of "duty", in the racial sense of the term, being imposed on the Black soldiers, since as the "inferior race", they are expected to lay their lives in the battlefield without asking for their dignity in a White dominated U.S. Langston Hughes uses the myth of Uncle Sam, the personification of the U.S. government during the War, for subverting the wave of "nationalism" that the poster of Uncle Sam proposed:



<sup>3</sup>For source, see notes

Langston Hughes writes in the poem:

"On the return Sam Smiley cheered

The dirty steerage with his dance,..." (*ibid*)

The image of "Sam Smiley" in the poem reminds us of the poster of Uncle Sam, as Hughes goes onto attack the fact that Uncle Sam wants recruits for his country, but the Black recruits will not be 'located' in the political and social milieu of nationalistic fervor, therefore constructing an exclusivist theory of a Nation during the War, that was going out to save the world against the Fascist regimes, but back home, there is a "racial fascism" that is simply kept under the cover. Paul Gilroy states:

"Getting beyond... national and nationalistic perspectives has become essential... [for] the urgent obligation to reevaluate the significance of the modern nation state as a political, economic, and cultural unit..." (Gilroy, 7).

Gilroy's dismissal of treating Nation as "a unit" is reflected in the concerns of



Langston Hughes, who also voices protest against the politics of U.S. being imaged as a country for the Whites, and hence, even though the Black soldiers are out in the War, they are not considered for honoraries when it comes to political and social representation. Such is the racial abuse that a "rich white man" is sent to keep the company of the soldier's wife. The Black woman is deemed fit to be subsumed for sexual gratification when her man is out in the battlefield- such is the extent of devastating hypocrisy of the American society which Hughes is resisting through his 'counterculture'.

The last poem in our focus is *The Gift of India* by Sarojini Naidu. Like the American Harlem poets of her times, Naidu is equally resistive of Eurocentric White politics of denying the 'natives' of "war glory". In the poem Naidu writes that the Indian soldiers, who have been deployed by the British army to fight in the First World War, have "flung to the East and the West" and have met the "Persian waves" and "Egyptian sands", but have been reduced to a state of obliteration, since they have been rested in "alien graves". Naidu equates her own self with the concept of "Mother India", who is pained to see her sons getting killed:

"They lie with pale brows and brave, broken hands,  
they are strewn like blossoms mown down by chance  
On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and France  
Can ye measure the grief of the tears I weep  
Or compass the woe of the watch I keep?" (Naidu, web).

It can be argued that by stereotyping India as the "mother goddess", relating it to the fertility cult, hegemonises the 'Nation' as a "productive" unit that must "produce" culture in terms of overt nationalistic discourses. There is a Hindu bigotry in such a portrayal as well, but the point that Naidu wants to make is that Indian soldiers should be given the necessary human dignity to be allowed their dead bodies to be returned to their kin so that they can be buried according to their religious rites. As in Hughes, Naidu states that the Indian soldiers are getting marginalized as "non-essential" entities in the Great War, who are "supposed" to take on the Fascist forces but will remain in oblivion in terms of War narrative and representation. Naidu does for a universal return of peace, when the politics of hate, exclusion and racism will end:

"when the terror and the tumult of hate shall cease  
And life be refashioned on anvils of peace,..." (*ibid*).

The idealistic strain in Naidu's poetic voice provides a kind of visionary text to the violence of War. As all idealisms, this one by Naidu is also placed on the plank of a Utopian hope. Violence as a practice is deeply interrelated to power relations and equations, as the 'native' soldiers come to realize. The War narrative therefore has been hegemonised by Eurocentric and American (specifically White American) discourses in terms of aggressor-victimhood dialectics, but time has come to question such a narrative that seeks to silence spaces that also existed during the War leading to unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

#### End Notes:

- 1 a line from Langston Hughes
- 2 <http://indianexpress.com/art/who-fought-in-wwi/>
- 3 The poster cited in this paper appeal to recruit soldiers in t is conceived as a 'White Am The picture has bee Uncle\_Sam&ei=K89lcqet&

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## End Notes:

- 1 a line from Langston Hughes' poem *I too*
- 2 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/remembering-indian-soldiers-who-fought-in-wwi/>
- 3 The poster cited in this paper was drawn by J.M Flagg in 1917 as a "Nationalistic" appeal to recruit soldiers in the U.S. army for the War, but interestingly, Uncle Sam is conceived as a 'White American' in the poster, thereby corroborating our reading. The picture has been taken from [en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle\\_Sam](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Sam) &ei=K89lcqet&lc=en-IN>. 11<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2014. Web.

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### Alienation and Assimilation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

Arunabha Bhuyan

**ABSTRACT:** Diasporic writing which occupies a major part of our contemporary Indian writing in English has brought in themes such as that of displacement, alienation and isolation. Jhumpa Lahiri in her fictional work has often dealt with experience of the Indian immigrants in multicultural America. Her characters in the United States are not totally free of anxiety about roots and cultural affinities. The immigrants (like Subhash and Gauri) are often seen to make attempts to shed their cultural baggage and merge themselves into the new world. While the characters are shown to adapt themselves to new situations in life, they are often unable to leave their past behind. *The Lowland* follows this pattern that Lahiri has witnessed of the marginalised members of the society making an attempt to adapt themselves to this multicultural world.

**KEYWORDS:** diaspora, immigration, hybridity, displacement, assimilation, multiculturalism.

Diasporic experience is often at the centre of many of our contemporary Indian writing in English and Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories and novels move around this experience. English as a medium of communication have allowed many of our writers living in different parts of the world, either by choice or by necessity, to present their diasporic experience to the world. Aijaz Ahmed one of the noted critics of post-colonial studies does agree that English is now "for better or for worse, one of the Indian languages." (Ahmed: 282) English can be regarded as the main language of communication between the educated members of the different linguistic sections. Indian writers writing in English like Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and Salman Rushdie have established themselves well in the scene of world literature. It is often expected that the third world cosmopolitan writers (popularly known as postcolonial writers) concern themselves with colonialism as a theme. These third-world writers emerge from non-western backgrounds but it is their familiarity or expertise in the metropolitan language of narrative that allows them to be accepted in the global literary scenario. It is important

to note that the diasporic fiction scenario and in the process of (Postcolonial English Literature) immigrants in her *Interpreter* (immensely promising writer but basically projects the existential multicultural world. The characters accommodate themselves to the next generation however moves the original inhabitants of the forefathers did. Bela in *The Lowland* Gauri, her mother, needs a Subhash problems are not Bela's. Gauri American world. Subhash marries this enables Gauri to escape the Bengali household of her in-law

*The Lowland* is a melancholic framework exists pairs of contradictions and her uncompromising tradition of convenience, the wetlands of see the living suffering for the dead death and we also see a mother's abandoning her when the time of happiness and sorrow, hope and from various themes and subthemes an element that runs through all sibling love but also by the lack of Brotherhood exists also among them they choose divergent paths and the past. The two brothers are the rebel and the other a conformist.

The political tone of the novel Movement in the sixties and seventies Calcutta at a social level also affects and Udayan at a personal level. At 'history' and 'nation' come together into a post-colonial entity, the nation because of the Naxalite activities

to note that the diasporic fiction has found for itself a niche in the world literary scenario and in the process has created its own 'literary critical paradigm' (*Postcolonial English Literature In English*: 117). Jhumpa Lahiri's stories of Indian immigrants in her *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) not only established her as an immensely promising writer but also won her the Pulitzer Prize in 2000. Her fiction basically projects the existential dilemmas of the Indian American immigrants in a multicultural world. The characters are not totally free of anxieties of roots and cultural affinities. Her stories tell us that the first generation immigrants try to accommodate themselves to the social and cultural milieu of the new country. The next generation however moves on in life and feels as much a part of the society as the original inhabitants of the country and do not feel the constraints that their forefathers did. Bela in *The Lowland* can afford to have a child out of wedlock but Gauri, her mother, needs a Subhash to give her child a name and security. Gauri's problems are not Bela's. Gauri, Subhash and Bela are a part of the multicultural American world. Subhash marries Gauri who is expecting his brother's child and this enables Gauri to escape the plight of her early widowhood in the traditional Bengali household of her in-laws in Calcutta.

*The Lowland* is a melancholic tale told with a lot of restraint. Within the same framework exists pairs of contrasts— an academically ambitious daughter-in-law and her uncompromising traditional mother-in-law, a marriage of love and a marriage of convenience, the wetlands of Calcutta and the coastland of Rhode Island. We see the living suffering for the dead, we see a mother's inability to accept her son's death and we also see a mother's indifference to the existence of her child and even abandoning her when the time comes to move on. Life after all is an intertwining of happiness and sorrow, hope and disenchantment. The novel's complexities arise from various themes and subthemes. Jhumpa Lahiri attempts to show that love is an element that runs through all of us. Subhash and Udayan are not only bound by sibling love but also by the love of their parents and their own motherland. Brotherhood exists also among our countrymen. As Subhash and Udayan grow up they choose divergent paths and yet cannot free themselves from the memories of the past. The two brothers are identical in looks but opposite in character—one a rebel and the other a conformist.

The political tone of the novel is merged with the personal one. The Naxalite Movement in the sixties and seventies that touched the lives of men and women of Calcutta at a social level also affected the lives of the people like the police officer and Udayan at a personal level. According to the political commentator Sunil Khilnani 'history' and 'nation' come together to shape 'the idea of India' and the novel falls into a post-colonial entity, the nation state (Gopal: 5). Gauri's activities take a turning because of the Naxalite activities and eventually make her leave Calcutta for the



United States. The details of the Naxalite Movement that Lahiri entails in her book *The Lowland*, such as the role of leaders like Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal make the novel almost a historical document. Her idea is to show how a political movement brings about disintegration, immigration and later on assimilation of various individuals who pass from an early stage to a later stage in their lives. Political and social structures are responsible for great tragedy and displacement.

The way in which Jhumpa Lahiri creates a story revolving around the Naxalite Movement with the ecology of the area where the protagonist lives is rather interesting. The area between the two ponds in the lowland is buried in monsoon time and the two ponds become one water body. It is not difficult to understand that the two ponds symbolize the two brothers—sometimes together and sometimes not. Right in the beginning of the novel the narrator mentions: "Certain creatures laid eggs that were able to endure the dry season. Others survived by burying themselves in mud, simulating death, waiting for the return of rain." (*The Lowland*: 3) Subhash, the elder one, forever cautious and predictable seemed to have buried himself in mud to survive. Whereas Jhumpa Lahiri's other fictional works like *The Namesake* (2003) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) revolve around the problematic issues of the Indian immigrants, her *The Lowland* has at its core the Calcutta of the sixties and seventies and the central characters move back and forth from Calcutta to America and return to Calcutta again and again even after they have settled down in America. It is as if they had left their souls behind in the soil of Calcutta. What Lahiri wants to show here is that the characters need to free themselves from the shadows of the past rather than fear for the present.

Leela Gandhi in her seminal work *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* mentions that "Postcolonialism pursues a post national reading of the colonial encounter by focusing on the global amalgam of cultures and identities consolidated by imperialism. To this end, it deploys a variety of conceptual terms and categories of analysis which examine the mutual contagion and subtle intimacies between colonizer and colonized. In this regard, the terms 'hybridity' and 'diaspora', in particular, stand out for their analytic versatility and theoretical resilience." (Gandhi: 129). When the concept of post-colonialism is discussed, along with it comes up the image of immigrants— different cultures are fused together to emerge with a hybridized form of an individual. Jhumpa Lahiri's stories are about such immigrants and the problems they face when they are forced to lead a dual existence. Homi K. Bhaba, Aijaz Ahmed, Gayatri Spivak Chakraborty and other post-colonial thinkers dwell on this dual existence of immigrants who are expected to uphold the past and embrace the present. This makes the identity of the hybridized individuals rather blurry. According to Leela Gandhi "While 'diaspora' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'migration', it is generally invoked as a theoretical device for

the interrogation of ethnic identity of the term just as that of 'hybrid' of 'cultural mutation and restlessness avoid capture by its agents' (C important trait of the colonial culture the two cultures of the colonial enunciation.' (Bhaba: 54) In his about 'cross-fertilization' of culture Lahiri. Gauri once she gets married she is apprehensive about and motherhood seriously (much to the extent that she wishes to reclaim. Subhash 'domestic bliss' but Subhash believes almost to perfection. These children immigrants do between the native pursue her career and leaves behind also a kind of escapism from real escape from a marriage bereft of memories of Udayan torment her Gauri and Subhash and in the year partner. She is not interested in you across in a traditional Indian family and individual freedom and career regarded as a nucleus in the Indian willing to transcend the limitations choice. Bela has an American upbringing Had Bela been brought up in Calcutta her decision to have a child out of her father had no role in this journey for a year or so. She wanted to know of facing the challenge of motherhood which seemed so complicated: "My child... He's nothing like you." (The Lowland) rather disturbing: "A pregnant woman needing him. It was a reenactment of Gauri to him, years ago." (*The Lowland*) Bela does not have much faith in her boyfriend Drew about her told him how she used to sit inside

the interrogation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism" (Gandhi: 131) The value of the term just as that of 'hybridity' "inheres in the elucidation of those processes of 'cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents" (Gilroy:2) In fact Homi K. Bhaba thinks that one important trait of the colonial culture is the hybridity and he calls the space between the two cultures of the colonizer and the colonized as 'Third space of enunciation.' (Bhaba: 54) In his seminal work '**The Location of Culture**' he talks about 'cross-fertilization' of culture and this is clearly dealt with in **The Lowland** by Lahiri. Gauri once she gets married to Subhash enters a new cultural world which she is apprehensive about and interested at the same time. She does not take motherhood seriously (much to the disapproval of Subhash) rather it is her 'selfhood' that she wishes to reclaim. Subhash and Gauri's marriage is bereft of the so called 'domestic bliss' but Subhash being an Indian plays the role of a husband and father almost to perfection. These characters experience the duality of existence as immigrants do between the native and the alien. Gauri later on moves to California to pursue her career and leaves behind Bela and Subhash. This according to Lahiri is also a kind of escapism from reality. Gauri's departure could have been a kind of an escape from a marriage bereft of love, as well as, an escape from a sense of guilt that memories of Udayan torment her with. There is a lack of communication between Gauri and Subhash and in the years they live together she is just a passive, detached partner. She is not interested in upholding the image of a mother and wife that come across in a traditional Indian family. In having to choose between familial security and individual freedom and career she is willing to forgo the former. Family which is regarded as a nucleus in the Indian society becomes a burden for Gauri. She is willing to transcend the limitations of society to be able to lead a life of her own choice. Bela has an American upbringing and Subhash respects her individuality. Had Bela been brought up in Calcutta Subhash would not have been able to accept her decision to have a child out of wedlock. She was four months pregnant and the father had no role in this journey—just someone with whom she had been involved for a year or so. She wanted to keep the child as she felt that she was now capable of facing the challenge of motherhood. But for Bela there was nothing in the situation which seemed so complicated: "Because he's not the kind of father I want for my child...He's nothing like you." (**The Lowland**: 263) Subhash finds the coincidence rather disturbing: "A pregnant woman, a fatherless child. Arriving in Rhode Island, needing him. It was a reenactment of Bela's origins. A version of what had brought Gauri to him, years ago." (**The Lowland**: 264) After witnessing the life of her parents Bela does not have much faith in the institution of marriage. She mentions casually to her boyfriend Drew about her mother "That she'd left and never returned...She told him how she used to sit inside the closet where her mother had kept her things.



Behind the coats she hadn't taken with her, the belts and purses on hooks that her father hadn't yet given away. She would stuff a pillow into her mouth, in case her father came home early, and heard her crying." (*The Lowland*: 299-300) In the later years of his life Subhash finds a companion in Elise Silva and according to the latter "their purpose was religious, perhaps funerary or commemorative." (*The Lowland*: 331) A companion is essential to face the immensity of the world. But in India things could have been perceived in a different way. Jhumpa Lahiri in all her books have retained the Indian American experience of her characters. The novel brings in multiple dislocations of the characters— cultural as well as historical which the first-generation Americans experience. Along with the immigrant experience comes clash of cultures, problems of assimilation and conflict between the generations. Here the generation conflict is seen in India itself where Gauri agrees to marry Subhash to free herself from the restrictive household of her in-laws. Jhumpa Lahiri's stories often document the trauma of the characters disturbed by cultural displacement. In the narratives which are basically cosmopolitan, rootlessness and displacement are repeatedly spoken about. Ondaatje, born in Sri Lanka but settled in Canada writes about his fictional characters as "international bastards, born in one place, choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to a get away from our homelands all our lives." (Bharucha and Nabar: 89) Bharati Mukherjee, settled in US, in the preface to her *Darkness and Other Stories* speaks of her mixed heritage with pride: "I have joined imaginative forces with an anonymous driven underclass of semi-assimilated Indian with sentimental attachment to a distant homeland, but no real desire for permanent return... Instead of seeing my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration (or worse, a 'visible' disfigurement to be hidden) I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated... Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of comprehending the world." (Bharucha and Nabar: 89) However unlike many other diasporic writings the clash of Americans and Indians do not come across in Lahiri's writings. The Indians are not shown to battle the local American hostility but it is mostly the exiled souls who are shown battling their own loneliness. Loneliness and cultural conflicts are experienced more by the first generation Americans. The land of opportunities does not deny success to these people. If Gauri experiences academic advancement in California Subhash finds domestic happiness in his marriage to Elise Silva and in the company of his daughter and grandchildren. Jhumpa Lahiri herself represents such displaced identity and hybridized cultural entity and the novel reflects her own situation—her Bengali roots and an American upbringing. Hence her fictional characters usually traverse countries, continents and cultures.

*The Lowland* like her other novels projects the cultural dilemma faced by the immigrants in a foreign land. She has attempted in her own way to answer the

questions that the characters face. In *The Lowland*, the characters' locations identity can also underpin one's cultural legacy is not only where it is there deep rooted in one's culture. In the Indian diasporas' experience in the land the sense of alienation is both felt and lived. To be there one has to discover the 'self' at the end of the novel, the novelist and thereafter, alienation and culture. Lahiri tries to argue through the novel that worth, however alienated they may be. Subhash and Gauri, often make a home as a part of the new world. Armed with a new life. One gets to understand the novel through Udayan out of her inner being to name it as Lahiri shows is actually a kind of home when Gauri goes to hand over the house to her daughter's words of hatred pierce her. Putting an end to Udayan, silence is what Udayan felt, in the loneliness of the neighbourhood watched? There is a metaphorical one, towards the end of the novel. The fear to tell Bela that it is Udayan who has surely change after this heavy rain pelting the windows, washing the streets as a sign of something. Of another first night he spent with Holly, born in America. He began expecting it to be a home through the ceiling, to seep in his life every year in Tollygunge. The time is turning invisible." (*The Lowland*: 331) passing through the initial phase of settling down in America even though it cannot be like Bela—a part of the old world there is a kind of acceptance to the new world he'd landed and made his life, v

questions that the characters face in their search for identity. With the change of locations identity can also undergo a change. To be excessively obsessed with one's cultural legacy is not only unnecessary but also meaningless at times, because it is there deep rooted in one's collective psyche. Alienation does become a part of the Indian diasporas' experience and however well settled they might be in a foreign land the sense of alienation is bound to be there. As social pressures will inevitably be there one has to discover the 'identity' through a series of negotiations. Towards the end of the novel, the novelist brings about some revelations and reconciliations and thereafter, alienation and cultural confusion do not seem to matter much. Jhumpa Lahiri tries to argue through the storyline that each of the characters spell their own worth, however alienated they may appear to be. The immigrants in this novel, like Subhash and Gauri, often make an attempt to shed their cultural baggage and become a part of the new world. Armed with stoicism they move forward in their journey of life. One gets to understand that Gauri is so detached as she is unable to push Udayan out of her inner being to make space for Subhash or even Bela. Self-alienation as Lahiri shows is actually a kind of escapism from reality. At the end of the novel when Gauri goes to hand over the papers to Subhash she meets Bela instead. Her daughter's words of hatred pierced her whole being: "Bela's words were like bullets. Putting an end to Udayan, silencing Gauri now... There was nothing inside her. Was this what Udayan felt, in the lowland when he stood to face them, as the whole neighbourhood watched? There was no one to witness what was happening now. Somehow, she nodded her head." (*The Lowland*: 312-313) There is a monsoon, a metaphorical one, towards the end of the novel that lifts Subhash out of his unknown fear to tell Bela that it is Udayan and not he who is her biological father. Life would surely change after this heavy rain: "At night the rain would wake him. He heard it pelting the windows, washing the pitch of the driveway clean. He wondered if it was a sign of something. Of another juncture in his life. He remembered rain falling the first night he spent with Holly, in her cottage. Heavy rain the evening Bela was born./ He began expecting it to leak through the bricks around the fire-place, to drip through the ceiling, to seep in below the doors. He thought of the monsoon coming every year in Tollygunge. The two ponds flooding the embankment between them turning invisible." (*The Lowland*: 260) The characters experience assimilation after passing through the initial phases of insecurity, loneliness and struggle. Subhash settles down in America even though he still feels connected to his motherland. He cannot be like Bela—a part of the American social structure—but nevertheless there is a kind of acceptance to the situation in his life: "This arbitrary place where he'd landed and made his life, was not his. Like Bela, it had accepted him, while at



the same time keeping a distance. Among its people, its trees, its particular geography he had studied and grown to love, he was still a visitor. Perhaps the worst form of visitor: one who refused to leave."(*The Lowland*: 253)

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#### Metaphors of Jhumpa

**ABSTRACT :** *Jhumpa Lahiri particularly the second and third and waterscapes occupy an in characters. Though metaphor language, George Lakoff and the very thought processes metaphors. An exploration of especially those related to dilemmas and tragic underst metaphoric exploration of the hidden cruxes and trajectory particular cross-section of the*

**KEYWORDS :** Diaspora  
Existential Dilemmas

#### Introduction :

In an interview with Christie and freedom as a writer edges of water:

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A close study of Jhumpa's portrayal of nature in their varied that binds the varied narrative

## Metaphors of Water and Waterscapes in Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction: A Study

Md. Sohail Ahmed

Prof. Liza Das

**ABSTRACT :** *Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction explores the varied tragic shades of particularly the second and third generation Indian-American-Bengali lives. Water and waterscapes occupy an important space of her 'realistic' narrative of these characters. Though metaphor is ubiquitous transcending all aspects of human language, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson gives it a new orientation by invoking the very thought processes of human beings and formulating conceptual metaphors. An exploration of conceptual metaphors in Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction especially those related to waterscapes reveals the 'overcoated' existential dilemmas and tragic understandings of the diasporic lives she portrays. The metaphoric exploration of the waterscape enables us to particularly to appreciate hidden cruxes and trajectories of the sense of loss and pathos underlying a particular cross-section of the Indian-American diaspora.*

**KEYWORDS :** Diaspora, Waterscape, Conceptual Metaphor, Tragedy, Existential Dilemmas

### Introduction :

In an interview with Christopher Taylor in 2008, Jhumpa Lahiri mentions her ease and freedom as a writer whenever the narratives of her stories rivet to the edges of water:

The part of the earth that I've always felt most at ease with is not the ground, but sort of the water's edge ... [the sea represents] a cleansing and an absence of so many of the things that came to bring me down in the everyday world: people's behaviour, people's attitudes, people's looks, people's curiosity about us and my parents. The sea's ... everyone's equal in the face of something like that.

A close study of Jhumpa Lahiri's stories and novels, too, reveals the recurrent portrayal of nature in their varied forms and hues - forming a rich domain of metaphors that binds the varied narratives of arrivals, births, departures and deaths of the



Bengali-American diaspora depicted by her. If we take the first story of her collection *Interpreter of Maladies* entitled "A Temporary Matter", we find a young couple trying to grapple with the vacuity following the death of their first baby soon after its birth and playing a 'revelation game' of episodes of hidden past lives amidst power cuts while outside ice was thawing by the sides of the roads. The eponymous title story of the collection also reaches its climactic moments at Konark where Mr. Kapasi – the interpreter and the guide informs that The Chandravaga river once flowed beside the temple site. It metaphorically gives a clue to the arid state of Mrs. Das haunted by a desert-like guilt the burden of which wished to be liberated by divulging it to an apt 'interpreter of diseases' like Mr. Kapasi. The final story "The Third and Final Continent" depicts the journey of the protagonist across seas and oceans comparing it with the voyage of the first man to moon. In *The Namesake* snowfall and melting, lakes, rivers and seas play key metaphoric roles in the narrative. Bridges and terminals become significant as joining or crossing the shores across water bodies and gulfs. In the title story of Lahiri's latest collection of stories *Unaccustomed Earth* the key metaphor of gardening is associated with spray of water, pools with the lake in Seattle act as the background frame of things happening to Ruma's family. The Atlantic ocean remains the spectator to Elliott's loneliness in "Mrs. Sen's", the setting for the Thanksgiving drama in "Hell Heaven", Ashoke and Gogol's sojourn to a 'point of no return', Kaushik's burial of his mother's photograph in "Year's End" – events which have significant metaphoric associations in the narratives of the stories.

What makes it interesting are the very perceptions and conceptualization processes of water and water bodies as a set of powerful, evocative, transformative metaphors and indicate possibilities of generation of a wide range of meanings out of its interaction with the characters of the stories like waters of love, devotion, pain, arrivals, departures, loss and death etc. They, thus, connote the possibilities of explorations from the cognitive perspectives and thereby might result in fresh lights on both the carefully etched lives of the Bengali-American diasporic lives on the one hand and would enable us in unearthing underlying conceptually integrative narrative threads on the other.

The trilogy of stories entitled "Hema and Kaushik" in *The Unaccustomed Earth* too is filled with the incidents and accidents that both Hema and Kaushik's Fate could have avoided. The trauma of his mother's death and father's shocking remarriage silences Kaushik. In turn, he becomes a globetrotting photojournalist meeting Hema in Rome only finding her standing at another junction of her life – her engagement and wedding with Navin. His watery death in Phuket reconnects with his mother's last days of gazing at The Atlantic. Though Hema assumes that her tempestuous love affair with Kaushik has left no 'trace' in the physical sense, she

has undergone now radically alt in the US and an equally stable the Gangulis could be said to h and curvatures for the Chaudh continue another sojourn by th for the Bengali-Indian-America taking different 'routes' alon metaphors.

#### The Metaphorical Imperative:

George Lakoff and Marl invaluable pioneering book on theory of metaphor. Situating everyday language, the book is like orientational, conduit and discourse of metaphor. This se implications for not only in fie but also in areas like literary s mathematics and the philosophy thought into the limelight. Som – meaning, truth, the nature of – are discussed in an absorbing ease. The moot question posed to formation of concepts. The ra of metaphors and our everyd metaphorical in nature

Johnson and Lakoff hav concepts in the following tern action and only derivatively a n are organized in terms of one o systematicity to each spatializat coherent system rather than a : an overall systematicity among **GOOD IS UP** gives an UP or coherent with special cases like l resultant revision of the earlie categories of metaphors like co The conceptual systems of c Symbolic metonymies are cr metaphorical systems that ci

has undergone now radically altered with the prospect of her stable teaching career in the US and an equally stable husband. An echo of the chain of events affecting the Gangulis could be said to have been replicated albeit along different tangents and curvatures for the Chaudhuris. Hema here steps in to the shoes of Gogol to continue another sojourn by the second-generation Indian-Americans. The saga for the Bengali-Indian-American protagonists would probably share the same 'root' taking different 'routes' along this curvature through profounder and newer metaphors.

#### The Metaphorical Imperative: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) is an invaluable pioneering book on metaphors which gave a radically new spin to the theory of metaphor. Situating at the crisscross of cognitive development and everyday language, the book is now renowned for some path breaking formulations like orientational, conduit and ontological metaphors etc. as a part of the overall discourse of metaphor. This seminal book brought far reaching and wide ranging implications for not only in fields of studies like linguistics and cognitive science but also in areas like literary studies, law, clinical psychology, politics, religion, mathematics and the philosophy of science. It is credited with bringing metaphorical thought into the limelight. Some of the most fundamental ideas in the study of mind – meaning, truth, the nature of thought, and the role of body in the shaping of mind – are discussed in an absorbing manner which a lay reader may follow with relative ease. The moot question posed is how we think metaphorically and how it is crucial to formation of concepts. The radical idea that Lakoff introduces is the pervasiveness of metaphors and our everyday reality being structured by concepts that are metaphorical in nature

Johnson and Lakoff have succinctly presented their thesis of metaphorical concepts in the following terms: Metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action and only derivatively a matter of language. Most of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors. There is an internal systematicity to each spatialization metaphor. For example, **HAPPY IS UP** defines a coherent system rather than a number of isolated and random cases. There is also an overall systematicity among the various spatialization metaphors. For example **GOOD IS UP** gives an **UP** orientation to general well-being. This orientation is coherent with special cases like **HAPPY IS UP**, **ALIVE IS UP**, **HEALTH IS UP**. The resultant revision of the earlier theories from a cognitive angle produces newer categories of metaphors like conduit, ontological, emergent and container metaphors. The conceptual systems of cultures and religions are metaphorical in nature. Symbolic metonymies are critical links between every day and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterize religions and cultures. Spatialization



metaphors are rooted in physical and cultural experience. Our physical and cultural experience provides many possible bases for spatialization metaphors. Which ones are chosen, and which ones are major may vary from culture to culture. In some cases spatialization is so essential a part of a concept that it is difficult for us to imagine any alternative metaphor that might structure the concept. The replacement of the vehicle/ frame/tensive formulation with the cognitive discourse of 'source'. It means the replacement of earlier schema of vehicle / tenor/ ground or locus/ frame / filter with a new schema of 'source domain', 'target domain' and 'mapping' of the target. As regards 'metaphorical truth' it is based on 'understanding' – one might explore it either through a 'direct' or an 'indirect' understanding through various structures, experience, interactive properties and types like – entity structure, orientational structure, dimensions of structure, experiential gestalts, background, highlighting and prototypes. It means that adequate account of meaning and truth can only be based on understanding. They challenge the 'myth of objectivism' in western Philosophy and linguistics and argue for giving new meaning to the old myths. Further, in *More Than Cool Reason* (1989) Lakoff and Turner remark:

"Metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it. It is omnipresent: metaphor suffuses our thoughts, no matter what we are thinking about... And it is irreplaceable: metaphor allows us to understand ourselves and our world in ways that no other modes of thought can." (xi)

The entire book is devoted to showing how poets extend, elaborate, question and make composite the ordinary metaphors we use. The contributions of Lakoff and Turner and Lakoff and Johnson are important because they have argued convincingly that metaphor is not simply ornamentation or poetic embellishment. Metaphor is ubiquitous. This however does not mean that there is no difference between everyday speech and poetic composition. What is problematised – and rather severely – is the neat Formalist formulation of the divide between poetic and everyday language. Now the very fact that everyday language is metaphorical at the root is a pointer to why we experience aesthetic delight in poetry: the metaphorical nature of our thought processes allows us in the first place to identify the extensions and elaborations of everyday metaphors in poetry. The present study is an attempt to explore how conceptual metaphors of water and water bodies are extended and elaborated by Jhumpa Lahiri in her fiction.

#### Metaphors of Water and Water Bodies in Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction:

Water, water bodies and varied forms of water act as hinges of the emotionscape of the actors in Lahiri's stories. A snow-storm results in the power-outage that acts as the natural backdrop to the emotional oscillations and interplay

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of light/darkness in the story "A Temporary Matter":

Nearly three feet had fallen in the last storm, so that for a week people had to walk single file, in narrow trenches. For a week that was Shukumar's excuse for not leaving the house. But now the trenches were widening, and water drained steadily into grates in the pavement. (5)

The metaphor of snow-storm here has been the narrative ploy for devising the power outage on the one hand and the confinement of Shukumar whose days have already been structured through a lazing around. Secondly, it evocatively captures the emotionscape of the inhabitants of the house—the young couple who have been trying to weather the recent storm in their lives in the form of the death of their baby. The act of weeping as sublimation was not possible in the pre-storm scenario. It is in the wake of the natural backdrop of the snow storm and the gradual process of the thawing that lends a powerful impact to Lahiri's narrative style and delineation of a sense of loss. From this powerful projection we can develop metaphors like **SNOWSTORM BURIES THE EARTH, THE EARTH CONTAINS THE TREE LINED HOUSE, SNOWSTORM OFFSHOOTS POWER OUTAGE, DARKNESS ENVELOPS DUE TO SNOWSTORM, CANDLELIGHT INDICATES THAWING OF HEAPS OF EMOTIONS, EMOTIONS THAWS AND BREAKS THE STALEMATE OF COMMUNICATION, THAWING OF ICE INDICATES COMING TO TERMS OF GRIEF LADEN EMOTION** etc. Each of these metaphors adds up to meanings associated with the onset, continuance and finally opening a channel of communication through the 'confession game' strategy vis-à-vis the relationship between Shoba and Shukumar. The snow-storm is again partially personified through the tall, debonair and intellectual figure of Pranab in "Hell-Heaven." The arrival of the stormy and charismatic character of Pranab is indicative of the way incidents of future in the story:

He had arrived in January, in the middle of a snowstorm, and at the end of a week he had packed his bags and gone to Logan, prepared to abandon the opportunity he'd worked toward all his life, only to change his mind at the last minute. (64)

Here, we can say that Pranab is fated to become a "snow storm" which he tries to avoid initially but could not. The metaphors that could be evolved inferentially are—**SOMEONE IS AFFECTED BY SNOWSTORM, THE SNOWSTORM IS A FIGURE, IT PASSES SOME OF ITS FEATURES TO A HUMAN BEING** etc. Though Pranab remained oblivious to Usha's mother- Aparna's crush on him and the devastating effect that his marriage with Deborah on her, it was he who 'destroyed' the happy family life with two beautiful grown up daughters by his association with another married Bengali-American lady—opposite to what Aparna had predicted. Deborah's frank admission of being jealous to her for having a cultural intimacy



with Pranab somehow balanced the jealousy that Aparna had for her. Usha, after experiencing a heart-break akin to her mother's and Deborah's gets an intimate view how her mother had methodically prepared for committing suicide—incidentally saved by their neighbour—with whom she shared little rapport. In a powerfully evocative and scary scene Lahiri delineates how the victim of the "storm" is 'rescued' by an observer of the setting sun:

It was not I who saved her or my father, but our next-door neighbor, Mrs. Holcomb, with whom my mother had never been particularly friendly. She came out to rake the leaves in her yard, calling out to my mother and remarking how beautiful the sunset was. "I see you've been admiring it for a while now," she said. My mother agreed, and then she went back into the house. (83)

We can note here that "raking the leaves" is associated with someone's habit of keeping the back garden clean and trim. Thus, beside the sunset view, it is also Mrs. Holcomb's urge to rake the leaves that connects Aparna's fatedness to be rescued. The metaphor **THE SUNSET AND GARDENING RESCUE A VICTIM OF A SNOWSTORM** could be aptly evolved to delineate Aparna's incidental coming back from the brink of death. Further, the metaphorical strand of the "storm-sunset" is also linked up with the title of the story "Hell-Heaven" as it is this feeling that primarily motivates in formation of a nether land in Aparna's mind and drives her to suicide. Interestingly, the coinage of this expression meant to highlight the chasm between Pranab's life as a bachelor and the post-marriage life with Deborah is again a by-product of cultural slippage on Aparna's part who probably wished to convey *Akash-Patal* (Sky-Netherland) in Bengali as indicated by Aju Mukhopadhyay in his article entitled "Short Stories of Cultural Mix and Clash" (2010). Though Mukhopadhyay recreates the formulation of "Hell-Heaven" as *Akash-Patal* his painstaking argumentation that "other communities too feel the same way" and dubbing such relationships as "unexpected, shameless and triangular" is an essentialisation of sort which also ignores textual cues as describing the presence of Pranab as a source of "pure happiness" for Aparna by her daughter Usha. In contrast, Tanushree Singh in her article entitled "Diasporic Indian Women in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*" hints that such a situation is often depicted in Bengali literature as done by Rabindranath Tagore in "Nasta Nirh." Here lies the latent link of Aparna's infatuation with the nineteenth century Bengali middle-class housewife Charulata—the protagonist of Rabindranath Tagore's story "Nasta Nirh" ("The Broken Nest"). Just as Pranab's presence ignites the dour life that Aparna is forced to share with the insensitive Shyamal, Charulata too was tired of her husband Bhupati's untiring mission of spreading the tenets of Western liberalism through publication of newspapers. For Charulata, the presence of Amal—Bhupati's cousin,

with his youthful exuberance and p to resist. Both the stories end in a ironical inversion in the form of f later in their own ways by the three fate and gradually a companions piques Usha slightly. She gathers both Deborah and her daughter's s due to the forceful blowing of the "Nasta Nirh" we can say that **THE** reference to "Hell-Heaven" we **DAMAGED BY THE SNOW ST**

One of the key aspects of Jhumpa Lahiri links the experie landscape. The narrative is wear manner that it invokes an aurr novel. While anticipating the new the hospital Ashoke goes on a stre of his youth with Russian classic He is still haunted by the fateful tr changed the trajectory of his life fascination for the snowcapped f

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The incipient connection nineteenth century Russia, the o invokes a metaphorical blending his marriage to Ashima it is fate three "mental spaces" operating h sketched by Nikolai Gogol in his of Ashoke on train—the "soot lad snowy landscape of St. Petersbu Ashoke would be fated, as per t and future are blended through t the son and the father later enable that would have pleased his now

with his youthful exuberance and poetic idealism becomes an attraction too powerful to resist. Both the stories end in a different way- "Hell-Heaven" has its underlying ironical inversion in the form of Pranab's faltering the trace of the scars are shared later in their own ways by the three women. Aparna obviously comes to terms to her fate and gradually a companionship evolves between her and her husband which piques Usha slightly. She gathers enough emotional strength to be sympathetic to both Deborah and her daughter's sufferings. The "nest" that is damaged is ultimately due to the forceful blowing of the metaphorical "snow storm." Thus, in reference to "Nasta Nirh" we can say that **THE NEST WAS BROKEN BY THE STORM** while in reference to "Hell-Heaven" we can metaphorically say that **THE NEST WAS DAMAGED BY THE SNOW STORM.**

One of the key aspects of *The Namesake* is indeed the manner in which Jhumpa Lahiri links the experiential reality of Ashoke Ganguly with the snowy landscape. The narrative is weaved through this metaphor in such a powerful manner that it invokes an aura of haunting through the narrative fabric of the novel. While anticipating the news of the birth of his first child alone in the lobby of the hospital Ashoke goes on a stream of reminiscence about the fateful intertwining of his youth with Russian classics such as Nikolai Gogol's story "The Overcoat." He is still haunted by the fateful train accident way back in 1961 which consequently changed the trajectory of his life. The narrator records the ironic fatedness of his fascination for the snowcapped fictional landscape evoked by Gogol:

Immersed in the sartorial plight of Akaky Akakyevich, lost in the wide, snow-white, windy avenues of St. Petersburg, unaware that one day he was to dwell in a snowy place himself, Ashok was still reading at two-thirty in the morning, one of the few passengers on the train was awake, when the locomotive engine and seven bogies derailed from the broad-gauge line. (17)

The incipient connection of the two landscapes—one belonging to the nineteenth century Russia, the other relating to the late 1960s of the USA, thus, invokes a metaphorical blending informing and structuring Ashoke's life and via his marriage to Ashima it is fated to be passed to the next generation. There are three "mental spaces" operating here. The first one pertains to the fictional landscape sketched by Nikolai Gogol in his story. The second one is the contrastive condition of Ashoke on train-the "soot laden" face about to soap. The third one is where the snowy landscape of St. Petersburg is mapped on to the Cambridge scenario where Ashoke would be fated, as per the narrative expression of future time. Thus, past and future are blended through this snow metaphor. The close relationship between the son and the father later enables his son Gogol Ganguly to recollect the landscape that would have pleased his now dead father in a poignant manner:



Snow covers the straw-coloured ground. Trees stand like spears, dried copper leaves from the previous season still clinging to a few of the branches. He sees the back of houses made of brick and wood. Small snowy lawns. A solid shelf of winter clouds stops just sort of the horizon. (184)

Here, we find the fourth dimension where again the son while looking at the moving sight on board from a train after his father's death is looking at the sight to recollect that such a sight would have touched Ashoke. Further, the metaphor here has an affective edge as it highlights the poignancy associated with the sense of loss of his father. This kind of creative and dynamic blending of the time-past, present and future on the hand and on the other the spontaneous movement from the fictional to the "real" spatiality cutting across geographical boundaries add a powerful impact on Jhumpa Lahiri's realistic framework through which she weaves the narrative.

Though Ashoke and Gogol Ganguly do not pray for snowfall, Hema in the novella section of the *Unaccustomed Earth* aptly entitled "Hema and Kaushik" recollected later while Kaushik's urge for seeing a heavy snowfall during their comeback to the USA and stay with her family:

Then one day snow began to fall, barely visible at first, gathering force as the afternoon passed, an inch or so coating the streets by the time I rode the bus home from school. It was not a dangerous storm, but significant enough to break up the monotony of winter. (247)

Crucial to the criss cross of Hema and Kaushik's paths is this scene of the snowfall in "Once Upon a Lifetime"—the first story of the trilogy depicting the tragic saga of this young second-generation Bengali-American couple. The discovery of a family graveyard long buried under the snow sets Kaushik the young photographer busy, while Hema—the thirteen year old girl is perplexed:

We walked a long way, until I no longer heard the sounds of snow being shoveled, no longer saw our house. I didn't realize at first what you were doing, getting on your knees and pushing away the snow. Underneath was a rock of some sort. And then I saw that it was a tombstone. You uncovered a row of them, flat on the ground. I began to help you, unburying the buried, using my mittened hands at first, then my whole arm. They belonged to people named Simonds, a family of six. They belonged to people named Simonds, a family of six. "They're all here together," you said. "Mother, father, four children." (249)

From this scene it can be assumed about the burial aspect of snow can be

understood through the interaction of metaphors that can be evolved:

**SNOW BURIES THE PAST  
UNDER SNOW, DIGGING THE  
GRAVEYARD, THE PAST IS  
PRESENT BURIES THE PAST  
ENABLING TO REST THE DEAD  
GRAVE, A FAMILY GRAVEYARD/  
GRAVEYARD etc.**

Through these interactions we can understand the reason why Kaushik's mother weeps. The intimate knowledge that Kaushik's mother has of the cancer afflicting Parul enables her to understand Parul's jealous views of her parents. She knows that they could not bury his mother's body in an approximation and alternative to a watery grave—she made them rest in a grave strewn over the Atlantic. The snow is a symbolic coating over the concrete reality, performing an immense symbolic function for it shifts and continually moves across the landscape, marking his fate at a sea side resort in Kailash. **Conclusion**

To sum up, Jhumpa Lahiri's "water's edge" as stated in her story depicts the trajectories of the incidents, actions and reactions of Indian-Bengali-American actors. It conveys a sense of loss and sad tenors of the diaspora.

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understood through the interaction of the source and target domains of a set of metaphors that can be evolved:

**SNOW BURIES THE PAST, OLD GRAVES SOMETIMES LIE BURIED UNDER SNOW, DIGGING THE SNOW ENABLES THE DISCOVERY OF THE GRAVEYARD, THE PAST IS A GRAVEYARD, THE HEAVY SNOW OF THE PRESENT BURIES THE PAST, BURIAL IS RESTING, BURIAL IS AN ACT OF ENABLING TO REST THE DEAD, THE DYING ARE INCHING TOWARDS THE GRAVE, A FAMILY GRAVEYARD REMINDS ONE OF ONE'S OWN FAMILY GRAVEYARD etc.**

Through these interactions a litany of meanings emerge which connect to the reason why Kaushik's mother was looking for a new house which has a water view. The intimate knowledge that Kaushik and Hema share about the advanced stage of cancer afflicting Parul enables Hema to have a different perspective not a kin to the jealous views of her parents. She shares the tone of regret that on Kaushik's voice that they could not bury his mother owing to cultural barrier. The closest approximation and alternative that has been chosen primarily at Parul's behest is a watery grave—she made them promise that after her death her ashes would be strewn over the Atlantic. The conception of the watery grave here acts as another symbolic coating over the conception of the earthly grave. This watery grave bears immense symbolic function for the trilogy. Kaushik as a professional photographer shifts and continually moves across the world along the water's edge till he meets his fate at a sea side resort in Khao Lak of South East Asia.

#### Conclusion

To sum up, Jhumpa Lahiri employs a litany of metaphors associated with "water's edge" as stated in her interview. Through analysis of these metaphors trajectories of the incidents, actions taking place by the side of the water around the Indian-Bengali-American actors reveal their varied striations and shades of the sense of loss and sad tenors of their lives.

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## Power Equation in Shashi Desai

**ABSTRACT:** *Shashi Desai's life of repression in the fan. In order to achieve their bondage with the hope of happiness in life. She pa, and private spheres. She their identity. As a femini of Indian women. In The relations with profession, latter on the former. Th marital relations, the dyn economic permutation. I glorification of sexual hi uses as a weapon to pos otherwise, gradually lost inversions, the male tak expression of power and l at marital relationship re*

**KEYWORDS :** *st institution, relationship s*

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### Power Equation in Contemporary Marital Relations: A Study in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*

Jewelina Chowdhury

**ABSTRACT:** *Shashi Deshpande's heroines are urban educated women and the life of repression in the family affects the very source of their thinking and behaviour. In order to achieve their freedom they seek marriage as an alternative to the bondage with the hope that their new role will help them in acquiring some happiness in life. She pays close attention to women and their issues in domestic and private spheres. She explores the struggle of the Indian women in search for their identity. As a feminist Deshpande recognises and aspires for the betterment of Indian women. In The Dark Holds No Terrors Deshpande juxtapose marital relations with professional priorities and analytically focus on the impact of the latter on the former. This novel shows analytical interpretations of changing marital relations, the dynamics of power in marital relations is dependent on new economic permutation. The belittling of the powerful male is a part of the de-glorification of sexual hierarchy culminates in marital rape which the husband uses as a weapon to possess, dominate and demean the wife over whom he is, otherwise, gradually losing control. Being a loser in power-politics in marital inversions, the male takes resort to rape-like act which exposes the sadistic expression of power and hatred for the wife. This paper makes an attempt to look at marital relationship reflected in the novel*

**KEYWORDS :** *stereotyped gender-role, power equation, marriage as institution, relationship structures*

Gender refers to the cultural categories of femininity/ masculinity based upon the biological division. By contrast, gender-role refers to a role that society anticipates according to one's gender; it thus involves the recognition that particular kinds of behavior (feminine versus masculine) are appropriate for each gender. By constant internalization of performance of roles assigned by the culture we become gendered bodies. In a patriarchal social order power becomes an exclusively attribute of the man. The Indian family unit largely follows a traditional structure which has been primarily patriarchal in its underlying philosophy which privileges the male



over the female and the former dominate in most cases. It moulds the behaviour and character structure of female from infancy through adolescence and trains and disciplines them teaching submission to the established authority. Shashi Deshpande in her novels presents a gallery of women caught in the web of marital discord where she lay bare the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operating within the institution of family. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Deshpande with her extremely poignant and realistic portrayal of contemporary marital domesticity expose when traditional marital structures are determined by renegotiated sex-roles, the conventional equations are jeopardized. Deshpande juxtapose marital relations with professional priorities and analytically focus on the impact of the latter on the former. This novel shows analytical interpretations of changing marital relations, the dynamics of power in marital relations is dependent on new economic permutations. The belittling of the powerful male is a part of the de-glorification of sexual hierarchy culminates in marital rape which the husband uses as a weapon to possess, dominate and demean the wife over whom he is, otherwise, gradually losing control. Being a loser in power-politics in marital inversions, sex is not man's source of gratification and fulfillment, but a rape-like act and sadistic expression of power and hatred for the wife.

Women's inhibition in the family is set in power relations. The domestic space which is the microcosm of society displays the arrangement of the members of both the gender. It acts as a site for the complex interplay of social relations and power and creates different meanings to the individuals who dwell in it in terms of gender. Michel Foucault is of the view that "power is mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts on their actions" (Foucault, 1982). Foucault does not deny the existence of negative or repressive relations of power, but he maintains that power is primarily positive rather than negative, productive rather than repressive, exercised rather than possessed, omnipresent rather than localized. Feminists argue that women as a social group are dominated by men and this domination of women occurs within a set of institutionalized relationships called patriarchy. Kate Millet states that in patriarchy power resides in male hands and that sexual domination is: "the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concepts of power" (Millet, 1970). Foucault's assertion that power is not possessed but exercised becomes pertinent in this context and analyses of the operations of power and the consequent effect on the spatial positioning of all the members within a family becomes relevant. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* deals with marital domestic crisis which ensued for the reason that of the protagonist Sarita's (Saru) innate love for power since childhood over other family members. She defies all the patriarchal norms at the slightest threat to her importance since her childhood with the natural love for power perhaps

inherited from her mother. It in the filial power structure" family spends her childhood. In her conversation with Gita by our childhood and our parents women are pre-determined by traditions of a culture that Beauvoir's statement, "one (295.) has a special relevance dictate and inhibit woman's independence at home, to sameness, to tradition of her secondary position. It the past which naturalize the recollects a distressing incident friend for a walk:

Walk? Didn't you thin vegetables to be cut, the butt

In a patriarchal society girls the indoors and see to it Her mother shows sexist/gender daughter Saru:

Don't go out in the sun

Who care?

We have to care if you

I don't want to get married

Will you live with us all

Why not?

You can't?

And Dhruva?

He is different. He's a boy

Deshpande points out a son and undermines the role of a daughter. Her research studies to prove her worth at home for higher studies. The system. Her entry into M.A. lecturer which culminates in Saru's marriage K.K. Sunal power and self reliance." (Saru to foster the growth of a girl child

inherited from her mother. It is a power struggle where the mother is the "arch rival in the filial power structure" (Triparthi 43). Saru born in a conservative Brahmin family spends her childhood repeatedly reminded of her femaleness by her mother. In her conversation with Gita Viswanath, Shashi Deshpande opines, "We are shaped by our childhood and our parents." (229) The behavioral patterns for the Indian women are pre-determined by the society into which one is born and the values and traditions of a culture that upholds archetypal images of woman. Simone de Beauvoir's statement, "one is not born a woman, one becomes one", (Beauvoir, 295.) has a special relevance to India where conventions, religious and social taboos dictate and inhibit woman's individuality. To be a female is to be confined to one's home, to sameness, to tradition and if she lifts her head she is reminded repeatedly of her secondary position. These women experience the weight of the ideologies of the past which naturalize the arbitrary power division between the sexes. Saru recollects a distressing incident when her mother retorts as she goes out with her friend for a walk:

Walk? Didn't you think you could have helped me at home? There are the vegetables to be cut, the butter milk to be churned" (176)

In a patriarchal society, it takes for granted that boys love the outdoor and girls the indoors and see to it that their respective roles assigned to them are indoor. Her mother shows sexist/gender difference in her treatment of her son Dhruva and daughter Saru:

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

Who care?

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

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't?

And Dhruva?

He is different. He's a boy. (50)

Deshpande points out the Indian tradition which gives undue importance to a son and undermines the role of the girl in the family. Saru's breaks the umbilical cord studies to prove her worth that she is no less than a male child and leaves home for higher studies. This is her first public defiance of the patriarchal power system. Her entry into Medical College leads to romance with Manu, a college lecturer which culminates in a marriage without parental approval. Commenting on Saru's marriage K.K. Sunalini says "...an act of defiance proving her strength, power and self reliance." (Sunalini, 102) The institution of home, which is supposed to foster the growth of a girl child, denied the right to her individuality. Deshpande's



heroines in order to achieve their freedom they seek marriage as an alternative to the bondage with the hope that their new role will help them in acquiring some happiness in life. Saru too in this novel leaves the inner space- parental home by marrying Manohar (Manu) and raising a family and having a home- once again.

Marital life with Manu provides Saru the chance to escape she desired from a restricted home- the freedom from gender bias and space that she needs. But this home too disappoints her. The very economic independence which she thought would earn her power now becomes a bane. Initially both Saru and Manu were leading a blissful marital life. But problems begin to slowly creep into their domesticity the moment Saru is recognized as a doctor. Manu can't tolerate that his wife enjoys better social stature; and it gradually destroys their marriage. She thinks "The human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband." (42) Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this cast a shadow in their marital life. In this context Bhalla's view stands pertinent:

The symbiotic relation of man- woman is cast in strict stereotypical boundaries of dominance and subservience. Any change in the dynamics of the power balance, a change both encouraged by the evolving economic, social framework of modern India and discouraged by tradition, myth and legend ...destroys relationship. (Bhalla31)

Saru's success as a doctor and Manu's relatively lower status deconstructs this "dynamics of power balance". This equation holds up a mirror to Manu. Phallocratic power-holds become imperative for marital status quo but when marital structures are determined by renegotiated sex-roles, the conventional equations are jeopardized. Her ascendance renders Manu less significant and impotent. This disparity deepens the rift in their relationship. The situation worsens when a reporter, from a woman's magazine, comes to interview Sarita and asks Manu: "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" (200) This question seems to hurt the pride of Manu as he like a conventional husband unable to stand his wife's professional success. He to hide his growing inadequacies transforms into a brutal animal at night and a sheepish husband in the day. Manu enforces his masculine power on her body:

Monstrous onslaught on her person and personality. He attacked like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this...this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body. (201)

For the first time in the literary history of Indian women's writing in English deals with the issue of marital rape. Manu fails to exercise his male domination over

Saru, and he tries to play traditi every night. "His purpose, the taking on the 'male' role, and violence" (Atrey and Kirpal 4 how the stronghold of traditi perpetrators of evil. Infact, the who is the predator? Are the both? (144) For Saru power ex is a unique scheme:

[...] there is something destroyed by female dominati she can submit, and yet hold sc in her that prevents erosion and become lethal only when a wo

Saru fed up with subordin step and leaves parents' hom identity. In all these acts of de express her grief. She starts t Manohar, without the consen thinks that if her marriage had and sympathetic for her suffer fault again. If mine had been would he have left me like this' power equations and the fast t by the control of the male. Th to depict the man's superiority of all virtues.

In *Dark Holds No Tern* sexual violence and sexual dc the husband uses as a weapc whom he is, otherwise, gradua in power-politics in marital in fulfillment, but a rape-like act wife. It reveals how a normal as a result of transformed r reconstructions. But Manu w a parasite, is dependent on l economic independence help happy one for a man. With his

Saru, and he tries to play traditional male dominated role through sexual molestation every night. "His purpose, though repressed in the subconscious, is to punish her taking on the 'male' role, and to assert his superiority and power through physical violence" (Atrey and Kirpal 43). Deshpande in depicting Manu, seems to show how the stronghold of tradition makes scapegoats of men and turns them into perpetrators of evil. Infact, the novel explores questions like, who is the victim and who is the predator? Are the roles so distinct, so separate? Or are we, each of us both? (144) For Saru power equation between husband-wife in marital domesticity is a unique scheme:

[...] there is something in the male that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination. It is not so with a female. She can be dominated, she can submit, and yet hold something of herself in reserve. As if there is something in her that prevents erosion and self-destruction [...]. Does the sword of domination become lethal only when a woman holds it over a man? (77)

Saru fed up with subordinate treatment at parental home takes up the rebellious step and leaves parents' home to seek career and husband to establish her own identity. In all these acts of deviation, she finds herself alone. She finds no-one to express her grief. She starts to feel that she has committed a mistake by marrying Manohar, without the consent of her parents. She has a guilty conscious. She thinks that if her marriage had been an arranged one, her parents could be receptive and sympathetic for her sufferings, and might have come to her rescue. "... It's my fault again. If mine had been a marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this?" (218) Even, a love-marriage is not free of the usual power equations and the fast transforming conventional marriage too is dominated by the control of the male. Through the portrayal of Saru, Shashi Deshpande tries to depict the man's superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of all virtues.

In *Dark Holds No Terrors* Shashi Deshpande particularly focuses on male sexual violence and sexual domination through forced and compulsory sex which the husband uses as a weapon to possess, dominate and demean the wife over whom he is, otherwise, gradually losing control. Defeated and displaced and a loser in power-politics in marital inversions, sex is not man's source of gratification and fulfillment, but a rape-like act and sadistic expression of power and hatred for the wife. It reveals how a normal male is converted into a sexually pervert psychopath as a result of transformed man-woman relationship in modern urban social reconstructions. But Manu will not even let Saru give up her profession as he, like a parasite, is dependent on her for his own position and comforts. No doubt, economic independence helps in shifting power but the process of shift is not a happy one for a man. With his downfall, Saru is torn between pride and exhilaration



on the one hand and a realization of change in his personality on the other. She finds herself in the vortex of conventional socio-cultural patterns. She is aware that she can neither lead her married life towards disaster or compromises. But the process of transformation once put into motion cannot be reversed. The change from the equation of a young man and his bride to being a lady doctor and her husband is immense and Saru holds herself fully responsible for it. "a+b", she knows, can never be "b+a". "It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible"(37). Marital domesticity is ruthlessly unmasked as an ugly and oppressive, both man and woman and in which man and woman are alike victim and persecutor, murderer and the murdered, equally trapped in a ruthlessly claustrophobic situation.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, marriage is a well-organized nightmarish rape in which the rapist who makes "monstrous invasion of my body" and pinions her "to a position of an abject surrender of myself" (10) is no other than the husband. Woman's silence is not symbolic of her conventional powerlessness but responsibility in the subversion of the traditional sexual equation. Bewildered Saru now runs from the "endless repetition of the same pattern" (158) of her marital home and dodged to her parental home only to confirm that there is hope for her. Her father lends sympathetic hearing to her problems. He advises her to face the realities of life with courage and return back to her husband's house. "Don't turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him." (216) As a result, she gets a new vigor which helps her to achieve wholeness and overcome the identity crisis. The realization dawns upon her that she cannot run away from reality. She learns that her life is her own which she will have to shape on her own. There is no refuge, other than one's own self. She decides to assert herself and march ahead to encounter the problems. With this in mind, she confidently waits to confront her husband. ". . . if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can." (221) In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru's exit from domestic space may appear as a deconstruction of gender identity but she finally goes back to Manu. Thus in a patriarchal set-up a woman is granted emancipation according to the parameters fixed by man for her. In Saru's case she goes out to deconstruct the sociological ideologies inflicted upon women but she comes back in to reconstruct her innate roles. From a dystopian world of the narrative all escape routes are after all, an illusion; this, Saru realizes philosophically. Beena Agarwal has pertinently comments:

The life of Saru, [...] is evidently a Saga of a modern woman, how she redefines her 'self' to escape the perpetual darkness of torture, injustice and ignominy. To escape the shadows of the animosity of parents, she reaffirms her identity in her professional achievements and later on tries to seek fulfillment in her married life. However, after the failure at these two stages, she turns back to recollect and

reorganize what she had left follows a circular vision to

Deshpande in this novel of marriage and inverts its characters to conscious or radical restructuring.

The male domination patriarchal family and socio-secondary position seem cause of women. In *The L* projects the post-modern resentment as they feel stifled changed notions of life. The women are mostly limited ideologies. "Through Saru, Deshpande highlights how Indian society can cause such The social status and recognition cleave a wedge in her before the issue of marital rape not necessarily amount to the perpetrator. Women have male dominance and sexual Holmstrom says that "me woman"(Pathak, 1998). As to get even with women who the issue of domestic sex documents for the understated important to acknowledge among educated urban Indians them as individuals with their to restore equality between must work towards a balance able to find their own rights repressive social structures consciousness which can be As Deshpande has pertinent trapped, frustrated women is In the context of the changin

reorganize what she had left in her parental home. In this respect, Shashi Deshpande follows a circular vision to constitute the fluidity of female identity. (31)

Deshpande in this novel prepares the ground for an overthrow of the institution of marriage and inverts its subtle patriarchal manipulations but ultimately leads her characters to conscious or unconscious acquiescence and forecloses change and radical restructuring.

The male domination of woman's life seems to be a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal family and society at large and the consequent relegation of woman to a secondary position seemed to have prompted Shashi Deshpande to take up the cause of women. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* through Saru Shashi Deshpande projects the post-modern dilemma of a woman who strongly voices a note of resentment as they feel stifled under the oppressive restrictions. She has her own changed notions of life. But in spite of the changing trends the options for such women are mostly limited in marital domesticity with the dominance of cultural ideologies. "Through Saru, the doctor protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Deshpande highlights how emancipation and success for woman in the patriarchal Indian society can cause subversion of roles in the family and destroy happiness. The social status and recognition Saru gleans as a doctor and the demands on her time cleave a wedge in her marital life" (Dominic, 2010). Deshpande has brought to fore the issue of marital rape, which is not often discussed in public and which does not necessarily amount to violence under the law because it is the husband who is the perpetrator. Women have been living in pain and silence for ages as victims of male dominance and sexual violence. Shashi Deshpande in an interview to Lakshmi Holmstrom says that "men do use their power, the sexual power to subjugate woman" (Pathak, 1998). As in the case of Manu rape seems to be the ultimate weapon to get even with women who hurt their pride. Shashi Deshpande's novels focus on the issue of domestic sexual violence making them, in the process, important documents for the understanding of gender relations in modern India. However, it is important to acknowledge the attitudinal changes that are beginning to happen among educated urban Indian men who have learnt to respect women and treat them as individuals with their own minds. Shashi Deshpande seems to look hopefully to restore equality between the sexes and achieve harmony. Marital domesticity must work towards a balanced gender equation in which both men and women are able to find their own rightful place. Though we cannot totally change or destroy repressive social structures; but by posing questions can help in formulating a consciousness which can perhaps ultimately bring about a constructive change. As Deshpande has pertinently comments, "A world without frightened, dependent, trapped, frustrated women is a better world for all of us to live in." (Deshpande, 2003) In the context of the changing world we live in, it has become imperative to do away



with separate domains for woman and man and to redefine man-woman relationship as equal and complementary and not on terms of domination and subordination.

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**Historic  
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*Abstract: Ghasiram Kotwal attributed to several reas context. Within the conte not seem to conform to the character and temporality of history in Ghasiram Ko the playwright demonstrat decision, a treaty, a reign, usurpation of power, the a had once used it, the feeb entry of a masked "other. relationship and struggle fo only a platform upon which By adopting a historical demonstrate the idea that made visible" (Brannigan, that predominantly border debates on contemporary i contextualisation of the play arrive at a postcolonial un power, space and hegemon look at the issues of spatia dwell upon the politics of s imperial ideology which est to Ghasiram, a Brahmin fro may be read in terms of c dominance while making it.*

## Historicism as Resistance: A Postcolonial Reading of *Ghasiram Kotwal*

Deetimali Barua Nath

Merry Baruah Bora

**Abstract:** *Ghasiram Kotwal's* significance in the domain of Indian theatre may be attributed to several reasons perhaps the most prominent being its historical context. Within the context of the play however, the historical perspective does not seem to conform to the socio-cultural givens where history in the form of the character and temporality does not serve the agenda of conformity. The presence of history in *Ghasiram Kotwal* serves to act as a narrative device through which the playwright demonstrates how history may also be visualised not merely as "a decision, a treaty, a reign, a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, the feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked "other." (Foucault in Rabinow, 88). It is this reversal of relationship and struggle for power that lie at the core of the play, making history only a platform upon which the narrative of hegemonic structures is constructed. By adopting a historical context in *Ghasiram Kotwal* Tendulkar intends to demonstrate the idea that a literary text is a "space where power relations are made visible" (Brannigan, 6). While adopting a subversive mode of narration that predominantly borders on resistance, *Ghasiram Kotwal* initiates several debates on contemporary issues which engage the readers and critics alike. The contextualisation of the play within the specificities of history may be employed to arrive at a postcolonial understanding while taking into account the notions of power, space and hegemony of class. Using power as a vantage point, one may look at the issues of spatiality and class hegemony foregrounded in the play to dwell upon the politics of subordination vis-a-vis the creation of an apparently imperial ideology which establishes the centrality of the Pune Brahmins in relation to *Ghasiram*, a Brahmin from Kanauj, besides others. The portrayal of *Ghasiram* may be read in terms of a relatively weaker margin, resisting the forces of dominance while making its way towards the more powerful centre. In all his



dubiousness and manipulative strategies to usurp power Ghasiram becomes the masked other who achieves success in transcending the limitations of class hierarchy. In all this however, power lies at the crux of the matter making the play a scathing critique of the supremacist ideology within which government, law and order and even human beings are transformed into mere apparatuses through which subordination and oppression attain a sense of legitimacy. And therefore, at the close of the play the brutal fate that Ghasiram meets with appears just and right. An attempt shall be made in this paper to argue that history provides the playwright an opportunity to resist the given structures of power, space and notion of hegemony. Here history becomes the apparatus with which the playwright contests the socio-cultural givens of his time thereby bestowing it with a sense of contemporaneity which only adds to its richness.

*Keywords: Historicism, power, space, hegemony.*

In his Introduction to *Ghasiram Kotwal* the dramatist Vijay Tendulkar remarked:

"This is not a historical play. It is a story in prose, verse music and dance set in a historical era. Ghasirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place." (2)

In the light of the quoted statement it becomes imperative to interpret the play not as a historical text but as one where within the historical context the playwright makes an attempt to construct a discourse of power seen through the prism of ideology, hegemony and space. The play's historicism may thus be considered merely contextual in the sense that the historical perspective does not seem to conform to the socio-cultural givens where history in the form of the character and temporality does not serve the agenda of conformity. Rather it serves to act as a narrative device through which the playwright focuses on how the idea of history may be applied in a subversive perspective to provide a contested reading of power and hegemony revealing the underlying nuances of politics that are at play. In other words history is not merely "a decision, a treaty, a reign, a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, the feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked 'other'" (Foucault in Rabinow, 88). By adopting a historical context in *Ghasiram Kotwal*, Tendulkar intends to demonstrate the idea that a literary text is a "space where power relations are made visible" (Brannigan, 6). Situated within this perspective the historicism of *Ghasiram Kotwal* attains significance since it remains as the "force which creates all concepts of the natural world, the social world, the sciences, the arts, religious beliefs...about how to interpret the nature of experience and knowledge." (Clouser, 44). The play's engagement with the notion of history may be then viewed as an attempt by the

playwright to represent how cultural organization of people structured social order at a given

Given such a perspective *Ghasiram Kotwal* would then be the operation of hegemonic power narrated in the play. The play takes place in Pune with an aim to establish practices in relation to the Pune Brahmins. Ghasiram is seen as an outsider who inroads into the centre. The conflict between Pune Brahmins, especially the struggle that Ghasiram confronts as his resistance to the dominant power remains the vantage point while exploring how the space of subjectivity to enable the game would mask the hidden politics. He can be seen as a subject created by power and becomes "a pawn in the game" or an allegory of power hungry educational... This makes the play in fact." (Bhise, 145)

It is rather interesting to see how the representations to focus on the space in the play. To critique the Pune Brahmins representative becomes the subaltern other, and the Brahmins, representative of the dominant class seem to echo any other class. Therefore, Ghasiram, though an outsider comes to Pune – his Brahmin friends forward to feed themselves as he is not allowed an entry to the ceremony. This is a repeated assertion of his identity.

"First Brahman: ... This is a feast..."

Sutradhar: All the Brahmins...

playwright to represent how through various discursive practices societal and cultural organization of people's lives reverberate institutionalized practices and structured social order at a given moment.

Given such a perspective toward history, a postcolonial interpretation of *Ghasiram Kotwal* would then entail a critique of the binaries produced by the operation of hegemonic power and ideology reflected in the characters and events narrated in the play. The play introduces Ghasiram, a Kanauj Brahman who comes to Pune with an aim to establish himself. However, within the dynamics of power practices in relation to the Pune Brahmans who may be said to represent a class, Ghasiram is seen as an outsider, the 'marginal other' who had attempted to make inroads into the centre. The centrality of power and space which is attributed to the Pune Brahmans, especially through the character of Nana is at the heart of the struggle that Ghasiram confronts – his attempt to establish himself may be considered as his resistance to the dominating forces of hegemonic society of Pune Brahmans. Power remains the vantage point from which Tendulkar chooses to narrate his play while exploring how the specific structures of power imposes corresponding subjectivity to enable the game of power to run uninterrupted in a manner that would mask the hidden politics of construction. In this context, Ghasiram too may be seen as a subject created by the hegemonic ideology of Pune Brahmans and he becomes "a pawn in the game of power politics [while] the play becomes a metaphor or an allegory of power hungry people in all walks of life – social, political and even educational... This makes the play a brilliant expose of power brokers, of realpolitik, in fact." (Bhise, 145)

It is rather interesting to note that Tendulkar has rarely used other class/caste representations to focus on the dynamic of ideological constructions of power and space in the play. To critique the notions of power and ideology he works with the Pune Brahmans representative of dominance and exploitation while Ghasiram becomes the subaltern other, an outsider who comes from Kanauj. The class identity of Brahmans, representative of a 'type' here, is seen fraught with hierarchies which seem to echo any other class hierarchy within the given socio-political locale. Therefore, Ghasiram, though a Brahman himself is considered an outsider when he comes to Pune – his Brahman fellowmen from Pune leave him behind as they go forward to feed themselves and receive gifts from the Peshwa. Ghasiram is not allowed an entry to the ceremony by the guards who did not believe him despite the repeated assertion of his identity that he was a Brahman too –

"First Brahman: ... The ceremony today is in the Brahman's honour. There's a feast..."

Sutradhar: All the Brahmans go, all the Brahmans go once more to the



great dakshina ceremony...

First Soldier: Hey, who are you?

Ghasiram: I am Ghasiram Savaldas from Kanauj

Second Soldier: Go on, move aside. Why are you here?

Ghasiram: They're honouring Brahmans...

First Soldier: What does that have to do with you?

Ghasiram: I'm a Brahman too.....

First Soldier: Looks like a scoundrel!

Ghasiram: No. I'm a Brahman. From Kanauj. New to Poona – (Act I, 43)

It is the otherness of Ghasiram as an one who does not belong to Pune that becomes his identity based on which he meets with his fate thereafter. In this context it is noteworthy to mention that Ghasiram's Brahman-ness does not work as an identity marker here; that fact that he too is a Brahman does not help him to gain faith and respect from his own community. He is considered the other and the turn of events establishes him as the other in a rather violent manner landing him eventually in the cell. This event in Ghasiram's life proves to be a turning point both for Ghasiram as well as the play since it is from this moment that one witnesses a radical change in him – he decides to appropriate similar tactics of power game to avenge himself; the narrative too from here onwards reveals several layers of power mechanics at play showing how the dominant ideological assumptions of the Pune Brahmans were successful in camouflaging the underlying evil predominantly exercised through Nana and his coterie. It is interesting to note the shifts in this exercise of power as seen in the development of plot – the all powerful Nana trapped by Ghasiram through a bartering of his own daughter, Ghasiram made the Kotwal thereafter, Nana coming back with his dubiousness to disempower Ghasiram and continue with the same reign of viciousness over Pune. Thus one may consider *Ghasiram Kotwal* as "a discourse of power, power grabbed through the nastiest of barter arrangements, Ghasiram grabbing power by a nasty sell-out of his daughter's modesty." (Chakrabarti, 10) The manner in which Tendulkar devises his plot with the power game occupying the centre of action reveals the dynamics of contestation that shape and mould the powerful/powerless equation – within the spatiality of centre with power at the core there is always an intense resistance to the hegemony of centre while the margin, Ghasiram in this case, makes its attempt to occupy the seat of power. This power game however, is "played out against a background of political and moral decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power" (Bandhopadhyay, 3)

The notion of space appears to be of predominant importance in the narrative

universe of *Ghasiram Kotwal*. The spatiality at different points in the play proceeds one notices how crucial to Ghasiram's idea of a space representative of the centre for the legitimization of his power. Ghasiram Kotwal Ghasiram therefore are followed, issues pertinent to a city where "Sin was possible owing to the failure of institution of the Kotwal of new sets of values that his vicious agenda under and exercise of power bears the following remark:

"Space is fundamental in any exercise of power"

As the play culminates in Ghasiram subjected to the dirty politics of Pune, Ghasiram now has to meet with nothing but a pawn. Ghasiram being removed from his position is therefore the Kotwal of Pune. Ghasiram's identity as a person who possess power at all, he is reduced through his location within the city. Then one may assume that Ghasiram's "privilege" acquired or possessed (in Rabinow, 174) Now Ghasiram who ensures that Ghasiram is no more" (86). With the end of the play and thus Nana remains to be seen to achieve power and exercise it is Nana who controls the means which still represent absolute power. Thus Ghasiram's discourse of power and its representation by Pune Brahmins

universe of *Ghasiram Kotwal*. The equation of power seems to be enacted through spatiality at different points of narration beginning with the segregation of the Kanauj Brahman from his Pune counterparts at the opening of the play. As the play proceeds one notices how the issue of assuming power through Nana becomes crucial to Ghasiram's idea of resistance and thereby revenge. The Kotwal symbolizes a space representative of power which with Ghasiram at the helm becomes the new centre for the legitimization and exercise of dominance. Soon after becoming the Kotwal Ghasiram therefore unleashes the reign of terror ensuring that all his orders are followed, issues permits for even abortion and prostitution rendering Pune into a city where "Sin was worthless." (58) Such degeneration of values and morals was possible owing to the fact that these were implemented through the legitimate institution of the Kotwal. It is within this space that he indulges in the production of new sets of values that would enable him to sustain his dominance while masking his vicious agenda under the garb of law and order. In this sense the idea of space and exercise of power becomes complementary as revealed in Michel Foucault's remark:

"Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power." (in Rabinow, 252)

As the play culminates through a series of ghastly events, Ghasiram is once again subjected to the dirty power game initiated by Nana. For all the heinous actions Ghasiram now has to meet his fate, a fate designed in fact by Nana for whom he was nothing but a pawn. Ghasiram no longer remains the Kotwal, his seat of power being removed from his person, Ghasiram devoid of power becomes a nobody – it is therefore the Kotwal that may be seen as synonymous to power without which Ghasiram's identity as a powerful man stands defeated. In this sense he did not possess power at all, he only had the authority to exercise power that came to him through his location within the spatial limits of the Kotwal. Seen from this perspective then one may assume that "power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the "privilege" acquired or preserved, ... but the overall effect of its strategic positions..." (in Rabinow, 174) Now removed from his space, Ghasiram lies at the mercy of Nana who ensures that Ghasiram the 'disease' has been wiped out since "he was no use anymore" (86). With the final verdict being pronounced, Ghasiram's fate is sealed and thus Nana remains the ultimate power. Though Ghasiram makes an effort to achieve power and exercise it, which he does to a certain extent, in reality however, it is Nana who controls the fate of people subordinate to him including Ghasiram by devising means which stood in confrontation with the efforts of the latter to rise to absolute power. Thus Ghasiram may be considered as a subject produced by the discourse of power and hegemonic ideology constructed by the dominant class represented by Pune Brahmans, especially Nana. In all this however, power lies at



the crux of the matter making the play a scathing critique of the supremacist ideology within which government, law and order and even human beings are transformed into mere apparatuses through which subordination and oppression attain a sense of legitimacy. And therefore, at the close of the play the brutal fate that Ghasiram meets with appears just and right. The manner in which Nana manipulates Ghasiram's course of action may be interpreted as an exercise of authority through the "modern formation [of society] where power is relatively invisible and [which] controls us by seeing everything whilst remaining unseen." (Cavallaro, 133)

The relevance of *Ghasiram Kotwal* as a play focusing on power game situated within a specific context of history lies on the fact that the dynamics of power and equations of ideological relationships echo contemporary concerns. History for Tendulkar, in relation to the play, serves as platform from which he initiates his critique of the socio-political scenario of his times. The relevance of history is all the more owing to the socio-political reality of India as a country steeped in divisive cultural ideologies that are predominant in shaping the lived reality of its people. Moreover, the operation of a particular ideology within a given framework may be seen as the vehicle through which the dominant class produces its meanings and ensures its legitimization. Nana remains the same even at the close of the play and the people are no better. Nana's dubious character and the power game that he plays upon Ghasiram, the corrupt practices that he designed successfully remain hidden under the garb of his external self as a fatherly figure devoted to religion and virtues of life. Nana's cunning is never revealed to his subjects who finally come to him for justice in a situation which had in fact been created by him. Citing philosophy and religion, Nana continues duping the people and his position as the ultimate power is finally secured and established. Bhise's remark that "there are Nanas and Ghasirams everywhere" (146) may be seen as an envisioning of universality which also contributes to the contemporaneity of the play. With Tendulkar's unparalleled craftsmanship history becomes an apparatus that reveals the eternal struggle between classes to occupy power and the dominance of ideology that allow hegemonic socio-cultural relations to prevail within the lived lives of a people and it is through such a perspective of history that the play establishes its resistance towards the manifold hegemonic structures that serve to legitimize dominance at various points of time.

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SRI LANKAN ENGLISH FICTION: THE EXPERIENCE OF READING  
JAMES GOONEWARDENE AND PUNYAKANTE WAJINAIEKE

Prasenjit Das

**ABSTRACT:** *Considering the literary developments in the post independence Sri Lanka, it can be assumed that a great bulk of Sri Lankan literature today comes from short fiction that mainly deal with political and ethnic violence. Thus, much critical response in Sri Lankan Writing in English in general have been laid on Sri Lankan fiction which has granted visibility to Sri Lankan Literature like never before. However, we find three distinct languages in Sri Lankan literature—Sinhala, Tamil and English. Writing in English was not that popular during and after the independence of Sri Lanka. Even the academics from various English Departments too asserted a nationalistic view that writing in Sinhala and Tamil was preferable. But, in such a context, writers like James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaieke deliberately choosing to write in English to reflect on the socio-political changes that were taking place in Sri Lanka is very significant. One of the significant preoccupations of Goonewardene has been an analysis of the destructions the Sri Lankan people were bringing on themselves. Wijenaieke too has been quite successful in telling stories of their traditional upbringing as well as their contemporary socio-political experiences. This paper is a deliberation on how the issue of language is so important in the literary landscape of Sri Lanka, how English Fiction in the Post Independence Sri Lanka developed, and how the Sri Lankan writers have self-critically explored their strife-ridden political history as well as their post-colonial confrontation with modernity through the form of short fiction.*

**KEYWORDS:** *language, literary landscape, political history, postcolonial, short fiction*

**Introduction:**

A look at the literary developments in Sri Lanka in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, helps us to assume that a great bulk of Sri Lankan literature comes from English fiction many of which deal with the impact of political and ethnic violence on the lives of the indigenous people in Sri Lanka. However, a reading of the history

of Sri Lankan Fiction in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the representation of realities through English Literature is available in the form of English Literature in which there are hardly any classical Sinhala literature with classical Sinhala realities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, (Uprooted) became a torchbearer of Sri Lankan Literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with local subject matters, the other hand, was not visible in Sri Lanka in 1948. Even the Universities of Sri Lanka in Sinhala and Tamil was preferable in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the utmost urgency the suffering of the people unfolding in the land through novels, and short stories and finally granted visibility to Sri Lankan Literature today. This paper discusses Writing in English with special reference to themes in Sri Lankan English Literature seem to have tried to interrelate. To discuss the issue of self-criticism in Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaieke that both of them have used under discussion to describe

**The Case of Language in Sri Lanka**

While discussing Sri Lankan Literature in particular, the question of language is of particular importance to the writers. Because, the language used to critically analyse Sri Lanka had been Sinhalese and Tamil for the inhabitants of Sri Lanka before the Independence was only after the Independence in English and translated into Sinhala. Subsequently, themes like violence and displacement to feature prominently in Sri Lankan Literature

of Sri Lankan Fiction in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is almost a precondition to discuss the representation of realities through Sri Lankan literature in today's context. Sri Lankan Literature is available in three distinct languages—Sinhala, Tamil and English across which there are hardly any connections. There had been a great revival of Sinhala literature with classical Sinhala language beginning to meet the new socio-political realities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Martin Wickramasinghe's Sinhala novel *Gamperaliya (Uprooted)* became a torch-bearer of such a revival. Similarly, a revival in Tamil Literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by a fusion of Western narrative models with local subject matters, landscapes, customs and traditions. English writing, on the other hand, was not very popular during and after the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948. Even the academics from various English departments of the Universities of Sri Lanka also asserted a nationalistic view that writing in Sinhala and Tamil was preferable to English. However, during the last three war-ridden decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the many writers began to record self-critically and with utmost urgency the suffering, death, and trauma caused by the incidents that were unfolding in the land following its Independence. Subsequently, many poems, novels, and short stories came into being in English depicting death, communal riots, destruction of villages, abandonments of homes and so on; and this has finally granted visibility to Sri Lankan English Literature in the context of World Literature today. This paper makes an attempt to read the history of Sri Lankan Writing in English with special reference to short fiction. One of the most dominant themes in Sri Lankan English Fiction has been self-criticism as most of the writers seem to have tried to interrogate if what happened in Sri Lanka was right or wrong. To discuss the issue of self-criticism, I have tried to refer to two stories by James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaike respectively, and my main argument is that both of them have used self-criticism as the most dominant theme in the stories under discussion to describe their very specific Sri Lankan experience.

#### The Case of Language in Sri Lankan Writing

While discussing Sri Lankan Literature in general and Sri Lankan fiction in particular, the question of language is perhaps the most important preoccupations of the writers. Because, the case of language provides an important platform to critically analyse Sri Lankan Writing in general as the native languages of Sri Lanka had been Sinhalese and Tamils, and till the other day, English was a foreign language to the inhabitants of Sri Lanka. It was mostly seen as a colonial language and the authors before the Independence preferred to write either in Sinhala or in Tamil. It was only after the Independence of Sri Lanka in 1948 that works in English—both in Original English and translated from Sinhala and Tamil, gradually began to appear. Subsequently, themes like identity, self-interrogation, and self-articulation began to feature prominently in Sri Lankan English writing. The political history and the



relative insularity and isolation of Sri Lankan life, history and culture in the post-Independence period are reflected most visibly in the literatures written mostly by the Sinhalese and Tamil writers, and Cleve Kanaganayakkam informs that:

If the Insurgency was a central focus of the 1970s, the ethnic riots of 1983 brought in new concerns involving the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Where the earlier phase involved notions of class within a community the latter drew attention to ethnicity, identity, and the idea of the nation itself. Inevitably, the writing concerned itself with the conflict, either directly, or indirectly. (Kanaganayakkam, 59)

However, Kanaganayakkam also informs that a careful consideration of this body of English literature in Sri Lanka after the Independence would help us to acknowledge the fact that many works originally written in English also promote nativism in many ways. As she further states:

(...) The nationalist thrust of Sri Lankan politics in the last forty years seemed to favour the foregrounding of indigenous languages, namely, Sinhala and Tamil, rather than the acquired English. The projected decline of English writing, however, seems to have been averted and if English does not enjoy the "national" status it once held, it has shown its resilience by remaining a popular language in the urban areas, and among the growing middle-class. (Kanaganayakkam, 51)

Thus, the politics of language and the need for self-expression gave birth to many other important issues to be discussed in the context of English Writing in Sri Lanka. Besides, with the nationalist cultural policies, the growth of English writing was vehemently suppressed allowing national language and culture to flourish. Renowned authors like Shyam Selvadurai has stated that it was through the Youth Resurrection of 1971, led by Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) that paved the way for English writing in a substantial way. (Selvadurai, xviii). Subsequently, the writers trying to express in the English language began to engage more meaningfully with the problems of insularity and the need for representation they were facing. At the same time, the publication of several English works in journals such as *New Ceylon Writing*, *Navasilu*, or *New Sri Lankan Review* provided new platform to the emerging writers in English. However, it was during the economic and political changes of 1980s, that Sri Lanka was opened up to the world, which further fostered a revival in English.

A cursory look at the history of Sri Lankan literature in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century helps in understanding the fact that three important tendencies are clearly visible in Sri Lankan English literature which are as the following:

1. There can be found in contemporary Sri Lankan fiction a strong tendency to grapple with post-colonial situation in which a number of Sri Lankan writers, now living in other countries, seem to return to their native land only to get disillusioned soon.

2. Another tender advancement on the idyll

3. The third and p resulting out of a vehem dehumanising impact bro and exploitation of the p

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In the context of the parallel traditions of nar deprived and marginaliz stagnant and gender-base such groups are keeping giving a fillip to the deve of such traditions in the fl concern for the writers o different. The indigenous and Tamil languages bea and colonialism-born mo

2. Another tendency being the onslaught brought by modernity-based advancement on the idyllic life of the indigenous people.

3. The third and perhaps the most important tendency is for self-criticism resulting out of a vehement protest against the hypocritical Sri Lankan folks, the dehumanising impact brought into society by communal conflict and the inequality and exploitation of the poor in the supposed world order.

Based on such tendencies, it is almost an acceptable assumption that the need for expressing themselves in the international scene has finally made the English writers from Sri Lanka more visible and vocal. Besides, it's been quite interesting to note that the Sri Lankan English writers have systematically worked out some tools to set narration apart from Western modes of representation by which we actually mean that their works embody certain salient themes and preoccupations typical of this region. At the same time, Sri Lankan literature, especially fiction, seeks to assert its independence and uniqueness as an art form compared to other SAARC countries. Subsequently, we find that such a move by the writers has helped in evoking the details of the Sri Lankan life and society – its rich topography, ethnic composition, cultural nuances and the like. As Ajeet Cour has observed, one can assume that Sri Lankan fiction is marked by the authenticity of experience as lived in and evoked by the writers concerned. (Cour, 2003. pp. 9). However, in terms of the language used, many critics as well as authors believe that there is a cultural cringe activated by Western domination over indigenous language and culture. Many even seek to argue that Sri Lanka's leading writers now no longer stay in Sri Lanka. Besides, the internal political and cultural conflicts between the Tamil Separatists and the Sinhalese, who are the majority, have debarred all intellectual and literary developments in a significant ways. Intellectually, this situation has given a death blow to the Tamil literatures and cultures, and has activated much of Sri Lankan Literature written in English.

#### **Sri Lankan English Fiction:**

In the context of the SAARC region, it can be observed that there have been parallel traditions of narration surviving at different levels of the indigenous, but deprived and marginalized, sections of the society and other socio-economically stagnant and gender-based groups. What is so interesting to note is the fact that all such groups are keeping their native tradition of storytelling alive and thereby giving a fillip to the development of literary activities in their regions. But the loss of such traditions in the flux of time as well as modernity is another matter of great concern for the writers of the SAARC region. The case of Sri Lanka too is not so different. The indigenous literary works written mostly in the traditional Sinhalese and Tamil languages bear testimony of the underlying conflict between tradition and colonialism-born modernity.



The development of fiction writing in English has an interesting and traceable developmental phase. The incidents that lead to the 1958 communal disturbances between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, and the exodus of the Burghers in the 1960s as a result of national policies were not sufficiently powerful events to stir the feeling of nationalism as a whole. With the eruption of insurgency, the myth of a unitary nation almost got lost and the heterogeneity within a supposed –to-be unified model was becoming increasingly apparent. This new awareness among the elite class led to a wide range of fictional works which were not always free of naive dualities. But, Kanaganayakkam observes that although there is no consensus about the achievements of these novels, the fact is that writing in English was beginning to reveal an awareness of the political upheavals of the nation, and writers were becoming increasingly conscious of the futility of ignoring the political and social unrest in the country (Kanaganayakkam, 53-54).

Along with this struggle between two cultural systems over the issue of a nation, phenomena like Westernization fuelled by the Free Trade Zone, the emerging tourist industry, the emergence of expatriate literature by bilingual authors and so on, have rendered a greater emphasis on English in general as the language in everyday affairs. Partially, this might have affected the popularity and the relevance of English writing, and the significant changes brought about by contemporary fiction writers such as Ashley Halpé, Rajiva Wijesinha, and Jean Arasanayagam. Together with the diasporic writers, including Yasmine Gooneratne, Chitra Fernando, Shyam Selvadurai, Romesh Gunsekera, Rienzi Cruz, Michael Ondaatje, and Ambalavaner Sivanandan, one can speak of a substantial and significant body of writing in English over the past decades. Besides, many of the elite writers, who fled from the country during the trouble caused by communal wars, also found new grounds to engage with the Sri Lankan realities with more urgency because of a new rise in international readership. This induced the writers to both nostalgically and critically examines the values that had already been lost among the people in Sri Lanka in course of time.

But, when there could be found a cry against the use of English and the authenticity of the writers while using English as the language of creative expression, many fiction writers including James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaiké consciously contributed a lot to the early development of original English writings from Sri Lanka. Other writers like Ediriweera Sarachandra, though composed most of his works in Sinhalese during the fifties, wrote a novel in English called *With the Begging Bowl*. He also wrote another novel which he translated into English as *Curfew and a Full Moon* covering the insurgency of 1971. Although, the first two decades after Independence did not see any visible growth of writing in English, despite perverse criticism, writers like Goonewardene and Wijenaiké continued writing

in English. Rajiva Wijesinha observes that writing in English was a result of the Goonewardene's *The Anthology*. Subsequently, English writing emerged from an indigenous position of anxieties of the local people.

The form of short fiction in Sri Lanka is discussed in the *Penguin Anthology—The Penguin Anthology* to the discussion of contemporary Sri Lankan literature. Makarand Paranjape makes a point about the form of the short story in Sri Lanka. He states that Sri Lankan short stories are more than the novels an 'sociological soil' which is a result of fragmentation of the social structure. Sri Lankan literature on a grandeur scale is a result of narrative traditions in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan tales to more complex multi-layered narratives that like other commonwealth countries were by a strife-torn period of time. Sri Lankan writers to create some narrative in a form of writing.

Against this critical view, James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaiké are mentioned. Both these writers are in the developmental phase of their writing. The underlying themes of these writers are discussed in terms of their stories. Goonewardene as a leading fiction writer in Sri Lanka (*Kirithi* (1967) in which the author Punyakante Wijenaiké – Colombo, is famous for her use of rural life as her theme) will try to explain the theme of Goonewardene's story "The Monkeys" which are remarkable mode of expression. But, not multiple Sri Lankan traditions.

in English. Rajiva Wijesinha, in his edited Anthology *Bridging Connections* observes that writing in English came to its maturity with the publication of Goonewardene's *The Awakening of Dr. Kirithi* in the year of 1976. (Wijesinha, xii). Subsequently, English established itself as the language of creative expression from an indigenous point of view and the writers could beautifully express the anxieties of the local people in the different works of fiction that they had produced.

The form of short fiction in the Sri Lankan context provides another ground to discuss the relevance of the Sri Lankan experiences for fictional explorations. The Anthology—*The Penguin New Writing in Sri Lanka* (1992) is an important addition to the discussion of contemporary Sri Lankan writing. In his review of the book, Makarand Paranjape makes an interesting observation on the development of the form of the short story in Sri Lanka by relating it to the sociological aspects of this country. He states that Sri Lanka seems to support short fiction and short poems more than the novels and other voluminous works. This is mainly because the 'sociological soil' which nourishes its literature has been eroded or because the fragmentation of the society has denied its writers a large enough ethos to support literature on a grandeur scale. This must be an apt remark in the sense that the narrative traditions in Sri Lanka have historically traversed from being simple folk tales to more complex multilayered narratives typical of short stories. He also argued that like other commonwealth countries, Sri Lanka too has a colonial past followed by a strife-torn period of independence. Such experiences might have helped the writers to create some narrative snap shots based on the history of the Sri Lankan people in a form of writing which was not at all indigenous to Sri Lanka.

Against this critically significant context, the case of two pioneer writers—James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaiké within Sri Lankan Fiction is worth mentioning. Both these writers have rendered seminal contributions to the developmental phase of Sri Lankan English fiction. One of the most dominant underlying themes of these two writers has been self-criticism which can be explained in terms of their stories. Goonewardene, who was born in Pannala, Sri Lanka, emerged as a leading fiction writer in Sri Lanka with his collection *The Awakening of Dr. Kirithi* (1967) in which the pastoral setting prevails so visibly. On the other hand, Punyakante Wijenaiké – another best-known Sri Lankan writer who hails from Colombo, is famous for her story-collection *The Third Woman* (1963). Initially, she used rural life as her theme, but later she shifted her focus to urban landscapes. I will try to explain the experience of reading Sri Lankan fiction in terms of Goonewardene's story "The Doughty Men of Purantota" and Wijenaiké's story "Monkeys" which are remarkable achievements in making self-criticism an important mode of expression. But, no such attempt has been made in this paper to explore the multiple Sri Lankan traditions that shaped such writing. My focus will be on how



the two stories undertaken for discussion produce notions of self-criticism in the context of Sri Lankan English fiction.

#### Reading Goonewardene and Wijenaik

James Goonewardene's story "The Doughty Men of Purantota" from his book *The Awakening of Dr. Kirithi* presents a slice of life in a small village called Purantota which is witnessing a crucial conflict between modernity and ethnicity. This story starts with the construction of a bridge, the confusion and fear arising in the minds of the common folk on the point that the communication with the other side of the river would surely destroy the independence and identity of the village and the subsequent bombing of the bridge under the leadership of a not very significant man called Girigoris. The construction of a bridge on the river passing by the village has appeared to be the cause for discontentment and heated debates amongst the inhabitants. It is Girigoris, the chief layman of the village temple, who voices his fears to his fellow villagers that the construction of a bridge at the 'doorstep' of the village implies that the 'independence' of the village is seriously at stake. Once the bridge is completed, the village road will be occupied by buses, lorries, and people from other villages and the native people will be pushed to the wayside like rubbish. There have been voices disagreeing with Girigoris, but they are silenced soon before they are expressed profoundly by the secret destruction of the half-built bridge.

Goonewardene's story shows how the search for vengeance against ill-fate of life and the hunger for power and influence in society induce the physically deformed Girigoris to provoke the villagers against the bridge and destroy it. His construction of this fictitious moment in the story provides ample scope to delve deep into the contemporary politics of his time. The story raises questions of regionalism and preservation of indigenous identity which may be at stake because of the construction of the bridge which will surely help in the influx of people from the other part of the river. The destruction of the bridge is a symbolic resistance not only against the invasion of the machine – the buses and lorries – but also against the 'strangers' who might pass through the village. As Girigoris says: "It has to be an unpropitious time that strangers should climb over our stiles as if the whole village was now a public highway." (Wijesinha, 148) Girigoris' chief concern is to affirm the authority of the villagers over their village: "Because then there will no longer be a village here. The bridge will belong to no one. So, will be the village be no one's." (148) Then again he says:

I do not believe that there is anyone here who would like to see our village become a *palu kenatte* in which any stranger could come and plant his manioc and feed his cattle. We have no other place to go in any case, but more than that our fathers preserved it for us, and it is our duty to preserve it for our children. (155)

This concern for the idea of independence or the independence of the protected from outside itself to a state of insularity, modernity and progress village: "The village is independence we must d called Andoris Rala, w outsider. Destroying so 'more superior man', G authority. The villagers t instrument of destructio wish of the group (or of C group':

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This concern for the 'preservation' of the village is farther connected with the idea of independence of the village shared by every individual: "They believed in the independence of their village, and whatever happened in the village had to be protected from outside interference." (155) But this idea of independence extends itself to a state of insularity where certain inevitable and positive changes brought modernity and progress are misrecognised as harmful to the organic life of the village: "The village is ours. If it is necessary to destroy the bridge to preserve our independence we must do so". (156) At the same time, in the same process, someone called Andoris Rala, who settled in the village ten years ago, is also seen as an outsider. Destroying something following the decision made by what he called 'more superior man', Girigoris is jubilant of his newly acquired confidence and authority. The villagers under the leadership of Girigoris turn into a pack of 'pliable instrument of destruction'. They submit their individual opinions, furnish to the wish of the group (or of Girigoris, the leader) and work like a 'compact and tight little group':

They had been shedding their identities slowly and merging into a group, a tradition based village group... Soon they would become so mindless that they would have no separate wills, or the capacity to critically analyse any of their actions. For brief moments yet, certain doubts and fears erupted into their minds, but having given their will to do this thing they could not encourage doubts. (159)

What is this doubt? It is not merely a doubt over their leader's actions and intentions. It is a doubt over their own conviction and action. Goonewardene is perhaps trying to imply that the problems of binaries always linger as there are problems with both orientations. Such an intended meaning helps to portray 'self-criticism' on the part of the characters as a dominant theme of the story under consideration.

Thus, the story gives birth to a doubt over the fate of the village in connection with the building of the bridge. It is also a doubt over the changing lives on the other side of the river – the dock and the city – which is in continuous conflict with the insular stagnant life of the village. The world of Purantota is finally caught in the web of conflicts and confusions created by binaries like tradition and modernity, insularity and fluidity, change and stability, the insider and the outsider, human and machine, the individual and the group, the local and the global, stagnation and progress. Through his writing, Goonewardene looks back to himself and his society "with honesty and courage", as Yasmine Gooneratne observes, "exploring themes related to injustice and disharmony created in Sri Lankan society by political opportunists who irresponsibly bend the nation's divided interests to their own advantage." (quoted in Salgado, 43). Added to this confusion is the question of language. The way the world on the other side of the bridge is alien to the villagers,



the English language too is an alien linguistic field which has to be contextualised in a non-English setting. This is mainly because, the English as a non-native language already ingrains the cultural baggage contained by the term itself. Thus, the issues of representation and articulation perhaps become the most significant literary trope for a writer like Gonnewardene.

The other story chosen for discussion is Punyakante Wijenaiké's "Monkeys". Published in 1992, this story problematises the question of territories and boundaries – both physical and mental – and provides a scope for reading it in the context of the Sri Lankan experience of communal conflicts. The important theme in almost all of the fictional writing of Wijenaiké is the tyranny of a community or a group towards the weaker members of society. In the story "Monkeys" Wijenaiké deals specifically with the emotional life of a Samanera—the young novice monk. His father thought that the hermitage is the best-place for a motherless child and expected the child to be happy among the monks. Although, the Buddhist philosophy of the monastery is supposed to develop the small boy spiritually, he is too young to understand and appreciate the training he has been receiving from the Chief Priest. Subsequently, the young boy-turned-monk finds himself in-between two contradictory forces—his natural yearning for love, play and freedom and the restraints he would face while on the path of spiritual advancement. Gradually, he develops friendship with a group of playful monkeys following which the disciplined and routine life in the hermitage is contrasted with the freedom and love he witnesses in the behaviour of the monkeys. He starts stealing away to the forest after his noon meal when the other monks are resting. He prefers lying down on the hard rock surface in the scorching sun watching the monkeys and enjoying their friendliness to meditating in the isolated monastery. He takes food to the monkeys in the begging bowl hidden in his robe. The situation reaches a climax when the monkeys create havoc in the hermitage compound. The development of the Samanera's character is evident by his determination to obey the Chief priest as well as by his realization of the value of being a free man. Although this is the crux of the story, the story leaves behind many clear entry points for the reader to arrive at a political reading of it.

What is important for discussion is the fact that the boy, who has grown up among the monks of the Sangha, without any motherly love, has to conform to the strict and dull routine of a *Samanera*. The only moment of the day that he finds enjoyable is the time when after the noon-meal he steals some time out of his short leisure and runs to the forest, climbs the rocks to reach the group of monkeys. He gives them food, plays with them, sleeps among them and even imagines about his mother whose love he has never experienced. But this friendship with the natural world helps the hordes of monkeys to follow the boy to the hermitage, encourage

them to invade the cor- Priest. After this inva- destruction, advises the follow him here to the would always follow hir as much as he can. The crying, but he did not ge they would always haun child, Wijenaiké, in this boundaries at various b between rules and freedo and problematises the c the other. This series of the self, the constructe larger than the individua Sri Lankanness and sel transgressing the bound readers to determine w questions regarding the finally deprives the kid

The issues raised i significant points. Whe Lanka, by the very natur boundaries, he or she wi self-criticism over what the questions of bounde the writings of the writ world out there, and how they have portrayed get: Lankan fiction writing in noticing is the way the t stories although they are Lanka. In the previous s outside world—is not d assimilation of the peop ways of life in the villag possible invasion of the ' natives, which can also i second story, the 'other'

them to invade the compound, pluck the fruits and berries grown by the Chief Priest. After this invasion of the monkeys, the Chief Priest, engraved by the destruction, advises the boy that, "He must not allow monkeys to dominate him, follow him here to the temple. He must not play with them or feed them, or they would always follow him." (218) The boy tries to understand and follow the advice as much as he can. The next day, "He could hear his monkeys call him, screaming, crying, but he did not go to them. If he went on playing with them and loving them, they would always haunt him." (219) Thus, through the experience of a six year old child, Wijenaikē, in this story, seems to be concerned with critiquing the drawing of boundaries at various levels. She raises a series of conflicts in terms of binaries between rules and freedom, the primitive and the civilized, the insider and the outsider; and problematises the construction of boundaries that can delineate one idea from the other. This series of conflicts and doubts lead Wijenaikē to critically reflect on the self, the constructed identity as an individual as well as a part of something larger than the individual. Thus, unlike in *Goonewardene*, we find a different kind of Sri Lankanness and self-criticism where both the formation of boundaries and transgressing the boundaries become equally important leaving everything for the readers to determine what is right and what is wrong. Besides, the story raises questions regarding the decision taken on behalf of the boy by his elders, which finally deprives the kid of his childhood.

The issues raised in the two stories I have tried to discuss exemplify certain significant points. When a writer has decided to write in the context of the Sri Lanka, by the very nature of Sri Lankan experience of conflicts and construction of boundaries, he or she will have to end up coming back to the issues of identity and self-criticism over what has happened or what has been done. In such a situation, the questions of boundaries and ethnic affiliations automatically get reflected in the writings of the writers concerned. Thus, how the individual encounters the world out there, and how, in return, the selves of both the writers and the characters they have portrayed get narrativised in the process of representation, has given Sri Lankan fiction writing in English an unprecedented visibility. But what is also worth-noticing is the way the two writers address more or less similar issues in the two stories although they are written in two different periods in the literary history of Sri Lanka. In the previous story, the other—the threat that the villagers feel from the outside world—is not defined. The construction of the bridge and the resultant assimilation of the people—both can be seen as threats to the simple easygoing ways of life in the village. The conflict begins mostly from the realization of the possible invasion of the 'machine-dominated' urbane life into the simple lives of the natives, which can also relieve them from the age-old insularity. However, in the second story, the 'other' is distinctively defined in terms of the monkeys, which



have the symbolic potential to disrupt the established order in the life of a community. This change of attitude in defining the 'other' might be seen as the resultant tendency of the post-1983 communal strife. Now, the 'other' is no more some abstract ways or ideas of life but some visible and animate groups. But in both the stories, the elements of self-criticism is very much available in the form of narration where everyone including the writers as well as the characters they have portrayed are engaged in a kind of debate over what is desirable and what is explicit in their transient world order.

#### Conclusion:

Today, any discussion on contemporary Sri Lankan fiction in English has to be carried out within the wider contexts of postcolonialism. Besides this, how do the works of the resident writers relate to those of the internationally acclaimed writers who had fled from the country following the Civil War; or to what extent have the Sri Lankan literary productions at home and abroad been caused and shaped by the political incidents in the island country, are also to be considered critically. Although notions of cultural nationalism have been instrumental in the production and critical reception of texts, Sri Lankan English writers like Michael Ondaatje, Romesh Gunasekera, Shyam Selvadurai, Carl Muller, James Goonewardene, Punyakante Wijenaikē etc. have rigorously challenged the theoretical, cultural and political undercurrents in binaries like 'insider-outsider', 'resident-migrant', 'authentic-alien' and so on. By interrogating self-critically the discourses of territoriality and boundary that have come into prominence since the Civil War, they have rightly sought to reclaim the marginalised voices through the form of the short stories.

#### End Notes:

Some critics were of the view that writers in English failed to engage themselves with the Sri Lankan milieu and socio-political reality of the day. Thus, they had to face vehement criticisms.

After the Independence, in 1956, SWRD Bandaranaike took the lead of a new government and issued a mandate to do away with English as the ruling language through the passing of the Sinhala Only Act. However, this was also the beginning of ethnic tension leading to communal riots between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in 1956, 1958, 1970 and so on. In the subsequent riots of 1977 and 1981, many Tamil people lost their lives and properties which led to the rise of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that became the dominant Tamil political force demanding a separate country for the Tamils.

James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaikē have written a large number of short stories in English about the social and political changes that were taking place inside Sri Lanka. For example, Goonewardene in many of his stories undertook

an analysis of the destructure themselves by conforming on their traditional upbringing the contemporary socio-political

D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, *Lankan People 1917-2000*, Lankan English Writing, Lankan English Literature both Pre-independence and

In this context, a recent book *Lanka's Modern English*, a body of English literature book deals with the historical and cultural factors that shaped the works by authors

Besides, this Anthology of Sri Lankan English Literature have been published but titles like *An Anthology of Sri Lankan Stories* (1986), *A Drama* (1987), *The Penguin Literature in English 1947-1998* (1998), *An Anthology of Sri Lankan English Literature* published in Sri Lanka and other Anthologies seek to discuss the cultural and intellectual life of Sri Lanka.

James Goonewardene is primarily a novelist, he has written *Place* (1968) and *Call of the Wild* based on the interplay and upholding life way and values of the Western prominence.

Wijenaikē published other story collections including *Other Stories* (1991), etc.

The texts of both the anthologies are *Bridging Connections: An Anthology of Sri Lankan English Literature*

Here I would like to refer to the making their own particular voice and to the exploration of human condition ("Sri Lankan Literature" 13).

an analysis of the destructions that the Sri Lankan people were bringing on themselves by conforming to hatred and conflict. Wijenaïke too focused substantially on their traditional upbringing as well as their experiences upon confrontation with the contemporary socio-political situations in Sri Lanka.

D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke's book entitled *Sri Lankan English Literature and Sri Lankan People 1917-2003* published in 2005 serves as a kind of history of Sri Lankan English Writing, and this book played a significant role in introducing Sri Lankan English Literature and culture to the whole world by making a reference to both Pre-independence and post-independence English Literature.

In this context, a reference may be made to Wilfrid Jayasuriya's book *Sri Lanka's Modern English Literature—A Case study in Literary Theory* that presents a body of English literature spanning one hundred years, from 1900 to 2000. The book deals with the historical background and the social and political factors which shaped the works by authors written in English.

Besides, this Anthology, many other anthologies of Sri Lankan Literature have been published but they are not easily available in India. The list includes titles like *An Anthology of Modern Writing from Sri Lanka* (1982), *Modern Sri Lankan Stories* (1986), *Modern Sri Lankan Poetry* (1987), *Modern Sri Lankan Drama* (1987), *The Penguin Book of Modern Sri Lankan Stories* (1996), *Sri Lankan Literature in English 1948- 1998: A 50<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary Anthology* (1998), *An Anthology of Contemporary Sri Lankan Poetry* (1993) etc. which are published in Sri Lanka and India and are easily available to readers. Most of these Anthologies seek to discuss how language is so important in modern Sri Lankan cultural and intellectual life.

James Goonewardene started writing fiction since early 1940s. Although famous primarily as a novelist, he has contributed several short stories. His novels *A Quite Place* (1968) and *Call of the Kirala* (1975) foreshadow the elements of interrogations based on the interplay and contrast between the rural and the urbane—the village upholding life way and values and the city embodying the life style and values of Western prominence.

Wijenaïke published her first novel *The Waiting Earth* in 1966. Some of her other story collections include *The Third Woman* (1963), *The Rebel* (1979), *Yukthi and Other Stories* (1991), and *To follow the Son* (1995).

The texts of both the stories are taken from Rajiva Wijesinha's anthology *Bridging Connections: An Anthology of Sri Lankan Short Stories*.

Here I would like to refer to Halpé who stated: "Lankan writers in English are making their own particular contribution to our critical awareness of Lankan reality, and to the exploration of human potentiality that is central to art of any importance." ("Sri Lankan Literature" 13).



This problem finally gets realised in an acute manner in the intellectual developments of Sri Lankan fiction in the subsequent periods. However, what I am actually trying to explore is the concerns of a writer who has deliberately chosen to write in English to express something very much typical of the Sri Lankan societies irrespective of the language used.

In her preface to the novel *The Waiting Earth* (1966) she tells her readers that in the stories in her *The Third Woman* there is no high endeavour and no moralising and that the characters and the incidents are real to her.

Chelva Kanaganayakam has pointed out that in Sri Lankan writing, "the line that separates aesthetic criteria and political conviction becomes extremely thin" (quoted from Salgado, 10). However, she seems to be talking more about the critics and less about the authors.

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## Sri Lankan Fiction

*Love has a place in greatness and happiness. One's fellows, the ecstasy of flow for country and free race.*

(Sri Aurobindo: On N

ABSTRACT: Pluralism is countries that have opted for nation state from the class communities that are constant that has risen against a power against the minority and the movement for self determination beyond the reach of what voices of dissent and secession the 19<sup>th</sup> century and mainly political hues as 'the stor power' (Whose Imagined C Postcolonial Histories, *The Delhi*, 2011, p6) Nationalist Sri Lanka, this has been a territorial representation and The Tamil people of the is their aspirations within the

Sri Lankan literature the world perspectives in

## Sri Lankan Fiction: Perspectives of Nationalism and Violence

Sweta Pegu  
Tora Mahanta

*Love has a place in politics, but its love for one's countrymen, for the glory, greatness and happiness of the race, the divine ananda of self-immolation for one's fellows, the ecstasy of relieving their sufferings, the joy of seeing one's blood flow for country and freedom, the bliss of union in death with the fathers of the race.*

(Sri Aurobindo: On Nationalism, 1906-1908, *The Morality of Boycott*)

DONE

**ABSTRACT:** Pluralism is an essential ingredient of democracy. The South-Asian countries that have opted for democracy are facing challenges to the concept of the nation state from the clamour for identity and self determination by the very communities that are constituents for democratic pluralism. It is a clamour for space that has risen against a perception and reality of the violation by the majority against the minority and the marginalized. In the aftermath of Globalization the movement for self determination has crossed the boundaries of the Nation and beyond the reach of what we mean by 'Nation'. Democracy in South Asia has voices of dissent and secessionism. Nationalism, as a Western idea developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and mainly arose from cultural consciousness. However it took on political hues as 'the story of nationalism begins with the contest for political power' (Whose Imagined Community?, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2011, p6) Nationalism is also represented by linguistic, ethnic groups and in Sri Lanka, this has been marked by violence since 1971. The demand for adequate territorial representation and administrative reforms grew into a full scale civil war. The Tamil people of the island nation called for secession when they found that their aspirations within the Sri Lankan nation remained unfulfilled.

Sri Lankan literature reflects the troubled history of this period and gives to the world perspectives in raising issues and discussing the web of interlinked



problems. The paper will attempt to trace the growth of anti-nationalist feelings in post-colonial Sri Lanka. It will also analyze the literary expressions of the 'felt' and 'lived' experiences of the people in the times of violence. The trauma of the people; those who have been victims of violence, those who have resolutely held on to their nationalist origins and feelings reflect the irony of being a 'victim' in the war for 'identity'. Some of the texts that will be considered in this context are Elmo Jayawardene's *Sam's Story* and Roma Tearne's *Mosquito*.

Nationalism is a western doctrine that emerged from the days of the Enlightenment, on the principles of universal liberty, progress, equality, reason and fraternity. Anthony Smith constructs the 'core principles of nationalism' fusing three ideals: (a) collective self determination of the people, (b) the expression of national character and individuality, and (c) the vertical division of the world into unique nations each contributing its special genius to the common fund of humanity. Partha Chatterjee thinks that the 'first' amongst the European nations to surge ahead in the cultural, economic and economic field like France and Britain never aroused an anxiety in the other European nations because they too had the skills to advance like them. Therefore we can understand that Nationalism as a western idea was synonymous with progress in the cultural, economic and intellectual fields and it was not, in the purest sense, restricted to any particular class or community. It believed in humanity's right to liberty and in the realization of aspirations. The larger picture was the attainment of the universal urge for political development, economic progress and intellectual development. This has been termed as 'good nationalism' by Hans Kohn. There is a variant to this form of nationalism and it attempts to stride two approaches together; keeping progress, liberty, reason, and freedom as the goals and the use of force by revivalist movements and other regimes to make their cultures better suited to the modern world. This is deviant nationalism in Kohn's view. Some of the elements of this form can be discerned in the postcolonial world. The political motivation to organize, form and occupy actual sites of identity has been manifesting itself in the erstwhile colonized world. However the tenets of nationalism that had been handed down from the days of the Enlightenment have undergone mutation chiefly because of the colonial experience. The colonial experience has sharpened a dual consciousness. One, the civilization of the colonizer was not only different but superior in terms of the success they had achieved in establishing broad-based progress and development, and two, the need to search for a standard from within to combat the colonizer and awaken feelings of nationalism.

Indian nationalist thought created self awareness of the cultural and spiritual domain. The difference between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized gave the idea that 'Sovereignty' belongs to the inner life or the inner aspects of

culture like language, re out of these and engaged battle, the case for a h pointing out the continu the imposition of the autonomous subjectivity on both sides. It has been most important position positions. Both sides hav religion, language and te past but they regard eac perspective of 'who is ti Ondaatje feels that the T rule and they wanted to thinks 'its real source an cultures, races and class access to these. It is this

*Mosquito* by Rom nationalist thought. Thee England for a long time Island nation. Theo's libe by ideals of equality and principles of the Enlighte thought, one that comes t not entirely conform to th and leaves some people come to this?'

The island of Sri La that country after the 5<sup>th</sup> ce as the first people of the building the idea that Bud to reinforce Sinhala identi also been a powerful sub simultaneous feeling that The Tamil response has b demand for territory and liberal had reached the Tan Tamil captor puts the war in Central to Tamil natic

culture like language, religion, social ethics etc. The colonized kept the colonizer out of these and engaged with it in the political public sphere. 'In this contemporary battle, the case for a history of subordinated groups has often been stated by pointing out the continuities between the colonial and the postcolonial phases of the imposition of the institutions of the modern state and by asserting the autonomous subjectivity of the oppressed'. Sri Lankan nationalism is an expression on both sides. It has been a struggle between Sinhala determination to occupy the most important position and resisting the striving Tamils from occupying those positions. Both sides have claimed their share of history in terms of antiquity, race, religion, language and territory. Both the Sinhala and the Tamil refer to a glorious past but they regard each other as distinct identities. There is a contest in their perspective of 'who is the other?' and the legitimacy of their position. Michael Ondaatje feels that the Tamils have always enjoyed privileges under the colonial rule and they wanted to continue with them. This created an ethnic rift. Ondaatje thinks 'its real source and condition lies in the patterns of incorporation of diverse cultures, races and classes in the hierarchies of power, opportunity, resources and access to these. It is this core of structural tension that is crucial...'

*Mosquito* by Roma Tearne throws up several strands of discussions on nationalist thought. Theo Samarajeeva, the protagonist, who had been staying in England for a long time has a strong connect with Sri Lanka and returns to the Island nation. Theo's liberal outlook is a western endowment; he is genuinely moved by ideals of equality and humanistic concern, very much like the cosmopolitan principles of the Enlightenment. He is the man who holds a position of autonomous thought, one that comes to be challenged by his people and at the same time does not entirely conform to the Tamil course. The search for self identity had gone awry and leaves some people bemused: 'How had two thousand years of Buddhism come to this?'

The island of Sri Lanka has been predominantly Buddhist since it travelled to that country after the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The popular discourse of the Sinhala consciousness as the first people of the island has been reiterated in others and has helped in building the idea that Buddhism has been used as a political and religious category to reinforce Sinhala identity and nationalism. Popular belief in the Mahavamsa has also been a powerful subtext of nationalist thought amongst the Sinhala and the simultaneous feeling that the Tamils are immigrants and do not belong to the land. The Tamil response has been the same assertion of the right to self determination, demand for territory and sharing of power. Theo Samarajeeva's reputation as a liberal had reached the Tamil camp and they kidnap him from the Sinhala prison. The Tamil captor puts the war in perspective 'We are fighting for recognition and freedom.'

Central to Tamil nationalist feeling are the narratives of ancient Tamil invasions



that subjugated the Sinhala in the Northern and Eastern provinces and thus these areas have always been Tamil homeland. Sam, the Sinhala boy in *Sam's Story* who works in the River House tells us the story of his family that has sent two sons to the war in the North. Jaya dies while on patrol duty on a road and Madiya steals back home one day after deserting the army. But Madiya has to leave as the Sri Lankan army will eventually come in search for him and Sam informs us that the family has to do without any further news about his whereabouts. Sam reflects 'that it was very easy for village boys like us to become soldiers.' For Sam the boy, nationalism is an unknown zone and the novel only covers the sites of fuddled thought that is natural in a rustic and dim-witted boy. For him, violence is a reality as his family has suffered. There is instinctive recoil from Leandro, the Tamil cook in the River House for he is 'different'. The novel does not look at the political question; rather it suggests that nationalist feelings remain indefinite and inarticulate possibly because it can only be aroused in a given context. The people of the River House are the elite who discuss the turmoil amongst friends and are concerned about the violence as a barrier to their industry and way of life. Nationalism as a political opinion remains indeterminate but the distance and alienation between the binaries are irreconcilable:

I think this war had split beyond the leaders who were planning it and the soldiers who were fighting. It had even made stupid cooks like Leandro hate stupid house-boys like me. It was a matter of which kind you belonged to- you always hated the other kind;...

Violence is more tangible and familiar than feelings of pride in collective identity and the urge for self expression.

Has nationalism taken on features that have emerged from the postcolonial local ills? It has added to itself the contesting aspirations of the people who share spaces. Given the fact that colonial rule never fostered assimilation for obvious reasons, the postcolonial scene is one of contest among the closest. It now questions the recognition of each other. Theo is the quintessential postcolonial individual burdened by a broad outlook that seeks to recognize the legitimacy of the 'other' and thus completely at odds with views held by his 'own' community. He suffers his own load partly because he is guided by idealistic thoughts of belonging to his land and his people and partly because there is none to share those thoughts. He is sucked into the vortex of violence and he asks 'Has there ever been a country, that once colonized, avoided civil war? Africa? India? Burma?' Theo's western orientation is no match for radical thoughts of identity. His weltanschauung is bruised in the encounter with the ugly side of resurgent Sinhala consciousness and the State. The novel describes his ordeal as a prisoner of the army and the brutalities inflicted on him and reveal to us the intolerance and violation that takes place in the event of

differences between Today, the postcolo State has occupied a been presumed that i The north east of In mapping identity an command are used c since its 'merger' wi against the State, the that have torn asun consolidating the hc futility and utter stu mutually acceptable.

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differences between dominant views and views tempered by a *weltanschauung*. Today, the postcolonial world is scattered with such examples of violence. The State has occupied a position of the oppressor of its own people even though it has been presumed that it has created a class of citizens with equal, non-arbitrary rights. The north east of India provides an illustration of this discourse on the crisis of mapping identity and the self-critical, questioning outlook. Suppression and command are used on the voices of dissent. The story of Nagaland, in particular since its 'merger' with the Indian Union – the subsequent rebellion by the Nagas against the State, the resultant years of strife and conflict and concomitant sufferings that have torn asunder the region reinforcing the feelings of alienation and consolidating the hostile environment already in place only goes to prove the futility and utter stupidity of aiming at a pan Indian outlook without a healthy, mutually acceptable discourse.

The *Funny Boy* touches on intertwined issues of growing up as a homosexual in an affluent Tamil family of Colombo during the strife. Arjie is put in a school that has separate sections for Sinhala and Tamil students. 'How come you're in a Sinhala class?' Salgado asked Arjie. Arjie's answer is a foil to his inner anxiety searching for acceptance by the dominant group. He says, 'my parents put me in a Sinhala class from grade one because they wanted me to learn Sinhalese.' Salgado's retort is a denial of this recognition: 'We don't want you here' ... 'Go to the Tamil class'. Arjie does not know Tamil and therefore cannot act according to Salgado's bidding. Language is one of the standards measuring nationalist feeling, particularly in the Sri Lankan context. Arjie is a misfit amongst the Sinhala children though his parents thought that he should learn and speak the dominant language and thereby build up familiarity and acceptance. The 'Sinhala only' movement of 1956 supported by the Government was not only to consolidate the language but also to resist assimilation through language. The tension is palpable between two sets of people who constitute a nation. Arjie is already excluded from the Sinhala mind and the opportunities. The Tamils like Arjie's family are caught between the fervour of their own kind and the rejection by the dominant Sinhala culture. There is a gradual descent into the ultimate realization that they cannot share spaces with the Sinhala even though they had wanted to. Events like the death of Uncle Daryl in Jaffna, the ill treatment and allegations against Jegan to alienate him and finally the riots of Colombo are responsible in making Arjie's family decide to leave Sri Lanka and move to Canada. The *Funny Boy* reflects how difficult it is for Jegan to shed off radical antecedents. He has two oppositions: the Sinhala and the Tamil affluent. Extreme nationalism is almost an imposition based on rejection from both sections. Violence of the riots and the Jegan's possible return to violence are undesired ancillaries of nationalist positions.



Today, nationalism is punctuated by unresolved issues of development, consciousness of differential handling within a nation, resurgence of religious and linguistic hegemony by the dominant group and consequent rigid uncompromising stance of the group or groups in minority. Sri Lanka has witnessed all these in the years of violence. The novels that have been considered here give a testimony to this experience through the lives of people who do not hold any stiff opinion on nationalist thought. But they have been unwitting add-on participants in the violence. Sam is devastated by his Master's death. Leandro, Sam's arch enemy is equally affected. The war of the north had entered their lives and brought irreversible changes. Theo of *Mosquito* is the only character who muses on a more broad and conservative form of nationalism but he fails to make the others understand his position, possibly because he is too moderate in the extreme times. Contesting nationalisms and group identities force non participants to leave their land and seek life, recognition and freedom elsewhere like Arjie's family. Sri Lankan fiction that has been considered here has represented various moods but has scrupulously avoided voicing a position. They have relied on responses conditioned by private situations. Borrowing the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia and extending the meaning from the voices in the text to the voices outside, nationalism can be represented through plurality, multiplicity and heterogeneity. A dialogical relationship between communities placed close to each other helps in cultural, religious discourses. Such discourses can construct a broad objective and address contentious issues through self-criticism and argument. Violence is adopted as an immediate route when the dialogical relationship does not exist or is weakened. But the price is too high and democratic nations of the postcolonial world have to ready themselves for more voices and differences in its political and intellectual development.

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between the Christian missionaries and the Kenyan natives during the colonization of Kenya. This encounter embitters the relationship between two tribal groups situated on two different ridges divided by the river Hornia. The cultural clash between the traditionalist tribe, Komeno and the modernist tribe, Makuyu is interestingly represented through a topographic lens where the river Hornia assumes a cultural character. Thus, river in the African literary context has acquired a rich cultural connotation, and instead of being a part of silent landscape, it has evolved as a significant trope for defining the cultural imagination of the Africans. If seen from this perspective, then Achebe's *Chike and the River* (1966) does not appear to be a simple children's tale in which an innocent Nigerian boy aspires to cross the Niger river. The river Niger in this text assumes a symbolic dimension and the act of crossing the river, as my study will reveal, is richly loaded with theoretical issues that need to be carefully examined. In fact, *Chike and the River* is the only fiction of Achebe that has attracted very little critical attention because the narrative is chiefly related to the children's world, and there is a strange air of simplicity and innocence in the story which has convinced the critics that it is meant for young and enthusiastic readers and therefore requires no serious interrogation.<sup>3</sup> In his review of the fiction *Chike and the River*, Gabriel Constans states, "In *Chike and the River*, young readers get an intimate look at African life, learn about the Niger River, and connect with Chike as if he is their own sibling. The brilliance of Mr. Achebe's prose is his ability to make a reader feel like an omniscient sprite on Chike's shoulder: along for the ride and privy to all that he senses and sees" ([www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-review/chike-and-river](http://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-review/chike-and-river)). Gabriel Constans evaluation of *Chike and the River* reflects the general approach of the critics towards this fiction of Achebe, and this outlook of the critics, as my paper will argue ignores the potentially rich connotative dimension that this narrative acquires due to the presence of river in the story. This paper will therefore critically examine the relationship between the Niger river and Chike (the central protagonist of *Chike and the River*) to point out the fact that the act of crossing the Niger river makes Chike more mature and experienced as a person.

Before examining *Chike and the River* from the above stated perspective, it is necessary to understand how rivers are integral to human existence. The association of rivers with human civilization is very old and rivers occupy a significant space in the cultural memory of a particular race or nation or tribe, as the cartographic conception of a nation or a state is often based on the flowing rivers that spatially divide two distinct lands. In his exploration of the interface of rivers and humanity, T. S. McMillin states:

Rivers *move*, flowing over land, through history, and among diverse groups of people, changing considerably from their source to their destination; yet they also *stay*, permanent blue lines on our maps,



constant waypoints and lasting landmarks. Rivers *connect*—state with state, interior with exterior, one region with another, the past with the present; but they also *separate* nations, subcultures, and families. In short, rivers do not cede their meanings easily. (McMillin xii)

As the shape, direction and pace of rivers vary with change of time and location, therefore it is impossible to study rivers from a fixed perspective. McMillin's aim in his book entitled, *The Meaning of Rivers: Flow and Reflection in American Literature* (2011), is to emphasize the significance of river in studying literary texts. He believes that rivers are inseparable from literature in the same way as nature is inseparable from culture (McMillin xiii & xiv). Instead of analyzing nature as an important component of literature, McMillin urges the readers and critics to indulge in river-centric study of literary texts, which, he hopes will shift the paradigm of understanding the representation of nature in literary writings, "By bringing literary matters to the attention of those interested in rivers, I hope to make a case for the importance of humanistic inquiry in the understanding of nature; by bringing rivers to the attention of those interested in literature, I hope to make a case for the importance of nature in humanistic inquiry" (McMillin xvii). Though the focus of McMillin's analysis is strictly based on the representation of rivers in different American literary texts, yet his theorization of river is of general nature, as he takes into consideration all the aspects that deal with the interface of humanity and rivers. Chapter titles in the book of McMillin: "What Do Rivers Mean?", "Overlooking the River", "By the River", "Up the River", "Down the River", "Crossing the River", "Up and Down the River", indicate his critical take on the river from a variety of perspectives in which the human approach to the river is evident. In the context of this paper, the chapter titled, "Crossing the River" is important because while theorizing the human act of crossing the river, McMillin asserts that any description of river crossing in literary writings bears a 'transformative quality', and this motif of river crossing is often used by the writers to "explore other crosses, intermixes of personal and political, historical and prospective, physical and spiritual" (McMillin 128). This particular idea of McMillin is thought provoking as he shows interest in exploring the act of crossing river from the perspective of the development of human self, an issue which is more metaphorical in nature than physical. If seen from this stated perspective, Chike's act of crossing the Niger river is obviously transformative, but in order to arrive at any conclusive idea regarding Chike's development we must analyze the text properly in the light of McMillin's argument.

Chike lives with his mother and two sisters in a Nigerian village named Umuofia. When he attains eleven years of age, his mother decides to send him to his uncle who lives in the city, Onitsa. Since Onitsa is a city, therefore Chike is very happy to

know that he will be further. In fact, this culture' of his village of Onitsa is like a dream his mother warns him near the river Niger is a big city, full of about the city. In part there every every y mother makes Chike he comes to know fre river Niger in a ferry go to the other side o learns that after cross the midwestern Niger Lagos: " 'Do you kno ferry in Asaba you are had been to the Midv Ezekiel, 'that once y 'Lagos. Second-to-La poor-man's Lagos.'" the mind of Chike a dreams of reaching a give Chike a feel of connected to his desir that he knows the city nature or does it car culture, Chike's desir drive towards moderr educated boy like Ch quickly adapts to the for Chike, whereas th age-old prejudices. Hi movement from the r Asaba, which is a bi detachment from his o the native culture, the ferryboat to cross the river, and this leads h "Chike's dream had c

know that he will be sent there to stay with his uncle and also carry on his studies further. In fact, this decision of his mother helps him to go away from the bush culture<sup>3</sup> of his village which he has never liked. Therefore Chike's going to the city of Onitsa is like a dream come true. However, when he leaves his house in Umuofia, his mother warns him about the dangers in the city, and also advises Chike not to go near the river Niger because many people usually get drowned in the river: "Onitsa is a big city, full of dangerous people and kidnappers. Therefore do not wander about the city. In particular do not go near the River Niger; many people get drowned there every every year..." (*Chike and the River*). This particular advice of his mother makes Chike curious about the river Niger. After settling in the city of Onitsa, he comes to know from his friends in the new school that it is very easy to cross the river Niger in a ferryboat, and for crossing the river one needs just twelve pence to go to the other side of the river and come back. From his friend Samuel, Chike also learns that after crossing the river Niger one reaches the city of Asaba situated in the midwestern Nigeria; a place which is not far from the capital city of the nation, Lagos: "Do you know," said Samuel to Chike, "that as soon as you step out of the ferry in Asaba you are in Midwestern Nigeria?" The others agreed excitedly. They all had been to the Midwest. "And do you know," said another boy whose name was Ezekiel, "that once you are in Asaba it is one way to Lagos?" "Yes," said Samuel. "Lagos. Second-to-London. I have not been to Lagos. But I know Asaba which is poor-man's Lagos." (*Chike and the River*). Such discussions in the school trigger the mind of Chike as his desire to cross the river Niger grows stronger and he dreams of reaching a new city Asaba on the other side of the river; a city which will give Chike a feel of being in Lagos. Thus, Chike's temptation to cross Niger is connected to his desire for seeing big cities and also to claim like his school friends that he knows the city culture. Is this temptation in Chike reflective of his childish nature or does it carry an instinctive connotation? As a representative of bush culture, Chike's desire to visit big cities is remarkably suggestive of an impulsive drive towards modern colonial cities that holds a promising life for a missionary educated boy like Chike. Therefore, when Chike comes to the city of Onitsa, he quickly adapts to the city culture. The city is a symbol of modernity and progress for Chike, whereas the village Umuofia is representative of conventionality and age-old prejudices. His journey from Umuofia to Onitsa is therefore indicative of a movement from the rural to the city culture. From Onitsa, Chike desires to go to Asaba, which is a bigger city than Onitsa, and this again is symbolic of his detachment from his original native culture. In his metaphorical journey away from the native culture, the river Niger plays a very vital role. When Chike boards on the ferryboat to cross the Niger, he is extremely excited about the idea of crossing the river, and this leads him to sing a song that he had learnt in his village school: "Chike's dream had come true; at last he could go to Asaba. He jumped up and



down several times and sang 'One More River to Cross.' It was one of the songs he had learnt at the C.M.S. Central School, Umuofia" (*Chike and the River*). During his journey across the Niger river, he starts thinking about the city of Lagos because his friends had said that Asaba is like a 'poor-man's Lagos' (*Chike and the River*). So, he recalls all the places in the city of Lagos about which he had read in the geography books. In fact, while crossing the river, Chike is highly optimistic about his new adventure, as he expects to encounter a mini image of Lagos in Asaba city. In this context, we may refer to McMillin's take on crossing the river:

Encountering the river as a separation between one side and the other, the crosser *must* cross, either because of where he or she is (this side) or because of where he or she is not (that side). Another fundamental trait of the crossing experience pertains to the number of transversals. In some cases, a river is crossed once and for all; ... Or a cross may have two parts, the crosser first exploring the other side or obtaining something of value, then returning home. This type of cross may be extended into multiple crossings, ... All of these factors have a bearing on the meaning of rivers themselves, each providing different elements of significance, from the historical to political to the philosophical and psychological. (McMillin 128)

As a crosser of the river, Chike goes to the other side of the Niger and after spending a day in Asaba returns to Onitsa. His journey to Asaba and the return journey to Onitsa bear on the meaning of the river Niger, and as McMillin suggests, each journey across the river provide 'different elements of significance'. While crossing the river for the first time to reach Asaba, Chike is extremely excited, but the moment he reaches there, the city of Asaba appears less attractive and much below his level of expectation: "Was this Asaba about which he had heard so much? There was nothing to see except a few miserable-looking houses. He was really disappointed. ... But he had expected more. The market could not be compared to the one in Onitsa" (*Chike and the River*). This initial disillusionment in Asaba is significant as Chike's encounter with the so called big city in the midwestern region of Nigeria proves to be futile. The high life of the city is not seen by Chike and he realizes that there is nothing worthy about the city of Asaba about which he may write to his people at home. When Chike misses the last ferryboat leaving from Asaba to reach Onitsa, he has no alternative but to spend the night in Asaba. With just six pence left in his pocket which will be used to travel back to Onitsa, Chike decides to spend the night in a lorry van. Before securing a safe place inside a lorry van, Chike feels the pain of remaining away from home. He thinks about his mother and sisters at home who are sleeping peacefully, and he, on the contrary, has to spend the night alone in an unknown city: "He thought of his mother and sisters

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quite safe at home and his misery grew. He was hungry and mosquitoes sang in his ear.... He prayed and cried quietly in the darkness" (*Chike and the River*). During the night when Chike tries to sleep in the lorry van, he overhears a discussion about theft. Eventually, three people rob the shop of a rich cloth merchant, and in order to escape being noticed by the thieves, Chike gets down from the lorry van and hides in a nearby place. Next morning when Chike wakes up he finds those thieves arrested by the police and when enquired about the robbery, he narrates the whole robbery to the police and also informs about the involvement of the watchman of the shop. The manager of the shop is extremely happy to find the truth about robbery from Chike, and for being honest and brave, he is later rewarded by the owner of the company with a scholarship that would help him to complete his secondary education. Though Achebe does not describe the return journey of Chike through the river Niger, but he evidently comes back to Onitsa on a ferryboat because the manager of the company, after the thieves are arrested by the police, provides Chike a good meal and then escorts him to the ferry in his car. Interestingly, at the point of closing the narrative, Achebe states, "So Chike's adventure on the River Niger brought him close to danger and then rewarded him with good fortune" (*Chike and the River*). Thus, the narrative ends with a remark of the author which sheds light on the achievement of Chike.

The act of crossing the river Niger carries multiple connotations in the case of Chike. The river plays a transformative role in the life of Chike, as he learns many things about the city life and this enables him to grow-up. In fact, the whole narrative can be studied from the perspective of a bildungsroman in which the river Niger does the work of maturing Chike. Crossing the river or moving from Onitsa to Asaba is like undertaking a metaphorical journey from innocence to experience. As stated earlier, McMillin suggests that when a person crosses the river, the act of crossing involves 'transformative quality'. In Asaba, Chike's realization that the city is not different from Onitsa, confirms the deceptive nature of cities. That all the cities are not equally glamorous and attractive is a lesson that he learns after crossing the river. There is distinct binary that defines cities: appearance/reality, which often tends to confuse native inhabitants like Chike who have not seen too many cities. Apart from these experiences that he gathers after crossing the Niger, the ultimate experience is very noteworthy. The experience of witnessing robbery in Asaba gives Chike an idea of the corruption and illegal practices that are quite common in big cities. Behind the modern and progressive face of city lies the hidden darkness of corruption and wickedness. Thus, Chike's encounter with the city of Asaba on the other side of Niger brings about a change in the perception of cities. His return journey to Onitsa is a kind of return to the roots of his culture. Earlier, he had dreamt of going to Onitsa from his village Umuofia, then from Onitsa to Asaba, and while conceiving the city of Asaba, Chike had thought of Lagos and London. So, the



onward journey from a village to a city, and then from a city to a bigger city, is interrupted when he crosses the Niger to reach Asaba. In this onward journey from village to city; which can be metaphorically considered as a form of movement away from the native culture, the role of the river Niger is significant as it educates Chike. While spending the miserable night in Asaba, Chike severely misses his home in Umuofia. The painful experience of the night spent in Asaba makes Chike realize the pangs of detaching oneself from the original culture. In fact, Chike comes to know about the futility of blindly following the city culture after he crosses the Niger and reaches Asaba. Hence, Achebe's *Chike and the River* is a narrative that can read both from the perspective of bildungsroman and also from the point of view of river literature. The river in the narrative, as my argument suggests, becomes an active participant in the formation of the self of Chike. Interacting with the self of Chike, the river produces a meaningful discourse, a phenomenon that demands a river-centric study of the narrative.

#### Notes

1. For a detailed understanding of the use of river as a symbol in African novels please go through the article of G. M. M. Grobler titled, "And the river runs on ...: Symbolism in two African novels"
2. When I searched the internet to see articles related to Achebe's *Chike and the River*, I found that no critic has seriously considered this fiction from any theoretical point of view. Most of the reviewers and critics of this fiction have noted that *Chike and the River* belongs to the genre of children literature which is meant for the young readers. Even in the JSTOR database, there exists no single article that extensively examines this narrative from any serious critical point of view.
3. Bush culture is a term used to denote the original native culture of the African people. 'Bush' is a word which is commonly used in the Australian literature to refer to the original inhabitants of the country who were colonized by the white settlers.

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ABSTRACT: *Travel as this genre offers con- historical and cultural its transformation as o Feminism too has she considered as male-cei The female road trip de a shift within it. Wome reads into a space that she adds to his/story h identity. The present pa Chinese traveler, philos geographical borders a idea of history. At the s terms of the individual,*

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**"A Journey in the Footsteps of Xuanxang":  
Mishi Saran's *Chasing the Monk's Shadow***

*Kalpana Bora Barman  
Krishna Barua*

**ABSTRACT:** *Travel and writing enjoy great currency in the literary world today as this genre offers compelling ground for theory, and initiate dialogues between historical and cultural determinants. Travel also involves the issue of identity and its transformation as one traverses the dividing line between the I and the not-I. Feminism too has shouldered its way into a domain that has primarily been considered as male-centric. Gender operates differently in the context of travel. The female road trip does not necessarily subvert the given paradigms but marks a shift within it. Women experience and portray travel differently as the female reads into a space that has been colonized by her male counterpart. In the process she adds to his/story her own story thereby re-discovering and re-defining her identity. The present paper attempts to read Mishi Saran's retracing of the famous Chinese traveler, philosopher and scholar journey to India as a re-negotiating of geographical borders and ideological boundaries and also a questioning of the idea of history. At the same time it addresses the question of identity not only in terms of the individual, but also in terms of geography, nation, culture, and history.*

**KEYWORDS:** *travel, gender, history, identity*

Travel and writing have emerged as one of the major genres in literature today. Travel writing enjoys great attention in the present period, and the huge number of contemporary travel narratives testifies this. These narratives offer compelling ground for theory, and initiate dialogues between historical and cultural determinants. They invite discussion and open up new vistas of interdisciplinary criticism as they question national, political, ideological and cultural boundaries. Travel writing allows the exploration of new spaces and the bridging of gaps between various worlds and cultures. Thus, from the periphery of leisure, travel writing has moved to the center-stage of various social and ethnographic discourses.

Feminism too has shouldered its way into this domain, which has primarily



been considered as male-centric. Way back in 1983, *Punch* published a light-hearted doggerel by Mary Kingsley that has famously acted as the premise for the negotiation of the role of gender in travel and travel writing:

A Lady an explorer? A traveler in skirts?  
The notions are a trifle too seraphic:  
Let them stay and mend the babies, or mend our ragged shirts;  
But they mustn't, can't, and shan't be geographic.

"To the Royal Geographic Society."

The conventions of travel writing are deeply marked by gender, so that it has always been challenging for women to travel and write about it. Travel and travel writing are located in the patriarchal tradition that is public, and, in contrast, the female space was considered to be personal and private. The male traveler overlooks, or perhaps turns a blind eye to the female traveler and her experiences. In her seminal book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) Marie Louise Pratt traces the imperial image and critiques such visual (and textual) colonization when she argues that the traveler is rhetorically, ideologically, sexually, and even politically "the master of all I survey" [emphasis mine]. The subject of this authoritative survey includes landscape, natives, and women. Such an authoritative voice finds its critique in Edward Said's criticism of the Orientalist vision, which points out the intrinsic power relations that exists between the writer who writes about other cultures, and the culture that is represented. The Orientalist writes about the Other, thereby locating it as passive. The relationship shared is thus unequal:

[...] the Oriental is that the [Orientalist] writes about, whereas the latter is written about. For the latter, the passivity is the presumed role; for the former, the power to observe, study, and so forth [...] The Oriental is given as fixed, stable, in need of investigation, in need of knowledge even about himself (Said, 308)

Said's critique can be extended to the ideological gendering of travel which problematises the happy reception of women travelers and writing by them. It is important to remember that women travel not only as representatives of their gender but also as members of a particular society and culture. Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* states that the a man, when he undertakes a journey, has, in general, an end in view, while women are more responsive to the many small incidents that occur on the road. This statement highlights the fact that women's journeys are different from those of men. A good example of this is perhaps the letters by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, which were written from Turkey. They give an insight into the domestic arrangements of Islamic society that men would have never the chance to see.

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Travel involves the issue of identity and its transformation. Identity, whether individual, national or cultural, is understood in the context of a given ideology which supposes a dividing line between the I and the not-I. During travel the stability of such an identity is challenged as the traveler engages in new experiences in different geographical and cultural environments. In *The Mind of the Traveller: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* Eric J. Leed desynonymises 'travel' into three stages — departure, passage and arrival. The nature of the journey is important as the mind of the traveler is transformed by what it encounters. Thus, travel is no longer individualizing. Rather, it is an intertextual process whereby diverse cultures meet and inform the mind, identity and experiences of the traveler.

Gender operates differently in the context of travel. The female road trip does not necessarily subvert the given paradigms but marks a shift within it. Women experience and portray travel differently as the female reads into a space that has been colonized by her male counterpart. In the process she adds to his/story her own story and recognizes the power of discovering identity on her own. Sara Mills' *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (1991) looks extensively at the difference between male and female travelers, and the way these differences generate a dialogue between textual and historical determinants. How does the individual respond to such changes? Does travel privilege the individual or the experience? How does the individual negotiate borders and boundaries, while him/herself being located in an ideological frame? Importantly, what is history then? These are some of the questions this paper attempts to address through a reading of Mishi Saran's *Chasing the Monk's Shadow: A Journey in the Footsteps of Xuanxang*.

Saran retraces Xuanxang's journey to India and tries to find a space for herself in history and records her travels. This paper attempts to address the question of identity not only in terms of the individual, but also in terms of geography, nation, culture, and history. In *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books about Southeast Asia* Susan Morgan says:

one key meaning of looking at place is looking at the conventions of a range of particular historical discourses, considering both that place entails history and that place is always framed by the points of view of other places. (78)

Thus, geography—especially political geography—is an ideologically motivated construct rather than a physical location in the globe. This paper would like to extend Morgan's understanding of political geography to Saran's narrative and attempt to show how cultural history is not determined by such boundaries. Rather, geographical boundaries are incapable of framing culture primarily because culture cannot be confined by boundaries. In Saran's narrative gender is the axis of



difference, but an alternate argument would be that such differences too become fluid in the negotiation of identity.

Travel is not only a journey undertaken but is also a metaphor. When one travels, one negotiates a lot many issues such as time and space and their representation, and well as the meaning of ideology and nationhood. In *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* Caren Kaplan argues that in postmodern travel the traveller is a decentered entity that no longer travels in one piece or as one citizen, but is in his/her multiple identities and masquerades. Importantly, territorial cartography breaks down into global cartography. The traveller now deals with spaces that are not bounded territorially, and this leads to the questioning of the ways in which collective identities, cultures and nations are built. Physical borders do not hold and cultural borders blur. Saran's narrative provides ample evidence of this.

How then is history, something that is almost always taken for granted, important here? Part of thinking about 'history' is to think about what—or who history is for. Studying history involves taking oneself out of one's present context and exploring an alternate world. This helps one become more aware of one's life and its contexts. To see how people lived in the past presents one with an opportunity to think how one lives in the present. To attempt an understanding of history is not an attempt to understand the elusive human nature; rather, history throws us into stark relief. Visiting the past is like visiting a foreign country people, doing some things the same way and some things differently, but above all else it makes us rethink of the idea of 'home.' Saran embarks on a similar project. She follows Xuanxang's route to find her way home.

In the seventh century, history witnessed one of the greatest pilgrimages to be undertaken by an individual. In AD 627 the Chinese pilgrim-monk Xuanzang (earlier spelt as Hiuen Tsang or Hsuan Tsang) set out on an epic journey to India on a spiritual quest. He traveled along the Silk Road, through the wastes of the Gobi Desert and the icy routes of Central Asia. After two years he reached India and slowly made way to the various sites, holy places and monasteries associated with Buddha, and also spent a number of years studying with Buddhist teachers. He returned to China eighteen years later in AD 645, carrying back with him nearly six hundred scriptures, which he translated from Sanskrit into Chinese. He also left a detailed record of his epic ten thousand-mile journey, and this remains an invaluable source of historical information on the regions he traversed and also on the social and cultural conditions of that time.

Fourteen hundred years later, Mishi Saran, a free-lance journalist, follows Xuanzang's footsteps to the fabled cities of China, Central Asia and India. Born in

Allahabad, Saran spent years in several countries before finding herself [...] in a society of refugees [...] of where she belongs [...] deficiency" (Saran 5).

Swinging between continents, eased in and out of cultures and staples. Stuck in between continents, unjoined [...] (Saran 3)

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#### *Chasing the Monk*

Saran's journey in the understanding of where into the changing political She eschews any specific include the very method *Tang Xi You Xi* (also spelled Beal, professor of Chinese *Buddhist Records of the Shaman Hwui Li* called yet another source that Watters' *On Yuan Chwang Xuanxang: Buddhist Pilgrimage* Saran's narrative. Incidentally the first woman to walk

Saran begins her journey in Luoyang, the place of origin follows the monk's route to Bishkek she flies to Tashkent. Non-availability of Pakistani Delhi to continue the journey

Allahabad, Saran spent the next two decades of her life shuttling between six countries before finding comfort in Hong Kong's "mixed up, cosmopolitan porridge [...] in a society of refugees and misfits" (Saran 2). But her restlessness and uneasiness of where she belonged leads her to realize that history had been a "troublesome deficiency" (Saran 5) in her life:

Swinging between countries, mine was a split life. My worlds never met. I eased in and out of cultures, switched tongues, I held together with a string, tapes and staples. Stuck in the space between one language and the next, losing among continents, unjoined dots. I wanted to shut my eyes and rest. I wanted to go home. (Saran 3)

Saran deals with this twin-dilemma of history and identity by embarking on her quest. Xuanxang, the Chinese monk, seemed to show her the path to her history. Like the monk, who yearned to travel to India to overcome his lack of knowledge, she too is caught between countries, between India and China. She writes, "An Indian woman with a China craze, a Chinese monk with an Indian obsession; we had the same schizophrenia, the monk and I. It seemed logical to take the same road" (Saran 5).

*Chasing the Monk's Shadow*, published in 2005, is a result of this quest. Saran's journey in the footsteps of the monk is a journey towards a better understanding of where she came from. Thus, her journey is also a journalistic foray into the changing political and cultural face of the region since the days of Xuanxang. She eschews any specialist knowledge of Buddhist philosophy. Her textual sources include the very methodical and factual journal that the monk kept as he traveled. *To Tang Xi You Xi* (also spelt as Si-yu-Ki) was completed in AD 648. Reverend Samuel Beal, professor of Chinese in the University College, London, translated this text as *Buddhist Records of the Western World* in 1884. A lively biography of the monk by Shaman Hwui Li called *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, again translated by Beal in 1911, is yet another source that helps make vivid the many facets of Xuanxang. Thomas Watters' *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India* (1904-05) and Sally Hovey Wriggins' *Xuanxang: Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road* (1996) are other texts that inform Saran's narrative. Incidentally, Sally Hovey Wriggins is the first Westerner and also the first woman to walk extensively in the footsteps of Xuanxang.

Saran begins her journey from Hong Kong in May 2000. She first goes to Luoyang, the place of Xuanxang's birth, before taking a train across China to follow the monk's route to India through China and Krygystan. From the capital Bishkek she flies to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and then drives to the Afghan border. Non-availability of Pakistan visa brings her back to Tashkent. From here she flies to Delhi to continue the monk's journey in India through now-vanished kingdoms



such as Kalinga and Magadha, to name a few. She visits the several Buddhist sites that the pilgrim wrote about. Between November 2000 and June 2001, she travels around India in buses and cars, and trains before finally getting her Pakistan visa that summer. Taking a bus to cross the Wagah border to Lahore, she travels through northern Pakistan by road. In August 2001 she goes to Afghanistan through the Khyber Pass. Unfortunately, her journey in the footsteps of the monk is never completed. Her journey ends in Kabul that was still under the Taliban rule.

The narrative travels seamlessly back and forth in time, between the seventh century and the twenty-first, as Saran uncovers the past while simultaneously bringing alive the present through vivid and engaging descriptions of people, the landscape, and the quotidian activities of the ordinary. Her chronicle is made rich by the vivid descriptions of her experiences. She recounts delightfully how she was mistaken for a Uighur (Turkic Muslim) in Turfan, while China's fraying edges offered her more comfort than the center. Could it be because of her peripheric location? She notes the similarities between the Buddhist shrines everywhere. She tastes fermented mare's milk in Krygystan and discovers a fraternity of *pulao*, *pollo*, and *pilao* between Uzbekistan and Kabul. She listens to stories of hope, despair, anger, bigotry and kindness in places as far-flung and as close as Bishkek, Mathura and Patna, and even sees four corpses hanging from a pole in Kabul, the same spot where President Najibullah's mutilated body hung in 1996. Saran, the journalist, gives an eye-witness account of Kabul under the Taliban regime just one month before 9/11. This is a key point in the narrative because it offers her and the reader the premise to reflect upon the complexities of a life caught in ideological war, and the need to discern between sordid realities and projected illusions. As Central Asia's cultural diversity leads one to pause and reflect on the arbitrariness of national boundaries, another blurring of national boundaries happens when Saran tells us that Korea's National Museum preserves some of the best artifacts from China, which were discovered by a Japanese explorer. This initiates a moment of reflection on the complex dynamics of travel, exploration and colonialism whereby the vandalism of Buddhist murals has resulted in Western museums being one of the richest archives of the ancient heritage today.

Saran recalls quaint stories as she travels along with the monk's shadow. She meets the Kashgari traders whose distant ancestors must have met Xuanxang as he went down the Karakoram Highway towards Central Asia. We travel with Saran from Bukhara to Bihar (both names are derived from the Buddhist term *vihara*), from Baramulla in Kashmir, on to Kapilavastu, down to a glimpse of the ghats in Benares. Bihar was Xuanxang's ultimate destination. Here he arrived at the University of Nalanda, and studied under Silabhadra, the learned head of the institution.

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Moving on to Assam to trace the museum reminders of the reign of the king of Kamarupa, Bhaskara Varman, to the ancient Buddhist rock carvings there, Saran travels down to Amravati and then to Kancheepuram, the last point in India, before moving towards Sri Lanka. Saran informs us that Xuanxang was dissuaded from journeying into Sri Lanka on grounds of political strife and chaos, a condition that is strikingly similar to the conditions in the present. As she herself goes back to the Ajanta caves of Maharashtra, to Gujarat, and stops at the Lahore Museum, Pakistan, Saran expresses her disappointment at being denied the permission of visiting Kabul, and hopes that someday this will be altered. The book, in this context, is multi-faceted: it is a personal memoir infused with lively reportage and historical inquiry.

Saran recalls how she was introduced to the legend of the monk through a childhood folktale, which featured a fictionalized version of the man. This sets the mood of her narrative: it is part travelogue, part journalism, part history and part memoir. As she travels, she gives us a glimpse of the man who is an important figure for the Chinese. Conversely, she also gives us a glimpse of China as she sees it—as a mosaic of cultures and ethnicities reflecting linguistic and religious convergences.

Her own inner journey towards a new understanding of her roots and identity runs parallel to the account of her travels. In trying to show how linked she is to the monk, or how the monk's tale informs her own, Saran parallels her narrative with that of the monk as they traverse through various lands, and adds relevant inputs from other historians also. Her fears, desolation and elation are intertwined with those of the monk's so that at one point their joys and apprehensions become one's own. The reader embarks on a twin journey where the connections become obvious. In the beginning the narrative shifts between two time spaces with much ease, but towards the later part of the book these shifts cease to occur and both the monk's and Saran's stories become one.

The spaces that Saran negotiates here are not only geographical but also cultural. Travel by different vehicles produces different experiences and different narratives. This is because the mode of mobility affects the traveler differently in terms of connecting and disconnecting him/her to and from the terrain of travel. It organizes one's ways of responding to unfamiliar territories, and thus affects systems of behaviour differently. Therefore, modes of mobility become both literal and figurative agents in the negotiation of identity. This is an important aspect in the journeys of both the monk and his follower.

When Xuanxang traveled in the seventh century, his only means of transport were animals such as horses, camels, mules and donkeys. He traveled through rough mountains and dry plains. Thus he was more in contact with his natural and



geographical surroundings, and his responses to these conditions were determined by his proximity to the same. He experiences extreme heat and cold and other manifestations of nature, and is even confronted by bands of dacoits and robbers who did not think twice before robbing the monk of his goods. Xuanxang found his patrons all over the land. Li-Chang, the Governor of Wuwei, king Qu Wentai of Gaochang city, and later Harshavardhana and Bhaskaravarman in India helped the monk complete his travel. They provided him with companions who soon abandoned him for they could no longer keep up with the enthusiasm of the monk.

For Saran, such conditions do not prevail. First, her means of transportation are far removed from those of her guide. In the present age of mass tourism, all modern means of travel are available to her. Her departure, unlike that of Xuanxang, is more uneventful. She travels in trains, cars, jeeps and buses. Transportation is comparatively easy for her as she covers distances quickly and without much difficulty. While this ensures a smooth journey for her, she is, nevertheless, alienated from experiencing geographical and cultural diversities. Snug in the comfort that modern amenities allows her, Saran's travels may be seen as incomplete in a certain sense because she does not experience first-hand the geo-cultural richness of most places. Such experiences are available to her only when she rests herself at various stoppages. Means of mobility is an important factor that contributes to and changes the perspective of the traveler. There is instant connection with and even instant alienation from certain cultural experiences and this conditions/informs one's reactions and responses to the same.

One of the central issues in Saran's narrative is her own understanding of her identity. Born in India, she is an Indian and a non-Indian at the same time. The fact that she is unable to place herself in a specifically-defined space highlights her non-possession of any specific identity. While this may be seen as a lack, it can also be viewed positively. Saran embarks on the journey so that she may acquire an identity. She wants to acquire a culture that she does not possess. She wants to understand and acquire her "Indianness." However, she offers no concrete definition of her notion of Indianness. She comes to understand it as she traverses her route.

Language is one of the key agencies that provide Saran a glimpse into her "Indian" culture. In Krygyzstan and Uzbekistan she comes across the word *darya* (stream/river). And while in Sogdiana she is pleasantly surprised to find that the Indian counterpart of the word *chakar* (in India it is *naukar-chakar*) actually referred to an institution in Central Asia where slaves were bought and trained to guard the homes of merchants travelling in long journeys. She delights in the fact that despite national boundaries and the historical difference of time, places are actually threaded by linguistic features. She feels at home in such places for they held the root to

India:

A common language turned the concept of sometimes the secret Or like them more. (Saran 32)

The concept of foreign land; it is only Saran is this quintessence are culturally her own Kashmir, she meets people and linguistic settings her cultural and historical one bound for home between the Self and In Dharamsala, where Points for Mind Train

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I remembered all all that had captured me needed to be. I only saw the world, airbrushed (Saran 32)

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India:

A common language smashed the walls between worlds, blurred boundaries, turned the concept of foreignness on its head. I spoke a language and sensed sometimes the secret life of a people, in some small way it made me more like them. Or like them more. (Saran 36)

The concept of the foreigner and foreignness is also questioned. "There is no foreign land; it is only the traveler that is foreign," remarked Robert Louis Stevenson. Saran is this quintessential foreigner who traverses through lands and spaces that are culturally her own. Whether in the remote areas of China or in the chaotic Kashmir, she meets people who are snugly comfortable in their respective cultures and linguistic settings. They offer help and hospitality to this foreigner in search of her cultural and historical home. This leads her to reassess her position as the one bound for home, and of those "foreigners" who help her. The differences between the Self and the Other is blurred as the self slips into the role of the Other. In Dharamsala, where she takes up Geshe Sonam Rinchen's classes on the Seven Points for Mind Training, she recognizes a moment of truth:

The class consisted almost entirely of foreigners, but this was a relative term. Who was the foreigner in Dharamsala? The sole Indian in a Tibetan community? The Tibetan community in India? And if all these visitors from the West had gathered to study Buddhism, then isn't the foreigner the one who isn't actually studying Buddhism? (Saran 196)

Religion, too, becomes a site for negotiating identity. In Uttar Pradesh she instantly recognizes the call of the azaan—*Allah hu Akbar*—as part of her childhood memory. To her it felt like a brick installed in a house of the past.

Stepping out into the world of the unknown, Saran seeks comfort in the world of the familiar. The unfamiliar unsettles her in the beginning. In the chapter "City of the Flying Horse," as she argues her way into a sleeper berth, realization dawns on her that she has to unlearn a lot about China (the country of her familiar, to pun Alice Walker's title) in order to come to terms with a section of people who exercise coercion in the name of politics. This admission immediately locates her as Said's Orientalist who falls in the trap of exoticizing the Orient and selectively representing it, and is shocked by the actual truth of it:

I remembered all of a sudden why I had wearied of China. It was not China at all that had captured my imagination, it was some imagined construct, a place that I needed to be. I only saw what I wanted to and ignored the rest. In my mind, I edited the world, airbrushed its faults and painted in the parts I would have preferred. (Saran 32)

In the very early pages of her book Saran acknowledges that she is not an



innocent traveler attempting to explore the unknown. Because she has lived in Hongkong for some time she is familiar with the cultural nuances of the Chinese. This experience does burden her with a cultural baggage. Throughout her travel in China she carouses through unknown territory, but she nevertheless knows the culture to some extent. Saran also becomes Eric J. Leed's traveler who carries a politico-cultural baggage at the beginning of her journey only to have it discarded, changed and even replaced by new knowledge and information as the journey progresses. She is capable of linguistic communication, and is not faced with the problem of non-communication at least in China. Here she is one with the monk, and different from him at the same time. Like Saran, Xuanxang too knew the language of the region. However, the difference lies in the purpose of their mission. While the monk traveled in search of knowledge, Saran's journey is towards her self. Thus, while in the process of re-constructing her identity through that of the monk, Saran constructs a history and a culture of the same place but in an altogether different temporality. Thus, the project is not only of a self in the making but also a contemporary (and perhaps alternative) history to the one that already exists. As she proceeds towards her destination, Saran admits abashedly that she had been carrying a cultural baggage, which determined her perception of the Chinese. These perceptions are made false as she realizes that she chose to inform herself with only select details of the people.

Maps, too, are an important agency in travel. Cartography, or the science of codifying space, plays an important role in the negotiation of one's spatial identity. Geographical maps are never wholly neutral and objective representations of space. They aim to rationalize the world in systematic ways. Maps are constructed according to specific cultural requirements and this makes them important ideological tools. Adrienne Rich says that "a place on the map is also a place in history" (Rich 212). However, while maps are attempts at accurate representations of spaces, they are paradoxically countered by the fluidity of cultural and historical boundaries. In Arnav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* Tridib and the narrator as seekers of spaces in history. In their stories, the map becomes a metaphor that allows them to question the idea of political boundaries and nationhood as the private and the public narratives interpenetrate. Saran's journey can also be placed within such a reading. In tracing the monk's journey, she also maps a journey towards her self. In his "Notes on Travel and Theory" James Clifford states that "location" is not about finding a stable home or discovering and sharing a common experience. Rather, it is about recognizing the differences in otherwise concrete situations. Saran finds her location in the many differences that connect and separate her with other human beings:

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I drank it all in. It was like learning a new language, the vocabulary of an Indian landscape. Slowly I was acquiring a country, a history, making it mine by marching through it, claiming this branch, that road, that casual 1000-year old brick, these people. Mine, all mine. I felt a little giddy. (Saran 215)

In Saran's story, time also acquires a metaphorical context. The mapping out of time is a difficult task. This is starkly evident by the attempts made by cultures to record their vicissitudes through the discipline of history. For Saran such mapping becomes even more meaningless as she discovers her history in various lands and in an altogether different time space. Her own narrative reverberates with the interpenetration of the past and present, giving us a sense of the way in which history repeats and perpetuates old patterns, even as it loops together apparently dissimilar people and places. The travel account intermixes and informs both Xuanxang and Saran's knowledge of the self. The monk believed that he would find authentic written accounts of his master's teachings in India, and consequently improve himself through the study of these texts. Likewise, Saran hoped that by following the monk's trail, she too would come to know and understand herself, and her "Indianness." She follows Xuanxang's shadow until she almost merges with it. She identifies with the monk and his quest. Like her guide, she visits every Buddhist site that he did, most of which are now in a state of crumble and ruin. When she arrives in India, she is appalled by the lack of national interest in preserving most of these sacred sites except for Bodh Gaya and Dharamsala, which are gracefully maintained by foreign funds.

Saran's responses to the cultural diversity around her is one of shocked displacement. She writes "My world had shrunk, my past crumpled, and the people I knew evaporated" (Saran 65). History, for her, becomes a threadless, clothless fabric that hold people together without the consideration of ideological boundaries. Regarding political divides she observes, "the planning of one nation above other meant hiding the history of people from them" (Saran 127). As an example of this she talks about Uzbekistan. The country's dilemma is the assertion of its own identity after the break-up of the Soviet Union. The embracing of a Muslim heritage has landed the country in an unexpected position of fighting Islamic extremists. In her own journey Saran changes maps and blurs boundaries to locate the places that the monk talked about:

I had to mentally erase the modern cities from maps, abolish international boundaries, to see instead, smaller kingdoms with settlements of vanished names along natural defiles, kingdoms that paused when the landscape changed to a range or a river. (Saran 142)

In India and Pakistan too she questions the meaning of boundaries as Pakistan



continued to shed blood while life remains divided in the "war zone":

Villages were divided into half by the Line of Control, houses even, so that the kitchen was in Pakistan and the outhouse in India. Some children needed visas and permits to attend schools because it was on the Indian side. Wedding parties needed permissions because the groom's baarat had to go to Pakistan to meet the bride, dodging shells. (Saran 185-186)

She also talks about the influence of such hostility affects gender. The alarming death rate of men who are shot and killed often force women to go out and work in order to support the family. The "war zone" no longer signifies political or military violence. Instead it extends to all those areas where people experience hostility on the basis of the differences of religion, culture, and politics included. It is no wonder, therefore, that her journey in the footsteps of the monk is never completed. She fails to make her way through the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Political conditions act as the deterrent in her journey. She concludes her story, the narrative, as well as her journey with the following words, "I had lost the monk long ago. Afghanistan had taken him away from me. And perhaps it is better this way" (Saran 430). True words spoken with heart-breaking honesty. It may be pointed here that Saran finally reaches home in the sense that she realizes that history is not merely a route or a map. Rather, it is an ongoing process. Searching for her own history Saran suddenly finds herself in the middle of it all. The journalist in her refuses to oversee this, while the traveler in her has reached the destination long ago.

Travel and travel writing are acts of translation. In representing other cultures and natures, writers often translate one place into another, and thus locate the impossibility of their own self-representation. How does then, one locate Mishi Saran, a repatriate, a child of mixed cultures? What space does one assign to her? Where is she located? In her seminal text *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Gloria Anzaldua constructs a mestiza consciousness as a dynamic "new mythos" capable of breaking down dualistic hegemonic paradigms. Anzaldua targets paradigms representing culturally determined roles imposed on individuals and peoples from the outside. In constructing her compelling argument in *Borderlands*, Anzaldua creates a "mythos" of Mestizaje to explore and explode the as in which socially enforced paradigms are established through surface and conceptual metaphors as well as the ways in which these paradigms seem to label people as us and them. Anzaldua defines the *mestiza* which is a product of "racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination" (Anzaldua 77). Anzaldua asserts in her text that because metaphor has the power to restructure the collective unconscious through both linguistic and visual means, it is therefore possible for her to alter the unconscious of the reading masses with her own metaphorical constructions. Anzaldua's position is thus one of both

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appropriation and resistance.

Mishi Saran is representative of Anzaldua's "new *mestiza*." Carousing between multiple worlds, the traveler here constructs a third world, a world between worlds. The loss of her previous cultural and historical baggage and its replacement by an altogether new understanding of history and culture locates Mishi Saran in the borders of established paradigms. Every voyage involves the re-setting of boundaries. The traveler is both the self that moves physically from one place to another by following public routes and beaten tracks, while simultaneously embarking on a undetermined journey where s/he has to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture. Between here there and elsewhere. Saran is one such traveler. An Indian and yet not an Indian, her search for home culminates with a better understanding of cultural and national paradigms. She realizes the existent paradigms are but shackles that ties one down to specificity and determined boundaries, while the actual truth is that man is at home everywhere. *Chasing the Monk's Shadow: A Journey in the Footsteps of Xuanxang*, therefore, is a text that maps out the territories of the mind. It redefines the contours of nation and community, and cultural and political representations. It mediates boundaries and poses a challenge to the existing knowledge systems that limits home to ideological boundaries.

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## Gender and Modernism

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## Gender and the Writing of History: The Emergence of Counter-Modernity in Nineteenth Century Women's Writing in India

Arpana Nath

**ABSTRACT:** *The nineteenth century was the time when discourses of gender and the 'women's question' were highly debated subjects in both the public and private spheres. The debates around the question of the construction of gender norms and what role women could play in public life affected women in a number of ways. The challenges to the social order from colonial rule was partially successful in bringing awareness to the oppression of women although it failed to immediately bring any effective changes to social expectations for women in terms of gender roles. Unlike the reformist project that imagined women to be entrapped in domesticity and without any agency or voice, there are instances of women's writing written during the same times which perhaps suggests a reconstitution of women's subjectivity in relation to the project of modernity. I propose to examine the space of the literary through a selection of writing by women during this period that depicts the struggle of women against political, religious and gendered suppression which not only confronts the nationalists' aesthetics of femininity and the discourse of domesticity but also provokes the reader to reflect critically on the conditions and limits of modernity.*

**KEYWORDS:** *discourse, gender, social order, women's writing, femininity*

In the "Introduction" to the second volume of *Women's Writing in India* (1999), Susie Tharu and K Lalita retrace the history of reception of the well-known Telegu classic *Radhika Santwanam* in 1910 by the poet Bangalore Nagaratnamma. The Telugu poet Muddupalani, a woman writer, originally wrote this in the eighteenth century on the theme of Radha's desire for Krishna rendered in very evocative terms. The reprinted edition of this classic work in 1910 was publicly criticized as vulgar, filled with "crude descriptions of sex" (3) and completely unsuitable for public readership. What the reviewers, mostly male social reformers and writers, found shocking was that it had been written by a woman. The government had to finally ban the book under pressure from social reformers and ordered the seizure of all the published copies of the text on charges of threat to the moral well being of its



readers. The ban remained in effect until the State Government revoked it in 1947.

The controversy surrounding the publication and reception of *Radhika Santwanam* is a telling point of the ideological manifestations of gender constructions in colonial times. The nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century in modern Indian history were the years when the controversies and debates on gender were hotly debated in the public space. Social change became an important issue for the reformers and the situation of women with respect to gender relations within the family and society was the first to receive the attention of reformers. In fact it became the central issue in debates on Indian nationalism (Chatterjee 250). However the discourse of education was a gendered programme as much of the benefits of British education policy accrued to the upper caste males who were quick to seize the opportunities thrown open by an English education. The British language policy clearly aimed to make inroads and take root in the social and cultural life of the nation by producing a set of anglicized subjects whose loyalty to the imposed culture could be usefully employed in the task of administering the nation. In course of time this education policy gave birth to a class differentiation and much of what came to be known as modern Indian literature was a product of this English-educated urban middle class (Tharu and Lalita). Education was still out of bounds for the lower castes and women.

Women's education was in fact a complicated and controversial issue that generated endless debates on the question of what was the proper sphere of women. In fact as feminist historians have pointed out, education of women became the tool with which to create a new notion of Indian womanhood, which was then sustained by disciplinary mechanisms (Sangari and Vaid). Under the disguise of liberal reform colonial modernity tried to control women's bodies and sexualities and to realign their gender roles to suit the purposes of an emergent anti-colonial elitist nationalism (Puri). The impact of imperialism and the liberal reform movement for the education of girls had far reaching consequences on the personal, familial, social and daily lives of the colonized people, especially women. This was an integral part of the mechanism to create a new national ideal of femininity and a discourse of home that was essential to regulating and controlling middle-class, upper caste mainly Hindu women. In fact the problem of home and the world is a common theme in many literary works of the nineteenth century. The literature on domesticity in colonial India shows how the relation between the sexes in middle class was affected under the influence of the "new patriarchy" which transformed gender relations both within and outside the home. Upper caste Hindu women in the nineteenth century were caught between the intersection of two social worlds; one was the social world of tradition and conservatism which they were familiar with and the other was

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the new order of colonial modernity with its new set of assumptions and the ensuing contradictory pulls of tradition and modernity. The challenges to the social order from colonial rule was partially successful in bringing awareness to the oppression of women although it failed to immediately bring any effective changes to social expectations for women in terms of gender roles. Women were primarily meant to be wives and mothers; it was a long time before women could step outside the home to create a space for themselves in the public world. The new changes in attitude under the influence of British rule made it possible for some women to have access to education, which slowly opened up and enlarged the space for women's activities. As Maithreyi Krishnaraj argues, "women gained both from colonial rule and the movement against it. The first made female education possible and the second effectively enlarged the space for For the purposes of this paper I shall look at two texts written towards the end of the nineteenth century, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905) and Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jiban* (1876), women's activities" (21). For many such women, writing was not only a means of self expression but it was also a way to engage with the discourses of the time.

that may be read as indicative of the emergence of an alternate modernity which effectively seeks to engage with and subvert the ideology inherent in the discourse of domesticity that was popularized by reformist elements. Such instances of female writing, although perhaps not too numerous and mostly coming from the upper echelons of society, does point to an emergence of a new subjectivity that tries to fashion itself a new identity through active and varied negotiations with society. While the reformist conception of modernity erases women out of history by locating them outside the demands of public life and by making them the symbol of nationalist "tradition", these instances of writing by women point to their dissent and dissatisfaction with the status quo. Most importantly these instances of writing by women suggest the subtle strategy of using textuality by which they could simultaneously conform and voice their opposition to prevailing discourses.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* is written in the style of a fantasy and was written as early as 1905. It was written in English at a time when few women had access to English education much less to have a flair for writing in English. As she herself states, the main motivation behind writing the story was to demonstrate her proficiency in English to her husband who was her immediate and appreciative audience (Jahan 1). In this story and in many others that she wrote her style of writing was to raise popular consciousness and this she set about to do by using literary devices such as humour, irony and satire to focus attention on the injustices faced by women. In *Sultana's Dream* the nation is transformed into "ladyland" as she calls, it enacts a reversal of roles where the men are forced to inhabit the



secluded space traditionally reserved for women, The Zenana. Breaking the stereotype of the idea of the home as the woman's domain, the women are taken out of their home and engage in activities that are typically considered a man's preserve. In an interesting twist the feminized site of the home is transformed into the very nation itself. In this imaginative utopia men stay behind the veil "in their proper places... we shut our men indoors" and women are the prime drivers of the nation. Ladyland is autonomous and they are able to thwart foreign armies not so much by physical strength but through brain power: "if you cannot save your country for lack of physical strength try to do so by brainpower." The suggestion is that it is the stupidity of men that has led to the colonization of the nation. The women are as brave and patriotic as any men and are proud of their nation and the Queen would rather "commit suicide if land and my honour are lost" (6). The tale of Ladyland is thus an allegorical representation of the political machinations of the Indian princes who had sold their loyalty to the British. At the same time it is also a critique of social reality through its portrayal of the idea of gendered subversion and its depiction of women's struggle against political, religious and gendered suppression.

Such an understanding of *Sultana's Dream* is possible only if we place the work in its cultural context to see the complex ways in which women's experiences were being sculpted and how particular women were negotiating, subverting and yet reproducing dominant discourses" (Lakhi 5). It clearly indicates that women's location in specific socio-cultural milieus both determine their positionality and are structured in return by their agencies as well. *Sultana's Dream* may then be read as "an example of imaginative subversion in which literary images of freedom are the beginnings of a critique of social reality, not an escape from it" (Lakhi 9). These works give us a picture of women's lives during colonial times and suggest of women's agency defined by themselves even if in a modest way and carried out in the confines of their homes.

Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jiban*, the first autobiography to be written in Bengali, was a miraculous achievement given the conditions under which it was written. Rassundari Devi was a housewife who taught herself to read and write and her autobiography describes her acquisition of literacy. As was the custom of those times girls were not allowed to read and write and any women who showed a preference for the written word was severely disapproved and ridiculed. So Rassundari Devi had to hide her aspiration for learning; it was only at night after she had completed her household chores and everyone had gone to sleep was she able to devote time to read and write. What clearly comes across in her writing is a sense of frustration, discontent and impatience at the limitations of her life as a woman trapped in a life of petty domesticity. Some of the most moving passages of

her autobiography capture and write: "Is this my fate but necessarily mean that the writes of the secrecy she that I had to go through like a thief, even trying (201). The great value of publication of her autobiography women's education and new found subjectivity.

However to read representative of women by questions of class and were part of an upper instances of women's nationalist agenda and her texts such as Rokeya Sal Devi's *Amar Jiban* (1870) writing which give picture female struggles were been to women's education and voices began to be heard own social status and as the space of the literary, confront dominant discourses

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her autobiography capture this feeling of helplessness and her struggle to read and write: "Is this my fate because I am a woman? Just because I am a woman does it necessarily mean that trying to educate myself is a crime?" In other passages she writes of the secrecy she was forced to maintain: "Wasn't it a matter to be regretted, that I had to go through all this humiliation just because I was a woman? Shut up like a thief, even trying to learn was considered an offence..." (Tharu and Lalita 201). The great value of her writing lies in its self reflexive quality. The writing and publication of her autobiography coincided with a crucial phase in the evolution of women's education and her autobiography is no doubt a part of the history of this new found subjectivity.

However to read *Sultana's Dream* or Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jiban* as representative of women's agency in a general way is problematic as it is mediated by questions of class and caste; both Rassundari Devi and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain were part of an upper caste/class hierarchy. Nevertheless these are significant instances of women's self-representation within the problematic question of the nationalist agenda and how women engaged with the problem of modernity. Women's texts such as Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905) and Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jiban* (1876) written during the same times are instances of women's writing which give pictures of an alternate reality and suggest that emancipatory female struggles were being carried out in homes across India. Despite the resistance to women's education and women's literacy, it may perhaps be asserted that women's voices began to be heard and they began to write about their perception of their own social status and aspirations. This was achieved through the written medium, the space of the literary, through which women could define their experiences and confront dominant discourses and thereby enter the masculinized public space.

#### Notes

An example of this is the use of didactic materials such as instruction manual for girls on proper conduct in the nineteenth century, which formed an essential part of the construction and naturalizing of gender relations within the context of the marital bond. Judith Walsh's *Domesticity in Colonial India* discusses how the ideas of colonial modernity affected the lives of women in the everyday spaces of home and domesticity. According to Walsh, British colonialism gave an opportunity for Indian women to create a new ideal of femininity. Walsh problematizes the idea of "new patriarchy" by asserting that women contested rather than simply accepted this emergent ideology.

As Puri's analysis points out "... in the context of the colonial state and anti-colonial hegemonic nationalisms, education had to serve a dual role – to elaborate and specify changing politically charged definitions of womanhood and sexuality



as well as make them appear normal and natural to the audience" (28)

*Ghaire-Baire*, loosely translated as *Home and the World*, is a famous novel by Rabindranath Tagore written in 1916. Satyajit Ray later made it into a film with the same title in 1984. Its plot typically deals with the romantic and marital life of a young Bengali couple set against the backdrop of the new colonial modernity in Bengal. The novel dramatizes the pressures the irreconcilable pressures of home and the outside world for women through the protagonist Bimala. It became instantly popular when it was published because of the controversial nature of the subject matter in which Tagore takes the opportunity to criticize the ideology of nationalism contrary to its rising popularity in India and in the West.

Dipesh Chakraborty uses the concept of 'new patriarchy' to explain the new set of gender relations that developed in Bengal under British Rule. He however opposes the conventional understanding of the development of new patterns of domestic arrangement in Bengal as a simple improvisation of the domestic ideals of European thought. In his book *Provincializing Europe* he argues that, "...Bengali modernity may have imagined life-worlds in ways that never aimed to replicate either the political or the domestic ideals of modern European thought" (217).

She wrote several novels and essays, her best known publications are *Sultana's Dream* (1905), *Padmarag* (1924), *Motichur* (1903) and *Abarodhbasini* (1931).

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## An Intersection of History and Fiction: Reading *Swarnalata* and Women's Education in Colonial Assam Contiguously

Garima Kalita

*Abstract* : A historical document need not necessarily be comprehensive and all inclusive. In fact what happens in history, happens sporadically, in various ways, by way of incidences which of course have cumulative effects. The 19<sup>th</sup> century for the people of Assam appears in multifarious disguises—a transition, change of social norms and ethos, a hesitant yet spirited leap from prejudices to scientific convictions and also not so strong a belief in an enlightened world! The text, *Swarnalata* by Tillotama Misra in Assamese is a path breaking one, in the sense that it introduces the Asomiya readers to a rationalistic appraisal of the age which for many people here could be just a part of passing time. However, for referential purposes we are using the English translation by Udayan Misra.

The socio cultural history of Modernism for Assam started with the British initiative of tea industry in 1836 which attained a stable base with the establishment of the Assam Company in 1839. The coming of the American Baptist missionaries just after that began the long drawn historical processes of economic, cultural and linguistic transition for the people of the land.

For the people of Assam the changes that took place over the years and culminated in the shifting scenario of 19<sup>th</sup> century must have been the source of much anxiety, torpor and also shock as a significant portion of the community was not involved in the process nor were the people even aware of the shifts that were taking place.

*Swarnalata* in the narrative cited had achieved in the annals of women's education the highest benchmark. That this action of hers had immense potential for creating history was not known by many, maybe not even by her mother. But her father Gunaviram Barua was aware of the consequences that the decision of educating his daughter would have in years to come.

The semi fictional and lived realities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Assam. If *Swarnalata* can accommodate the individual and the collective, So the fictional biography can be a part of contemporary history of

The Nineteenth century Assam had many identical characters—many restricted and confined lives of the people of the land. There were at times, not so welcome, the necessity to attempt a scientific appraisal of the changes and reforms or an effective intervention or a primary focus on religious practices in language and the culture of the people as the condition was uncertain as the British Government in the administrative matters (the province or state under British Assamese) was thought to be a respect for a people who were Missionaries who landed in Assam for the resurgence of the land. The missionaries were of course here. For that time, they realised to decide immediately to set up they established two schools. Dr Nathan Brown who had been in Cutter and some other Assamese in the local language. With the Assamese language and by Mrs Cutter, *Assam Bazar* responsible effort for revising

The semi fictional narrative of *Swarnalata* foregrounds colonial history, culture and lived realities of the protagonist situated against the contemporary life of 19<sup>th</sup> century Assam. If *Swarnalata* is a landmark in women's emancipation, that must accommodate the individual history, culture of the person and also the community. So the fictional biographical tale of Swarnalata Barua must perhaps be read with the contemporary history of education of women in Assam.

The Nineteenth century Assamese society was not a feudal society, but so many identical characteristics were apparent, that it would easily assimilate a highly restricted and confined community which in turn, would virtually define the mode of the lives of the people. But as time and history would have it, change was in the offing. There were at least a few people who were educated and were ready to welcome, the necessity of reform. Jnanadabhiram Barua in his *Assam Buranji* had attempted a scientific account of the Assamese society with abundant stress on the changes and reforms occurring in various spheres because of the powerful and effective intervention of the missionaries. Though these philanthropists worked primarily on religious motives, they had strong will and respect for the Assamese language and the culture of the indigenous people. It was a highly critical period for the people as the condition and status of Assamese language, was feeble and most uncertain as the British Government had already issued orders for the use of Bengali in the administrative matters and also in the school curriculum. Assam was not a province or state under the Government and the native language, Asomiya (Assamese) was thought to be a part of Bengali. Ironically it was the genuine endeavor and respect for a people's identity and independent existence that prompted the Missionaries who landed in Assam in 1836 in the month of March to start working for the resurgence of the dying language and culture. The initial aim of the missionaries was of course to go to China through Assam and establish religious missions there. For that they had already learnt the Shyam language. But once they were here, they realised the futility of working in that country. Consequently, they decided immediately to settle down in Assam and work here. As part of their mission, they established two schools with the medium of instruction as Assamese. Similarly, Dr Nathan Brown who had arrived at Sadiya in Upper Assam along with Oliver T Cutter and some other associates stressed on the necessity of the printing of books in the local language. Within a short span of two years, therefore, they learnt the Assamese language and by printing books like *Assamese vocabulary and Phrases* by Mrs Cutter, *Assam Buranji* by Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, they initiated a most responsible effort for reviving a language and literature.



### The Orunodoi : The Rising of the Sun of Assamese language and Literature

This glorious phase of resurgence of Assamese language initiated by the missionaries in fact gave rise to a series of efforts and endeavours leading to publication of books and pamphlets on diverse subjects. The most prominent publication of this time was, the first Assamese journal and news paper "Orunodoi" brought out at the behest of the American Baptist mission, from Sibsagar. Published in the month of January of 1846, the first editor of the monthly paper arguably was Dr Nathan Brown though the first few issues did not mention the editor, only the printer. This was called to be "ORUNODOI, A monthly paper, devoted to religion, science and general intelligence ...printed and published at the Sibsagar Mission Press by O T Cutter, for the American Baptist Mission..." It was a most notable fact that the Assamese language was specified, its spellings somehow given an ascertained form.

The contribution of these missionary philanthropists in the socio cultural and socio literary scene of the nineteenth century Assam is immense and immeasurable. They had in fact impacted upon every field that accommodated the civilised lives of the people. The colonial British rule in itself was an overriding influence of change on the society and communities. Most of that change was in the guise of initiation into the western thought, knowledge and culture. But against this typical reading of the colonial condition, curiously the missionaries also, in Assam, had targeted and achieved a separate political agenda. They initiated a long lasting process of development of the regional language, and attempted at a conscious cultural Renaissance for the people of the region. The cause of social reformation in the sphere of women's freedom and emancipation was purposefully served by this significant publication "Orunodoi". The first liberal reformist in this area was Nathan Brown who initiated various scopes for self expression and activism through publication of journals and books. There was also T Cutter who assisted in the enterprise. These socially conscious persons were instrumental in bringing in a slowly changing sensibility to the society. Though it was a fact that social change was far too remote to come in immediately, some avenues were opening up for new concepts and thoughts because of the workings of the missionaries.

They were also instrumental in ushering in an ambience of liberal ideas and the most importantly affected the condition of the women in the society. In fact their influence had begun giving the women a certain sense of freedom from repressed social constriction and liberal knowledge of the world and information about contemporary events outside their limited world perspectives. Of course one thing is certain, and that is, the condition of women in the contemporary society was not

totally conducive to their well into account the comprehensive society and time was perhaps. But the coming of the mission autonomy of women, and by co were supposed to be as relevant

The role of journals like C its responses to the events, poli events are also relevant topics were very slowly initiated into the time, imperial strategies an role of the first journal Orunodo

An assessment of the age: ritualistic patterns, economic c and also the social status of w demand a separate and distinc the nineteenth century was an a; too, this age initiated broad soci scholars and social activists of Gunaviram Barua. They were n Anandaram was a senior of rev that Gunaviram wrote a very in evident that for young Gunavira of emulation.

The English colonial offici the welfare of the natives and is like captain Jenkins the commi Commissioner were concerned: officials ardently sought the dev memoir by Gunaviram Barua the the recreational activities for littl

In *Swarnalata*, the novel b man Panchanan Sarma states the enough realization about the inh feels the pathos of his young wid pitifully aware of the pathetic plig dawning on him that without edu

totally conducive to their well being and their status as human beings, did not take into account the comprehensive requirement of the spirit and the mind. Pitifully the society and time was perhaps indifferent to the justified claims of these members. But the coming of the missionaries paved the way for a genuine concern for the autonomy of women, and by comparing the essential religious definition, the women were supposed to be as relevant as men for the uplift of the society and community.

The role of journals like *Ghar jeuti* which captured moments of colonial history, its responses to the events, policies and temperamental genealogies of these political events are also relevant topics for discussion and analysis in this regard. Women were very slowly initiated into the social fabric that seemed to implicate changes of the time, imperial strategies and administrative policies notwithstanding. Even the role of the first journal Orunodoi in the socio political history of Assam is noteworthy.

An assessment of the age should always start with the common cultural habits, ritualistic patterns, economic condition of the people, the nature of administration and also the social status of women. The last element or factor cited here would demand a separate and distinctive space altogether also because of the fact that, the nineteenth century was an age of reformation all throughout India and in Assam too, this age initiated broad social reforms in various parts of the state. Two eminent scholars and social activists of the time were Anandaram Dhekial Phuakan and Gunaviram Barua. They were not contemporaries in the strictest of terms because Anandaram was a senior of reverence for Gunaviram and it is curiously pertinent that Gunaviram wrote a very important biography of the elder and it is profusely evident that for young Gunaviram, Anandaram was an ideal figure, a person worthy of emulation.

The English colonial officials were generally not overtly sympathetic towards the welfare of the natives and indigenous interests. But there were a few officers like captain Jenkins the commissioner and Captain James Mathey, the Deputy Commissioner were concerned about their status and condition. Both these govt. officials ardently sought the development of the common people. As stated in the memoir by Gunaviram Barua these Englishmen tried to build up the foundation for the recreational activities for little children here in the region.

In *Swarnalata*, the novel by Tilottama Misra, the character of a prejudiced man Panchanan Sarma states the ambivalence of a lay person who does not gather enough realization about the inhuman condition of the Brahmin widows until he feels the pathos of his young widowed daughter. In chapter 23 Panchanan becomes pitifully aware of the pathetic plight of Lakhi, his widowed daughter and it is slowly dawning on him that without education his daughter's life will be ruined. But until



Lakhi speaks out her mind he wouldn't dare to think about her education, let alone take a decision. Although he was already advised by Gunabhiram Barua to educate Lakhi and shape her future, he was perhaps not fully convinced of the logic of this argument. Now he was surprised to find Lakhi speaking her mind to her father.

" Pitai, will you send me to Calcutta ? I've heard that Swarna is being sent to Calcutta for her studies. Both of us could go together." ( p 101)

" He felt that his daughter was speaking just like the Hakim Dangoria." What he felt, he tried to convey to Lakhi. " I don't believe that our society will change so fast. No one will give up the old customs so easily. ...Our Asom Desh will remain the same. If you are so eager to go to school, then let me enquire. I'll put you in the Bengali school here." What happens next in the pages is what is historical and humane and also perhaps epistemological. Turning the pages of history of colonial Assam, the benevolent role of the missionaries can hardly be underestimated.

The British and American missionaries tried to create an atmosphere of progressive thought and social development for the common people as they were conscious of the difficulties they would confront in the administration if the region remained in a state of darkness bereft of modern education. They established the second secondary boys' school in Sibasagar in 1840. This place was to become a centre of educational and cultural hub in this part of colonial India. Later from this part the most important publication, the first Assamese journal or periodical "Aronodoi" was brought out and this lasted for long forty years, contributing immensely to the intellectual world of the region. The missionaries also established a school for the girls but this attempt was not accepted in a favorable manner by the gentry in Assam. In 1870, a school was set up by Mr Ganga Gobinda Phukan and other compatriots the act which of course was appreciated by the conventional Assamese society. \*

As a committed author and also historian, Tillottama Misra in *Swarnalata* has posed historical truths against human circumstances and reading the social history of the time, maybe *Swarnalata* would bring the process of creativity into a more accentuated level and also may be the author is making more avenues of history and fact rather than revel in the magical presence of the protagonist created within fiction.

The reason why Sibasagar became the centre of social and cultural activities of the British India in the north eastern part was that it was the historical town of Rangpur which was in Ahom days Assam the capital for the royalty. Eventually may be for this reason Sibasagar was selected for all kinds of developmental and progressive activities of the colonial settlers. In 1855, as noted in *Arunodoi*, the first socio cultural society, Asom Hitoisini Sabha was set up for the development of

language and literature. ( father ) and Radhikanat which in turn gave birth

The social and c was mainly a very cons educated and enlighten for women was mainly i to the rearing of childr was to prepare her for terrible system of 'purd family was barred from age. If at all the women of two big Japis with c Assamese poet of the e " dark days" in her at women while performi water in pitchers for gr big mosquito net called one such choudhuli.

After Anandaram Gunabhiram Barua, wh bring the beneficial of Gunabhiram started to with a firm backup of accomplish. He himsel the path as a reformist widow called Brajasunc was an independent pe brilliantly portrayed in : bears the legacy of the undermine the factual a , in which fiction could proved in various conte support of historical fa definability in the realm and public life, now ther which had become indc years of domination an groups. He was influen

language and literature. Gentlemen like, Dinanath Bezbarua (Lakshminath Bezbarua's father) and Radhikanath Sarma had established forums for the sociocultural activities, which in turn gave birth to an ambience and spirit of women's education.\*

The social and cultural milieu in those years of the late nineteenth century was mainly a very conservative one for the women of the region. People, even very educated and enlightened ones couldn't think of radical reform for women. Education for women was mainly a vehicle for making her a subservient person entirely devoted to the rearing of children and maintaining of household. The aim of this education was to prepare her for a fruitful domestic life. Women at that time were under a terrible system of 'purdah', the implication of which was that a girl of a respectable family was barred from going out into the street after she became eleven years of age. If at all the women had to come out of home, they had to walk within the cover of two big Japis with cover on their faces. Nalinibala Devi the most noted mystic Assamese poet of the early and late twentieth century has cited references of those "dark days" in her autobiographical treatise *Eri Aha Dinbor*, when Assamese women while performing social bathing ritual of marriage by collecting auspicious water in pitchers for groom or the bride, had to walk on the road together, within a big mosquito net called *choudhuli*. At least forty to sixty women could walk within one such *choudhuli*.

After Anandaram dhekial Phukan, the most important social reformer was Gunabhiram Barua, who was the most vociferous figure in a gladiatorial attempt to bring the beneficial effects of western education to the society. The time when Gunabhiram started to work and lecture on the significance of women's education with a firm backup of the Brahma Samaj, the task undertaken was not easy to accomplish. He himself as a very polite and accomplished gentleman had showed the path as a reformist and as history reveals, he himself had married a Brahmin widow called Brajasundari, who conducted his household very efficiently and also was an independent person with strong will and determination. Her character was brilliantly portrayed in a period novel *Swarnalata* by Tillotama Misra, who herself bears the legacy of that Dolakasaria Barua of Assam. Of course, this is not to undermine the factual accounts of a time and the importance of genuine historicity, in which fiction could sometimes be dubious and also confusing. But as has been proved in various contexts, this fictional work tends to demonstrate an enviable support of historical facts and incidences. After a period of confusion and non definability in the realm of women's emancipation and spiritual assertion on society and public life, now there were clarion calls for women to rise from stupor and inertia which had become indoctrinated into them because of hundreds and thousands of years of domination and strictures about social and cultural taboos in patriarchal groups. He was influenced by the commendable work done by the missionaries in



Sibasagar and he was particularly impressed by the publications brought out by them. He himself recommended the Assamese dictionary published by Miles Bronson entitled *Asomiya Abhidhan* to the people who had interest in the development of women's education. He felt with conviction that when a race and community has deep respect for their own language and culture it has beneficial impact upon the society. Being an integrated part of the society the womenfolk needs to be collaborated with in all these approaches of reformation. In this respect Gunabhiram Barua played a pivotal role in social reforms. Beginning with women's education he himself showed the path to the successors by imparting higher education to his daughter Swarnalata in the city of Calcutta in the prestigious Bethun College. He was a thoroughly progressive personality, always daring to initiate action and execute plans in the midst great social opposition and dissatisfaction. In their attempts which in themselves were great acts of courage definitely infused enthusiasm and a critical thought about the abominable social status of women in the minds of the people. One thing must be ascertained here and that is the gentle way of persuasion he applied to the ignorant people in his community. As he already was enjoying the official status of a Munsip in most of the cases he did not have to apply force, but had conducted the reformation agenda quite peacefully and without strong opposition. He had the able support of the administrative authority of the British.

Tillottama Misra has created a character in Gunabhiram in her fictional novel, who is thoroughly rational, progressive, generous but with an awareness of social realities. In the creation of this character, the narrator has to triumph over personal and familial history and the novel in a way benefits from this ambivalence. For here, because of this sense of hesitation on part of the author, the meta fictional character of the process of creativity looks itself as it were in a mirror.

The missionaries were involved in almost all realms of social commitments as education, health, marriage, rituals, political knowledge etc. They through the medium of religious conversion had left very significant impression upon the lives of the people and their social custom. But as documentary evidences show the role of coercion was perhaps minimal.

One of the proponents of women's education in Assam, Gunabhiram Barua was earnestly involved in the processes of imparting education regarding the rights of women and girls as independent persons. The age old custom of child marriage which was widely prevalent among the middle class Assamese families became a curse for the tender aged girls as the society was still not open to the ideas of reformation. The reformist message was first spread effectively by the followers of the Brahma Samaj in Calcutta. Raja Rammohan Roy, Surendra Nath Chatterjee were some of the radical reformers of Bengal. They tried to introduce

abolition of child marriage. They referred to this because at a very young age they were introduced to a much junior in age before the girls attained young widows.

In the history of the colonial encounter, the colonial encouragement of the missionaries in the close association with the emerging middle class concepts and liberal ideas. Gunabhiram Barua's Misra has stressed that the Assamese society were many other models appealed to a wider widow remarriage in Assamese society. Because of this cause which he felt was the first such statement and also of the intellectual (RNN) This concern of reformers because of stringent social regulations. In the behest of Anandaram for studies, he witnessed to the society. This is Orunodoi (1853-54 Calcutta" and this is a woman.\*

In the contemporary gentlemen, persons of many. In fact as cited featured is Hemchand and the discrimination between men and women on is

abolition of child marriage and educated people of the perils of such an institution. They referred to the health hazards that these tender aged girls were exposed to because at a very age they had to bear children and their health failed. It also affected adversely the growth of personalities in the girls as so early in their life they were introduced to the burden of domesticity. And because the girls were so much junior in age to the middle aged men, they were married to, in most cases before the girls attained age the husbands died and the society was harsh on the young widows.

In the history of women's reform in Assam definitely, these two factors namely , the colonial encounter with the British resulting in the administration's calling of the missionaries in order to initially protect the newly established tea estates and the close association of the Calcutta based *Bhadrolok* culture with the newly emerging middle classes in Assam, did contribute substantially to usher in new concepts and liberal outlook. In an exhaustive introduction to her translation of Gunabhiram Barua's socially relevant play *Ramnabami Natak* , critic Tilottama Misra has stressed the singular interest that Gunabhiram had in the reformist themes that the Assamese society had no time to indulge in. As she says, " perhaps there were many other more socially relevant themes at that time which would have appealed to a wider section of the Assamese reading public , than a subject like widow remarriage that concerned the interests of only a small segment of the Assamese society . But Gunabhiram had made a forceful statement in support of a cause which he felt was based on the claims of justice, reason, and humanity. It was the first such statement in Assam that echoed the spirit of Western Enlightenment and also of the intellectual stir known as the Indian renaissance".( p.xvii Introduction RNN) This concern about the condition of women was grown in the mind of these reformers because of their experiences with many a widow in their family who under stringent social regulations , did not enjoy any individual freedom. When at the behest of Anandaram, his mentor, Gunabhiram at the age of fifteen went to Calcutta for studies , he witnessed a widow remarriage and was elated at this change coming to the society. This forms a part of a series of letters written to the editor of the *Orunodoi* ( 1853-54) by Gunabhiram under the pseudonym " An Assamese in Calcutta" and this could be one of the first Assamese writings on the subject of a woman. \*

In the contemporary scenario among so many so called educated Assamese gentlemen, persons taking the cudgels for the progression of women were not many. In fact as cited by Dr Misra in her introduction to RNN the most prominently featured is Hemchandra Barua, who wrote boldly on the uncertain status of women and the discrimination showed towards them. In a treatise on the unequal status of men and women on issues like marriage and manners, Barua writes in *Atmajivan*



*Charit* published in the *Jonaki* that because of the inequality and discrimination shown towards widows in Assam, he was abhorrent against remarriage after his wife's death. As he says "I did not marry again because, under the existing circumstances, the whole idea of a man marrying again after the death of his wife is repugnant to me....I can, if I wish, three or even more after her death. But my widow had so much as mentioned the word remarriage she would have become a social outcaste and everybody would have shunned her...How unreasonable and unjust is this attitude!"

*Ghar Jeuti*, a pioneering publication, brought out for the uplift of women's social position and expression of their voice, did contribute immensely to the cause of women's emancipation and education. It was in print from 1927 in the month of October to 1931, continuing only for 4 years. But within that span of time it became a living forum for the expression of women's thoughts and concerns. And it is heartening to know that not only women were involved in this enterprise and mission, many men of the time, many honorable gentlemen joined in the mission to take the side of the women who as a race was subjugated, who didn't have enough space for self expression, who were neglected as people of second class. *Ghar Jeuti* had these prestigious households and families to look forward to and people like Tara Prasad Chaliha, an eminent tea Planter of Assam and Durga Prasad Majinder Barua of Sibsagar to carry forward the mission. Of course the chief agencies to deserve merit for this most significant endeavours were the editors of *Ghar Jeuti*, namely Mrs Kamalalaya Kakati and Kanaklata Chaliha.

In the pages of this pioneering journal, women's condition was brought to lucid discussion. The social expectations that the women had to meet and the roles they had to play in the family and the society had put enormous burden on them. There was an ongoing trend of unrest and dissatisfaction in the mind of many who wanted to obtain a little freedom in and outside their home like their male compatriots. But the society as confined and callous it was about the need and desire of women, was not attentive and active enough. When the matter is analysed from the perspective of social discrimination that existed in regards to race and caste and individual social position, the author who took up women's causes were secular in their views. The reformists who spoke about the need to bring about changes only cited them in a moderate manner. Not many reformists seemed to be aggressive or radical enough. Women, as it is apparent from the entries of the journal, were almost hesitant to assert and the leading women pioneers showed the way in the establishment of certain principles for the freedom of women as a social class.

#### Women pioneers actively engaged in this movement :

As cited above, Kamalalaya Kakati and Kanaklata Chaliha were the first

women editors to publish it in the fo

Even at time issues of the jour various food item liberation of wom social status of the the women who v social literary circ The fact that freed was forgotten. *Ghe* among women and The prime positio

The structuri was perhaps a tra changes that overw like Kamalalaya k Chaliha, Champav largely contributin women's education Women's conditio activists, there wer about the conditio emancipation in A this regard, the lis were of responsibl psyche of the con awareness needs to Bhattacharya in a l the potential of suc consciousness in education women , , to him " The reas negligence toward *Ghar Jeuti*, Year 1 women's journal we and Jogakanta Bar Mahimchandra Sin power of Women" (

women editors to undertake the task of compiling the literature of women and publish it in the form of a significant journal called *Ghar Jeuti*.

Even at times women were taught social courtesy as when need be, in various issues of the journal appropriate for a changing Anglicized society. Recipes for various food items were provided for in this forum. Often it so happened, the liberation of women was considered to be useful only from the point of view of social status of the British. Without bringing in the nature of the class structures of the women who were conscious enough to assemble under the banner of such a social literary circle, it was true that the majority of them belonged to the middleclass. The fact that freedom and choice were essential elements in every human identity was forgotten. *Ghar Jeuti* was primarily concerned about the spreading of education among women and also a growing consciousness of themselves as a part of humanity. The prime position and status of men must equally be conferred to women as well.

The structure of the society that was reflected in the writings in the journal was perhaps a transitional one. The age was fast witnessing of the mechanical changes that overwhelmed the individuals and the society. Pioneering women authors like Kamalalaya kakati , Labonya aprava Barbara, Prafullabala Dutta, Kanak lata Chaliha, Champavati Bordaloi, Dharmeswari Das, Chandraprava Saikiani, etc were largely contributing on a regular level to the journal on issues like the necessity of women's education, the contemporary social scene( Samayik Jagat), the Ideal World, Women's condition( Narijati), et al. Among all the conscious women authors, activists, there were a large number of male authors who were genuinely concerned about the condition of their women counterparts. So in the history of women's emancipation in Assam there activists's role is most significant. To name a few in this regard, the list would not be too small as a significant part of these stalwarts were of responsible social positions and hence their words cast influences on the psyche of the common people and hence their role in the growth of women's awareness needs to be emphasised. An eminent contemporary author Kamalakanta Bhattacharya in a letter to the editor of *Ghar Jeuti* wrote most encouragingly about the potential of such a journal that was dedicated to the welfare and the growth of consciousness in women . In the same letter he emphasized the necessity of education women , but he stressed the need of instruction in their mother tongue as , to him " The reason of our lack of development in this age of knowledge is their negligence toward their mother tongue" ( translation mine, Letter dated 13/3/ 28, *Ghar Jeuti* ,Year 1, Vol IX) . Other important contributors to this epoch making women's journal were, Tara Prasad Chaliha , Satyananda Samya, Anandaram Hazarika and Jogakanta Barua , Satya Prasad Barua , Sailadhar Rajkhowa. and many others. Mahimchandra Singha in vol, II in the first year wrote a seminal essay on "The power of Women" (*Naari Shakti*) which dealt with the emerging power of women



in various countries of the world. He cites the instances of radical changes taking place in Turkey under the able leadership of Kamal Pasha in relation to the condition of women. He raises pertinent questions as to why the women folk in our country cannot be emancipated in the same manner as their counterparts outside, with the same examples and ideals. He brings into consideration the women characters of legends and myths of Indian subcontinent and compliments their commendable role in crucial moments of their history.

The social scene was changing because of the political changeover and mechanical advancement. In the town of Sivasagar, in 1914 the women gathered together and started organizing the Joimati Utsav which continued for a few years. Sati Jaimoti was an Ahom princess who sacrificed her life for the life and security of her husband Gadhadar Konwar who was the royal aspirant and who had to flee to escape the royal wrath. In the absence of the prince, his wife Jaimoti was called upon to court and at her refusal to divulge his whereabouts she was put to inhuman torture. Consequently she died and in her glorious memory this annual event was organised. Jaimoti belonged to the sixteen century Assam but her name was recollected and used as an icon for the sake of awakening of the women power in the region.

The role of another social organisation named Sivasagar Mahila Sanmiloni too is discussed at length by Kamalalaya Kakoti in the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of the Vol 1. One memorable enterprise of this organisation had been the regular holding of a massive social function called Joimoti Festival from the year 1919 onwards. Of course the initially the responsibility of the festival was conducted by other socio cultural groups since 1914. The primary purpose of the festival was to commemorate the historic dedication and sacrifice of Joimoti Kuwari for the welfare of her husband prince Gadhadar Konwar and also for her kingdom. Joimoti was a social and cultural icon of the Asomiyas and so this festival undoubtedly was able to instil a surge of patriotic fervour and a respect for the women kind in general. An institute for higher learning for the girls was one of the agendas in the festival held in the year 1928, which was organised with over whelming response.

The episode of Swarnalata forms only a very small part of our colonial history but to see it from social point of view of the community, it is spectacular. This episode of the person who as a woman emerged from the rear, in true sense would motivate people and from socio cultural perspective is very relevant for the contemporary history. She as a woman waged almost a war with prejudiced opinion of the community and triumphed over the conventional norms of education of women. As a pioneer of women's education in 19<sup>th</sup> century Assam, Swarnalata Barua herself becomes an iconic figure and a just illustration of the movement for liberation and literacy of women. Despite the differences that might emerge in the

comparative analysis that is the narrative of the diachronic and wake of a contiguous women's education.

The notion of some specific pur colonial/postcolonial people and society, *Culture and Impe* because of the co comments typically the colonial agenda: this tool of history-fiction, yet very little of empire. Reader: explorers and novel the method of colonization their own history." (

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Said Edward :

comparative analysis of history and fiction, one glaring feature still remains and that is the narrative *Swarnalata* is not a fragmented piece and so it fits deftly into the diachronic and even the synchronic. Perhaps the picture attains clarity in the wake of a contiguous reading of the text of *Swarnalata* and the historical context of women's education in Assam.

The notion of reading history and fiction together contiguously would serve some specific purposes at hand. Take the instance of *Swarnalata* here and the colonial/postcolonial parameters or yardsticks applied to the contexts would reflect people and society in a novel manner. Edward Said in his post Orientalism venture *Culture and Imperialism* touches upon variegated cultural patterns that emerge because of the colonial and post colonial forces stirred together. The author comments typically of the genre of 'novel' that tends to work as a strategic tool for the colonial agenda. In the 'Introduction' of the book he generally elaborates on this tool of history—"A great deal of recent criticism has concentrated on narrative fiction, yet very little attention has been paid to its position in the history and world of empire. Readers ..will quickly discover that ..stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world ; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history." (xiii, Introduction, CAI)

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1

RESISTING THE CONSTRUCTED FEMALE: READING NEELACHALAR GADYA THROUGH POSTCOLONIAL LENSES

Gautam Sarma

**Abstract:** *The stanch and determined language of resistance that informs the writings of Ruplekha Devi, especially her Neelachalar Gadya, and the issues she engages herself with vis-à-vis the woman question and encoded gender expectations combating thereby the dangerous attempt at imposing a definition of and marginalizing the female entity, by the forces of patriarchal hegemony that be, unequivocally situates her as a committed postcolonial author in the realm of Assamese literature. This paper, therefore, tries to look at Neelachalar Gadya through a postcolonial reading, as a penetrating interrogation of the notion of the constructed female – while engaging with and challenging as well the patriarchal constraints and the idea of female cultural space – within the all too familiar and accepted patterns of subsistence..*

**KEY WORDS :** postcolonial, patriarchal, feminism, gender, difference, hegemony

*I think I was born a feminist. ... I don't remember a moment when I wasn't aware that women and girls are treated by society as the lesser sex. In my very egalitarian household, I was constantly hearing, "Girls can do anything they want. There's nothing that will hold you back." ... What really was critical in my life was this: In 1982 I was following whether or not the Equal Rights Amendment was going to be ratified by the required number of states. I remember going to a rally in downtown Los Angeles on June 30, 1982, which was the last day of the required ratification period. I was absolutely shocked and dismayed that the ERA was not ratified. It's such a simple idea—that women and men are equal under the law and that you cannot discriminate against women on account of their sex. And I thought, "Who could be against this, really?" I was so*

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*It dawned on me, as I found out about the National Organization for Women, that there was an organized effort to fight for women's rights—and that people like me had to get involved. I could no longer just be a spectator, demanding equality in my own life but not demanding equality for all women and girls.*

*That's when I got active, and that's when I was able to make real contributions as a volunteer and then, ultimately, to do this full time. For 26 years I have been able to focus every day and every ounce of energy and brain cells on how we're going to get to equality—not just for women and girls in this country, but to guarantee the human rights of women and girls all over the world.*

— **Katherine Spillar**, Executive Vice President, Feminist Majority Foundation Executive Editor, *Ms Magazine*. Arlington County, Virginia, USA.

After the categorical success of her first two books viz., *Onyotro Birala Devi*, a novel set against the backdrop of her native land Kamakhya and *Mrityuramritamgomoyo*, an autobiographical narrative built upon the author's critical encounters with death, *Neelachalar Gadya* happens to be the third major work of fiction and the second book to reverberate upon the socio-cultural rudiments of the temple town of Kamakhya by Ruplekha Devi. While all the three books, share, as it were, a kind of symbiotic affiliation inasmuch as a tenacious and resolute language of resistance informs them all, *Neelachalar Gadya*, in particular, takes up for interrogation the many hues and ramifications of the woman question within the space and framework of an inescapable patriarchal hegemony. There are in all ten stories that go into the making of *Neelachalar Gadya*. Of these again, the stories, "Bhuichampa," "Ghateswarir Xadhu," "Neelachalar Bhoi," and "Nateswari" delineate so disturbingly realistic and brutal a picture of male tyranny and persecution that no reader with the slightest touch of sensitive discernment can afford to break away from the piercing impact of the accuracy of detail. The result is an interesting clash of signs and signals from the world external to the female self that tend to impose a definition of the female identity itself.

The circumstances leading to Ruplekha Devi's emergence as a feminist have not been much different from those of Spillar's as evident from the masthead above insofar as the individual privileges and accoutrements of their domestic fronts were concerned. Coming from an enlightened family and "an egalitarian household" where both parents were teachers Ruplekha Devi too like Spillar could never have imagined that that "women and girls are treated by society as the lesser sex". But having witnessed the world external to herself where women were not only



discriminated against but brutally persecuted she too felt the need to assert her identity as an activist for women's rights trying to "focus every day and every ounce of energy and brain cells on how we're going to get to equality—not just for women and girls in this country, but to guarantee the human rights of women and girls all over the world" through her numerous writings. In fact, there is not a single story in *Neelachalar Gadya* that does not in some form or the other deal with the obvious aspect of the violation of human rights with special regard to women and girls.

The first story of the collection, "Bhuichampa," for instance, presents a poignant picture of a tender aged daughter of a tea laborer being lured by a neighbourhood youth into marrying him only to be smashed to smithereens and her subsequent vengeance. It so happens that Nimo the lad meets Champa at the house of a common acquaintance Hariya Kaka and offers to marry her. Champa, whose mother does not allow her to attend school and forces her to work at the bungalow instead, against her will, deeming this opportunity as an escape route from the grim realities of her garden life decides to elope with Nimo and get married at the temple of goddess Kamakhya with the hope of leading a happy and decent life with her husband. However, the events that follow far from fulfilling Champa's expectations unfold a most harrowing tale of betrayal and villainy. For it does not take much time for Champa to discern the fiendish colours of her husband. A truck driver by profession he takes her immediately after their marriage to Kolkata in his own truck and puts her up in a pigpen like dwelling. But not even a fortnight passes by Champa's life is reduced to a veritable hell. On days when Nimo would not go out for work he would stay back at home the whole day, drink excessively and subject Champa to a life of unremitting torment and persecution. She would be left with no choice but to accept it all as a part of male trait which all women were destined to put up with. She had seen as a child in the tea gardens her father and other men rough up their wives or create scenes outside their homes after consuming *hariya*. But Nimo's kind of viciousness exceeded all limits. That ominous night, hardly two weeks after their marriage when Nimo brought those seven of his friends to their ramshackle hut to celebrate their marriage; that horrible night, those demons turned her body into a living corpse was the night indeed, that witnessed the natural burial of all her dreams. Days later, following the surface healing of the bruises left by the fiends when Champa tries to resist her husband's transgressions, unable to deal with her any more in Kolkata, Nimo gives her "on lease" to the owner of a brothel in Delhi where there were several other ill fated females like her for a term of three years. Champa, then, at this point of the narrative could be seen as the typical example of the colonised 'other' who in terms of Elleke Boehmer's reading could be seen as the one

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But the colonizer, in this case, is the patriarch in the form of Nimo. At the end of the term after the hyenas in the form of humans consume her flesh away to their gratification Nimo arrives again to collect his share of the money accruing from the proceeds of his rightful wife's whoredom.

As Champa sits once again in the truck with Nimo on their return journey to the so called *swamigriha* in Kolkata only to be transferred from one hell to another a "Vesuvius of revenge" (*Neelachalar Gadya* 12) engorges her entire being. When Nimo and his assistant stop at a *dhaba* for their meal she pretends to be in deep slumber prompting the two men to go ahead without her. As the men leave she runs to a nearby *dhaba* and with all that she could have saved for herself from the hellish years in Delhi along with her jewellery she hires the "ambassador of death" (*Neelachalar Gadya* 12) for Nimo. Nimo comes back drunk and turns on the ignition of the brakeless truck. And thus Champa rids herself free from the clutches of the 'evil planet called Nimo' (*Neelachalar Gadya* 12).

But the story of Champa does not end here. After wandering in the jungles and forests, cities and towns like a nomad for several weeks following her newly acquired freedom from slavery, in search of safety and shelter, she lands up at a Kali temple in a remote village in Bengal. The head priest would allow her to stay in the temple but in lieu of ??? Having gone through the trials and tribulations of her tumultuous life, Champa weighs the pros and cons of the proposal and realizing that playing the mistress to the priest was far better an option than being a whore to many. Consequently, she surrenders herself once again to yet another form of patriarchal tyranny. But fortune finally seems to come to smile on Champa. The villagers had all assembled at the temple to celebrate the annual Kali Puja of the temple with all pomp and gaiety marked by incessant playing of pipes, beating of drums and timbrels, feasting and the fire of oblation in splendid blaze. Champa too was busy helping the priest. In the midst of all the celebrations Champa, all of a sudden, starts behaving in a manner most strange and mysterious. Uttering a weird scream, her hair totally disheveled, her breath restless, she runs for the trident placed at the altar of the goddess and starts dancing in a peculiar style. Some of the members in the congregation try to overpower her back to sanity. They even sprinkle water on her face and the eyes. But all efforts fail. She is uncontrollable. She has come to possess a miraculous power. Suddenly, the entire assembly starts crying, 'The Mother, the mother, she is possessed by the mother'. Every soul is enthralled and falls at her feet. Even the head priest, her exploiter, starts trembling and drops full length at the feet of Champa, now in the guise of mother Kali. A few among them



even start accosting her with volleys of questions. And strangely enough, because of the experiences gathered from the ordeals and struggles of life or because of some miraculous energy she answers all their questions without being aware of what she was doing. Thus Champa comes to turn over a new leaf as she emerges in her new avatar as the powerful and angry mother Kali. She is now the new owner of the temple with the old priest being her servant. The menfolk too are happy to be sheltered at her feet.

A story with a typical postcolonial theme "Bhuichampa," has its obvious parallel in the Indian Dalit writing by women. As Pramod K. Nayar, for instance, states

In India Dalit writing by women function like *testimonio* because they are narratives of pain, resistance, protest and social change. Dalit texts such as Bama's *Karukku* (English translation 2000) document the sufferings of and atrocities committed upon a large section of the population. The writing proceeds from a lived experience of poverty, violence, rejection and suffering. It reveals the structure of the traumatic experience (caste in India) while also gesturing at the ways in which the victims have fought, overcome and survived the event. Dalit life-writing is about the reconstruction of the self after the traumatic event. (2008: 151)

"Ghateswari" is yet another gripping story that creates an extraordinary impact on the mind of the reader with its fusion of myth and reality. Based on a prevalent saga relating to a pond attached to the Bhairabi temple of Kamakhya the author goes on to depict a contemporary phenomenon that offers a scathing commentary not only on the subjugation of woman but also on the vital issue of terrorist violence as well. Significantly enough, the perilous consequences of the issues converge in the consummate handling of the narrative so as to eventually underscore the severity of the primary issue concerning the suppression of woman. In the first story, for instance, obviously a folk tale, Maharaja Nrisingha, an ardent devotee of the Goddess Bhairabi asks for the hand of Ghateswari, the exceptionally beautiful daughter of a florist in one of his dreams. Considering it to be only a dream Ghateswari's father naturally ignores the proposal. But, Maharaja comes to him in his dream a second time and repeats the proposal. This time of course, alarmed by the second dream, Ghateswari's father decides to share it with his wife. His wife predictably enough laughs it away and blames it on her husband's daily worship of the Goddess Bhairabi because of which he was now dreaming of offering his daughter in marriage to the Devi's devotee, who had himself by now been already deified. But things take a serious turn in the third dream. This time Maharaja tells Ghateswari's father that if the proposal was not heeded to the entire household would be in serious trouble. It would be better for them, therefore, to select a suitable date and leave Ghateswari at the premises of the temple under the cover of darkness to be

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Ruplekha now draws upon this story to analogize a burning concern of the day with regard to both the position of woman in society and the abusive sway of militant exploitation. In the story that follows Madhavi, an unusually attractive college student, the only child of a humble florist comes to be noticed by a youth with no immediate address of any kind but of infinite affluence and privileged circumstances, a self styled king, a globe trotter named Asom Dekaraja. This young man now sends his emissary to Madhavi's father and much in the manner of Maharaja Nrisingha of the earlier story coerces him into agreeing to marry off his daughter to him. The terms of the marriage too are dictated by Dekaraja. Accordingly, Madhavi's marriage takes place in an intriguingly cloak-and-dagger manner with limited guests and no flourishes or fan fare of any kind. The few guests present on the occasion too are left wondering whether it is a marriage or a funeral ceremony they are attending. When Madhavi visits her parents the first time after her marriage it is at the dead of night accompanied by armed guards who make sure that there are no other persons present in the house except her parents. Attired in flamboyant opulence she takes her parents straightaway to a safe zone in the house in hushed demeanor. And before they even get to exchange any greetings with her she heaps them with treasures and riches of inexpressible description. But, alas! The gifts are not to be displayed, distributed or talked about. In the midst of her eerie profusion Madhavi's chirpy spontaneity is lost forever. Torn between the sinister convergence of patriarchy and militant nuptial contract and placed as it were, at the shadowy crossroads of myth and reality, Madhavi, as the author would have us believe is not a princess from a fairy tale but one whose identity is shrouded in mystery.

Similarly, "Neelachalar Bhoi," presents a tale marked by a bewildering concatenation of events ranging from marital frustration to cataclysmic suicides; superstitious fixations to psychic struggles; hallucination to ghoulish encounters — all emanating from colossal patriarchal brutality and insouciance. The entire story revolves round the tragic peregrination of Rajlakshmi from childhood to womanhood; from being the protected enchantingly good-looking daughter of the *doloi* of the temple of Mother goddess Kamakhya and the apple of his eye to the lonely distressed motherless child to the object of her husband's abominable neglect to eventually the victim of self slaughter.

The discovery of an inert body of a young woman from the Wreenmochan tank in the premises of the temple brings in a whole assembly of people to the portentous spot. An eerie silence follows as the body just retrieved from the Wreenmochan tank turns out to be Rajlakshmi's. A huge crowd which has come to gather at the scene awaits the arrival of Satyendra *doloi* who has after the marriage of his daughter, following the death of his wife, become a loner disinterested in the



affairs of the world. However, on hearing the news of the discovery of the corpse in the tank he gets curious about the identity of the body. But he is prevented by some of the elders to proceed to the site of occurrence until the centenarian, Pandit Jashowanta Devsarma, who rarely moved out of the four walls of his house, escorted by his two sons lands up in the scene. Addressing Satyendra, Pandit Devsarma, exclaims, "Son, Satyen, how do I console you, dear... *dukhesvanudvignamanah, sukhesu vigata sprihah /vita raga bhaya krodhah sthitadhi munir ucyate ...* you have achieved sthita prajnah ... so much of pain and sorrow could not deter you from the path of *dharma*. Desire, attachment, anger, — sacrificing all kinds of domestic attraction, you have always remained dedicated to your duty — what can I say to comfort you — everything is the result of her *tripap* — who can undo the course of destiny — have patience, son, don't be distressed — leave everything to mother Bhavani — the *devi ma* is testing you". (*Neelachalar Gadya* 61, translation mine)

With a kind of hurricane force, Satyendra's old frame gushes forth to the place of the corpse. His thunderous cries leave, as it were, the three worlds shuddering. But, within seconds again, everything falls silent. Is Satyendra alive or not? Even the pupils seem to be motionless. Only silent tears roll down his cheeks. A few muffled words *dukhesvanudvigna— sukhesu — sthitadhi* surge from his mouth.

Despite her angelic beauty, it transpires from the gossip of the women folk who had gathered there, Rajlakshmi was subjected to abysmal neglect by Rajendra, her debauched husband. Poor Rajlakshmi did not have any knowledge whatsoever of the nocturnal whereabouts of Rajendra. Rumour had it that he would spend the nights in the dancers' colony. At first, she would turn a deaf ear to all such gossip. She was no ordinary woman. The residents of Kamakhya were all full of admiration for her beauty and accomplishments. She was the only child of Satyendra *doloi*. Rajendra wouldn't dare ignore her. But her illusion was shattered the day she watched him take out the necklace he had given her on their nuptial night from the wooden box and put it in his shirt pocket. Everything took place right in front of her eyes. But Rajlakshmi couldn't gather up the courage to question him. The gibberish prediction of the bharg addict *kapalik sadhu* made two years back during *ambubachi* kept echoing in her ears: "husband-wife friction, hurdles in conceiving." She wouldn't let that happen. She would do everything to save the marriage, to bear the child. She would rather be the quintessential "good wife," much like the character called Kannagi in the great Tamil epic *Silappadhikaram* who, as C S Lakshmi would have us believe,

knows how to wait - wait for love, wait to be needed, wait to be seen, wait to be recognized, wait to be accepted. (Lakshmi, "Bodies called Women", *EPW*, 1997).

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attainment of her puberty, Rajlakshmi did not conceive. What did she not do for the sake of bearing a child? Performing rituals, pujas, fastings of all kinds; wearing amulets given by *sanyasis*, *deodhas*, *tantrics*, quacks. But nothing seemed to bear any fruit. Not even her encounters with spirits and apparitions at the dead of night or in the wee hours yield any result. Alarmed by her desperation to meet in the darkness of midnight the *deodah* whose prediction that she would be able to deliver a son that very year itself did not come true, her grandmother tried to make her understand, "The deodhani cannot give you any child. Your cohabitation with your husband alone can give you the child. Try to understand the truth, you immature girl, you innocent girl. How would you get a child if you can't bind your husband with the thread of love?" (*Neelachalar Gadya* 67, translation mine).

The old woman also tries to persuade Rajendra to give up his wild undomesticated ways, come home early and spend the nights in the company of his wife so as to spare her the ignominy of being dubbed a barren woman. But Rajendra's patriarchal hauteur prompts him to dismiss the suggestion at once. It would not do for his male arrogance to ignore the affairs of land and property and keep his wife company. He also goes on to add that Rajlakshmi was mentally deranged. Or else she would not have entered the *aghora* tantric's cave to watch him perform his rituals using dead bodies. Nor would she wander around trying to discern the existence of the unseen unreal world. He concludes by stating that her father Satyendra *doloi* after marrying off his insane daughter to him was now acting like an ascetic disinterested in the affairs of the workaday world.

In a way, Satyendra *doloi* was of course responsible for the miserable plight of Rajlakshmi, though not in the way Rajendra had accused him of being. The patriarch in him saw nothing wrong in marrying off the little child of the third standard, fond of reading her books and playing with her peers under the *bokul* tree or in the temple premises to a person in age exponentially senior to her and whose nocturnal haunts were always shrouded in mystery, Satyendra's argument being "Husband or Yama, whoever she goes with, she goes for good." Distanced thus from her father's care and deprived of her husband's love Rajlakshmi has only the formless spectre of her mother who drowned herself in the Wreenmochan tank ten years ago to turn to. The bodiless form of the apparition of her mother listens to her, understands her, sympathizes with her and invites her to the tank all times of the day—mornings, afternoons and evenings, day in and day out—until one day, Rajlakshmi sick and tired of her role as puppet of marital identity and thwarted by the concomitant grim and sordid travails of her world decides to make her quietus by plunging headlong into her mother's tranquil bosom in the compassionate floor of Wreenmochan.

Then comes "Nateswari," a disturbing story of love, desire, frustration,



persecution and accidental judgment that purports to expose the extremities of marital brutality in the life of a young girl, Panchami, the daughter of an orthodox priest of Kamakhya. Not only is Panchami duped into marrying Bijendra, an aged widower with a son from his former wife, but she also discovers to her dismay that the man she is tricked into accepting as her husband happens to be the elder brother of her lover, Indra, who had sprinkled vermilion on her forehead following that turbulent embrace on the day of *holi* in the ancient temple of *Dakshina Kali* as a symbolic signature of their union. On learning the truth about the man she has been married off to, Panchami, of course, tries to offer some resistance initially as she tells her mother that she would rather allow her father — at the height of his wrath — to sacrifice her at the altar of the mother goddess than accept anyone but Indra as her husband.

But the blows of circumstance fall so heavily on her that all resistance comes to be overpowered by mighty opposition. Her mother tells her that she cannot destroy the family for the sake of her choice. She cannot be above the society. Nor can she afford as a woman to cross the *Lakhsman rekha* of social parameters. Forced thus into following the inexorable societal mores Panchami's protest gets smothered within the confines of her marital veil. That the fact of yielding to irrational demands of various hue and category through the institution of marriage has always been the bane for the Hindu woman hardly needs to be exaggerated. As Nayar would have us believe,

Marriage makes unreasonable demands on the woman, and offers little in turn. In the Hindu context, notions of chastity, service to the husband, and motherhood work toward an erasure of the woman's needs, desires, and even identity. She subsumes her identity under that of the family's. (Nayar: 131)

Such then is the fate that Panchami is forced into accepting. But the worse is yet to come. The real ordeal begins only after she enters her new home as Bijendra's wife. She is told by her husband on the nuptial night itself not to expect him on her bed as he would always sleep on the bed his former wife, the eternal queen of his heart used to sleep. Panchami's place in the house would be that of a housemaid or at best the nurse to his child. Torn thus between such abysmal neglect and womanly pride; between conflicting envy and scruples of conscience; and between the demands of proving her sexual attractiveness and fidelity to the man of her heart's desire she begins to experience the unbearable turbulence of a living death each single day of her life. And then as if to add insult to injury she finds herself at the dead of one night being dragged by the hair by her drunken husband and punched and kicked for having accidentally dozed off on his former wife's bed while trying to lull his child to sleep. Yet she bears it all with passive resistance. And not too long after the incident Panchami is threatened by her mother-in-law of being thrown out

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of the house if she could not get Bijendra to bed with her. Her mother-in-law had told her that morning "Listen, dimwit, just as the wife should take care of her husband like a mother during his meals, she should attract him in the same way, like Rambha and Menaka in the bed. Do you follow anything? Sleep with your husband in the same bed tonight. It is the woman who can control the man. Remember, if you cannot domesticate your husband and prevent him from becoming a recluse your quota of rice in this house too would come to an end" (*Neelachalar Gadya* 126, translation mine). With no alternative to fall back upon she breaks herself free from all qualms of conscience with regard to her relationship with Indra — who had for all practical purposes, abandoned her and left her in the lurch — and convincing herself of the need to accept Bijendra as her rightful husband, she stoops to conquer. Her sense of pride gets the better of her for once as she succeeds in pulling Bijendra to her bed and accomplishing the bliss of conjugal love, the lack of which was beginning to pose a threat to her existence itself. But lo! As luck would have it, Indra whose shadow even was not to be traced anywhere in the house all these days suddenly makes his appearance in the family, the very next morning.

On the other hand, Bijendra does not return home that night. A thorough search follows. And finally, his inert body is retrieved the following morning by a group of daring youths from a steep gorge near the temple of *Smashan Kali* which had become the refuge of bhang addicts. A new chapter thus begins in the life of Panchami.

Unable to bear the sight of Panchami being subjected to the tortuous life of the Hindu widow, Indra offers to take her away with him to Calcutta to live as husband and wife permanently, never to return to this veritable hell. After much hesitation Panchami surrenders to the will of Indra. Everything is arranged and the two of them decide to take the momentous step of their life the very next dawn. Accordingly, at the first sign of daybreak, with a mild and cautious knock on her door signaling his departure, Indra awaits the arrival of Panchami at the predetermined spot. But destiny had planned it otherwise. Getting over the contradictory impulses of trepidation, anxiety, concern and passionate inclination Panchami decides eventually to secure her release from the bondage of widowhood. But, alas! Destiny had planned it otherwise. With all her valuables packed in the tin box she sneaks a look through the door. And there in the guise of the watchful sentinel she discovers her mother-in-law seated vigilantly on the wooden chair on the verandah obviously to preempt any attempt by Panchami to cross the *Lakhsman rekha*. Thus ends her dream of escape and Panchami surrenders to the fate of widowhood once again.

In the morning when Panchami enters the kitchen her mother-in-law outraged at the sight of the former's groomed hair and manicured hands picks up a piece of firewood from the stock placed near the hearth in the kitchen and starts beating her



black and blue for having dared to defy the restrictions of the Brahmin widow until a huge crowd from the neighbourhood assembles there attracted by Panchami's outcry. As the news spreads like wild fire and reaches the ears of Panchami's mother the latter hurries to her daughter only to be horrified to find the once apple of her eye being reduced to the skeleton of her former self. But on looking at her swollen belly, she comes to learn from her daughter, much to her relief, that she is carrying nobody else's but her husband's child. Hopeful of salvaging some love and honour for her daughter, she breaks the news to Panchami's mother-in-law. But instead of rejoicing, her mother-in-law starts abusing her as the murderer of her husband only to commit incest with Indra, as to the best of her knowledge, Panchami had never slept with Bijendra. Charged with adultery she is thus thrown into the dingy confines of the goat shed to spend the rest of her life where she delivers, as expected, after the mother-in-law's thrashing, a still born child. The narrative ends with Panchami, an unwanted entity, not only for her society but even for herself, crying and praying for her release:

Having suffered much deceit, all my wishes have I sacrificed  
 Having endured much pain, all my desires have I forgotten  
 Have cried exceedingly too and can't cry any more  
 My thirst remained unquenched, my hope unfulfilled  
 Take me in your arms, o mother ... (translation mine)

Panchami thus becomes the classic example of the Indian widow who comes to be abhorred in her husband's family following his death in a way that her very presence itself is seen as ominous. Superstition too makes her an easy victim holding her responsible for the death of her husband. Reflecting on this phenomenon relating to the miserable plight of the Hindu widow, Trevor Bormann states

"In many conservative Indian Hindu families, widows are shunned because they're seen as bringing bad luck. Superstitious relatives even blame them for their husband's death. The widow can become a liability with no social standing, an unwanted mouth to feed. Often they're cast out of the family home,"

What is transparent, then, in the treatment of Ruplekha's stories is her concern with, to use an expression from Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan 'the (re)constitution of female subjectivity in the interest of a feminist praxis'. In each of the stories discussed above there is a constant and deliberate attempt on the part of the author at conjuring up an image of the feminist subject who would not remain a 'docile body' any more. Even in instances where they appear to retain a docile attitude they use their bodies as a statement of opposition. Take for instance, the case of Bhuichampa. It is in her state of surface docility itself in the form of her willingness to accompany her

husband Nimo on she emerges as the colonial feminism enables her to bribe other menfolk of the female subject who is passive, culturally inferior'.

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husband Nimo on the return journey to the so called *swamigriha* in Kolkata that she emerges as the 'speaking' voice of what could be termed the third world post colonial feminism. Similarly, in her new avatar as the Mother Goddess Kali that enables her to bring the old priest, her one time protector-cum-exploiter and the other menfolk of the community at her feet she comes to embody the image of the female subject who would 'stand in contrast to the iconic figure of the female as passive, culturally fixed in an objective relationship in which she is always the inferior'.

Similarly, Madhavi's appearance at her parental home at the dead of night signals the first signs of the calm before the storm as innocent and vivacious native inclinations of the sovereign subject get replaced by solemn silence and ruthless subjugation.

Again, Rajlakhmi's decision to seek refuge in her suicide in the placid waters of Wreenmochan demonstrates her resolute resistance to live in 'the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential' (Beauvoir, 1949). She will not live in a world where she is compelled to 'assume the status of the Other', doomed to immanence. But, it is her release from the state of dependency, her transcendence, in other words, that her suicide capitially articulates.

Finally, Panchami, the consequences of her action notwithstanding, through her decision to wear a new female corporeity so as to make herself as fit and acceptable as possible for the contemplated life in Kolkata with Indra as her husband, offers her resistance to the hegemonic fetters of normatization of the female body determined, as Foucault would have us believe, by the 'disciplinary gaze' of power structures.

Power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representation. (Foucault, 1980)

Similarly, the other stories in the collection, like "Xorisrip," "Taata ekhon ashram asil," "Dorothy madam aru satra satri," "Gurudakshina," "Deodha," and "Amrajuli" are an assertive attempt at projecting the female subject as resisting her patriarchally constructed status as victim of domesticity and encoded gender expectations or in postcolonial parlance, the subaltern 'other'. The stories in the collection present, in other words, a penetrating study of the obnoxious and insufferable processes of history and tradition that serve to conjure up an image of the woman in forms of diverse disposition as she battles with or reconciles herself to the disquietingly oppressive situations emanating from ages of patriarchal dominance in the name of creed, custom or culture. To conclude, *Neelachalar Gadya* comes, at a time most propitious for the society, as a powerful and imposing diatribe against forces and tendencies of immanent import within the patriarchal domain perennially trying to



reconstruct the female identity itself

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#### Narrativ

ABSTRACT: *The p the various complex Third World countri of forgotten heroes the colonial powers of power equation: degradation and a , without a 'voice'. A process and contin The paper, therefo protagonists – in the of two Bengali stori Fairy Tale of Mohar narrates the simplic and yet probes into t and resilience of t problematizes the p*

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## Narrative of the Decolonized: Spivak in Translation

Tandra Das

**ABSTRACT:** *The post colonial discourse on the subaltern subject has analysed the various complexities of subjugation and resistance in the decolonized areas of Third World countries. The present paper attempts to discuss the 'little' narrative of forgotten heroes against the 'grand' exposure of the freedom struggle against the colonial powers and the consequent dominance of the native representation of power equations in post Independence India. In this scenario, economic degradation and a patriarchal structure of society compels the spirit to survive without a 'voice'. According to Gayatri Charavorty Spivak, this is a historical process and continues, with unabated brutality in various regions across India. The paper, therefore, explores the nuances of survival of two aged female protagonists – in the literary text "Old Women". The text is an English translation of two Bengali stories written by Mahasweta Devi – "Statue" (Murti) and "The Fairy Tale of Mohanpur" (Mohanpurer Rupkatha). The translator Gayatri Spivak narrates the simplicity of the language of rural Bengal through skilful artistry and yet probes into the layers of irony that lies beyond sheer existence. The dignity and resilience of the souls of the protagonist are indicators of a spirit that problematizes the paradigm of modern society.*

**KEY WORDS :** *subaltern, the little narrative, social activism, woman's voice, survival- strategy.*

The above title attempts to unravel a few universal fixities and complexities of the post-colonial analysis in scholarly discourse. It also offers a curious motif of a subjugated world in which the Third World woman is doubly oppressed by the distorted ideology of a foreign masculist imperialism and native patriarchy. As literature is again a reflection of societal forces, fictional representations of such marginalized men and women raise a few questions on identity and gender-equations. In the post colonial nation state, the suffering and passivity extends to the woman who is generally considered to be the weak individual who fails to resist or to



challenge.

The argument may be further elaborated with some extracts from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay "Can The Subaltern Speak?" where she pursues the problematic of the native woman's voice. The subaltern woman can be defined as "a person without lines of social mobility". Her situation "leads to an essentialist, utopian politics that can, when transferred to single-issue gender rather than class, give unquestioning support to the financialization of the globe, which ruthlessly constructs a general will in the credit-baited rural woman even as it formats her through UN Plans of Action so that she can be developed". It is believed that in the rhetoric of service to truth, the oppressed subject (in this case, the Woman) must speak and act, knowing that gender in development will be the best path to follow. Therefore, Spivak speaks - "It is in the shadow of this unfortunate marionette that the history of the unheeded subaltern must unfold".

Post colonialism defines a set of diversified practices which characterize the societies which function from the moment of colonization to the present day, since colonialism continues to exist through various mechanisms even after political independence. In this world, the colonial space is occupied by a disruptive structure of society which tyrannizes over the 'silent' subject on the basis of casteism and racial prejudice. This is represented, as extolled by Homi Bhaba by 'imitation' and 'mimicry' of the colonized. According to Bhaba, resistance to imperialism reduces itself to dominance, whose "intervention as a dislocating presence paradoxically confirms the very thing it displaces". The displaced ideology gave rise to oppression of the landless peasantry and farm workers, sustained through an unofficial government-landlord nexus that easily defied the law.

The above approaches have provided a support to this paper which tentatively discusses the predicament of the colonized and specially that of the negation of the feminine spirit. In the essay "Can The Subaltern Speak?", Spivak again speaks of the colonial construct of "sati", through which she builds up a counter-narrative of woman's consciousness. The widow apparently willingly ascends the pyre of the dead husband, killing herself and proving herself to blend with spiritual universality. The British described this rite as a case of "White men saving brown women from brown men".....Against this declaration, there is the 'nostalgia' (as Spivak explains) of the nativist statement "The women wanted to die"..... The question now arises and as it will plague the metropolitan intellectual, - where is the mobilization of the woman's voice consciousness, who is caught between the historically legitimized statements of the past? This paper particularly brings forward, in this case, the 'silence' of the subaltern which has been narrativized in literary texts.

It seeks also, to contextualize the argument, therefore, by referring to two

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translations (in English) of Bengali stories by noted activist and litterateur Mahasweta Devi. The works are again translated by Gayatri Spivak whose rendering of the Bengali dialect into English is starkly in contrast to her analytical works. The translated works are exemplary in the sense that the post colonial theorist shares the same vigour of activism for the dispossessed as the narrator Mahasweta Devi, establishing Albert Camus's statement (in his 1957 Nobel Prize Speech) that "*the sympathy of the artist lay with the victim.*" The creator and the translator extend their empathy for the "other" within the periphery of the nation-state. The master narratives of the West are cast aside in the adherence to the native traditions. Mahasweta Devi has merged activism with creativity and individual expression. She has challenged the exploiting agencies in the world of the Adivasis, Santhals and the Mundas and has spent considerable time crusading for the rights of the individuals who are posited at the lowest level of social hierarchy. Spivak's translations are usually accompanied by introductions which are informative and dense. She pleads her readers not to view the stories as "*representative cultural artifacts to be observed and objectified*", claiming that Mahasweta Devi's fiction is historically and contextually complex.

It is interesting to note Spivak's comments in the Foreword to the English translation of "Draupadi" by Mahasweta Devi. In the Foreword, Spivak has questioned the attitude through which we condescend over our Third World sisters, wanting them to be free and yet congratulating ourselves on our specialists' knowledge of them ..... she reiterates – "*For the rest of the world's women, the sense of whose personal micrology is difficult (though not impossible) for us to acquire, we fall back on a colonialist theory of most efficient information retrieval. We will not be able to speak to the women out there if we depend completely on conferences and anthologies by Western-trained informants. As I see their photographs in women's-studies journals or on book jackets – indeed, as I look in the glass ..... it is Senanayak (the male protagonist of "Draupadi") with his anti-Fascist paper back that I behold. In inextricably mingling historic-political specificity with the sexual differential in a literary discourse, Mahasweta Devi invites us to begin effacing that image.*" Suggesting that Mahasweta Devi's gaze encompasses a "decolonized terrain", an analysis of her narratives may depict problematic representations of decolonization after a negotiated political independence.

The title of the translations – "*Old Women : Statue and The Fairy Tale of Mohanpur*" indicate the complexities of marginalization in a post-colonial structure. "Statue" narrates the politically motivated raising and unveiling of a bronze statue of Dindayal Thakur, a freedom fighter of Chhatim village, a remote area of West Bengal. Dindayal's story as a freedom fighter "*who was caught, imprisoned, tortured*



and finally killed on the gallows for the attempted robbery and looting of a train", was lost in the obscure history of an impoverished Chhatim village. His end was hastened, not due to the so-called tyranny of the colonial government, but through the betrayal of the Khan clan—as the writer states (through translation), - "Malicious people say that Madan's dad Badan Khan had received a disproportionate amount of money from the British for helping them capture terrorist Dinu Thakur, and had invested it in shellac farming forthwith. That money doubled in Madan's hands. For unknown reasons the post 1947 government figured Madan for a patriot and deluged him with licence permits as a reward for his service to the nation: licences and permits for everything from liquor to bus services."

The retelling of colonial history through native corruption and villainy ironically indicates another turn of events. A research scholar decides to retrieve the neglected tale of Dindayal to write a doctoral thesis on the armed struggles in Midnapore district. But his depiction of the freedom fight of Dindayal, "a little narrative" as against the grand struggle for Indian independence is also mingled with a curious self-interest:

*"The researcher is delighted. The state is looking for freedom fighters everywhere; here's a freedom fighter. He creates interest in the administration. The researcher publishes his book, and he, too, is given a D.Phil among others at the convocation of the University in the style in which fried puris are thrown carelessly at rows of wedding guests waiting to be fed ..... The book reaches a certain Minister's office. The Personal Assistant of the Minister is able to explain the need for erecting a statue of Dindayal to his Minister. Since the statue of a dead man is much more important than other living problems, there is no difference of opinion about the decision to erect a statue."*

This perception extends to a description of Chhatim village, the misery of its people and the empty promises of an authority who practises the same process of colonial deception. The post-independence scenario in a village in Bengal is a historical continuation of colonial display of false modernity – The desolation of the village is thus shown – "No health centre nearby, no well with water in the village, not even a market, a road way. In fact, the people of Chhatim village have forgotten they were always poor."

The discovery of a long letter by Dindayal intrigues the researcher, as it evades topics of nation, terrorism and lines from the Gita to passionate avowals of love to a certain "Dulali". This leads the reader to the female protagonist – an old woman of seventy eight whose shifts of consciousness down memory lane builds up a counter narrative of societal pressures on forbidden love. As a young woman, she had loved Dindayal. The statue which is brought to the village with pomp and fanfare brings back the painful memories. As she had been forbidden to see the

statue, she visits it at assurances from the hospitals and school of betrayal, - betrayal does not feel deprive voice is that of a "te the statue.

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statue, she visits it at night in the company of his nephew Nabin. Nabin had extracted assurances from the Minister and MLA that their village will see better roads, hospitals and schools. But disappointment descends upon him from another form of betrayal, - betrayal of fellow men of their own kin. But his aunt ('pishi') Dulali does not feel deprived any more; the statue offers her strength and sustenance. Her voice is that of a "tearless, dry, pain" and she attempts to celebrate in the glory of the statue.

The tale of the destitute 'old' woman is rewritten in the form of "Andi" (literally meaning blind in Bengali) whose loss of vision is enveloped in her own self-created myth of fairy tales in the second translation *"The Fairy Tale of Mohanpur."* The narrative speaks of a rural hierarchy of the despotic landowner Hedo Naskar, the aggressive and righteous activist Gobindo and the bonded labourers of the village, who leads miserable lives under Hedo Naskar. Against this subversive background, the decrepit old woman Andi has no identity - she belongs to a Fourth World in which survival is ingrained in her consciousness.

Her lack of eyesight is substituted by weaving strange fairy tales out of ordinary incidents in her own life. - *"She finds a new variety of frisky, many-coloured eel. When she ties it in her thin-weave washcloth, her gamcha, and brings it home, her eldest daughter-in-law opens the bundle. She screams. The eel becomes a water-snake and escapes slithering."* On another occasion, she falls into a pond, mistaking it for the grassy land where she picks thankuni leaves. The real world becomes blurred in her consciousness as she mutters -

*Everyone knows it goes like this. You say fish and it's a snake. You step in a meadow and it's a slime pond."*

Human suffering of the aged protagonist is transformed into a metaphor of an alternative existence in which common occurrences seem a miracle. The writer conceives a situation in which solace as well as release can be traced in magic realism. Gobindo, the Leftist worker has the herculean task of getting Andi's eyes operated at the nearest hospital. The apathy and corruption embedded in the health care units, political quarters and exploitative social system calls for resistance and collective action. Gobindo fights for the emancipation of human rights through his attempts at procuring proper medical treatment for Andi. Andi blissfully returned to her idyllic world - *"She will eat all kinds of things at the hospital, the doctor will come again from that district town; everything just like a fairy tale one by one!....."*

The narrative frame work of both the above stories offers a telling commentary on the grand postcolonial agenda of upliftment of the subaltern dignity. Dulali of "Statue" seeks her release through the path of memory to a past which justified her existence as an individual who celebrated the ecstasy of passionate avowals of



love. Andi, of "The Fairy Tale of Mohanpur", resorts to a world of myth as an assertion of her urge for survival.

It is in the context of this narrativization of passive resistance and consequently 'inner' resilience that Mahasweta Devi has stated as the source of her inspiration – "I have always believed that the real history is made by ordinary people. I constantly come across the reappearance, in various forms, of folklore, ballads, myths and legends, carried by ordinary people across generations... The reason and inspiration for my writing are those people who are exploited and used, and yet do not accept defeat. For me, the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazingly noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw material elsewhere, once I have started knowing them? Sometimes it seems to me that my writing is really their doing"..... It is, at this juncture, that the concepts of a new nation and location of power are obliterated by fictionalized representations of the dispossessed and the "unheeded".

Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak the translator has perceived Mahasweta Devi as a litterateur who comments on and questions contemporary issues of politics, gender and class. In her Introduction to "Old Women", Spivak recognizes her as a significant figure in the field of socially committed literature. "Devi's empirical research into oral history as it lives in the cultures and memories of tribal communities was a first of its kind", Spivak states. The purpose of her translation, therefore, as it is observed, is to transmit an awareness of the literary and cultural history of Bengal to an international audience.

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## English(es) in the Postcolonial Contexts : Local Rules, Local Roles

Anindya Syam Choudhury

**ABSTRACT:** *English was transported mainly through colonialism and transplanted in different parts of the world, leading to a contact situation in which English started getting localised in the linguistic ecology of the new sociolinguistic and cultural contexts because of the influence of the local languages, with the norms and conventions of the hitherto rather monolithic Standard English of 'centre' countries like the U.S or the U.S.A. getting adapted and transformed in new and interesting ways. This phenomenon of the localization of English, especially in the postcolonial contexts, has resulted in the development of several national Englishes, with their own endonormative or locally-grown rules. This paper attempts to first look into the phenomenon of the Englishes and how it has led to a reconceptualisation in the way we now think of various issues linked to English language use. In this endeavour, the paper draws on examples from the Indian context to show how bilingual linguistic and sociolinguistic creativity helps in the creation of a discursive space, a third space, through phenomena like code-switching and code-mixing, whereby the intermingling of languages like Hindi and English happen, creating a kind of splintered, hybrid variety of English, appropriated and adapted by local environments to perform local roles. This paper in a way counters the notion of English as a 'lingua frankensteinia', a killer language, which devours smaller languages, and tries to show how English, in a postcolonial context like India, for instance, actually helps in the sustenance of multilingualism.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Englishes, postcolonial, hybridity, localisation, endonormative, code-switching, code-mixing, bilingual, multilingualism*

The colonial expansion of the British Empire from around the late sixteenth century onwards has led to the spread of the English language across the globe, contributing to the making of it as the world's leading lingua franca, the language of international communication, politics, commerce, travel, the media, and so on. This



global diffusion of English has been viewed as giving rise to various diasporas of English, with one recent paradigm being that given by Kachru and Smith, wherein they have conceptualized the global spread of English by dividing it into a total of four diasporas (5). Beginning with the expansion, first all over the British Isles (first diaspora), English subsequently crossed the seas to North America, Australia and New Zealand (second diaspora). The third diaspora, which Kachru in his Three Circles Model of the spread of English, proposed in his article "Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle", refers to as the Outer Circle, was largely to colonized countries such as India, Nigeria, Singapore, and the Philippines, where English became an institutionalized second language. The fourth diaspora has been to countries like China, Japan, Korea, Brazil, Germany, Thailand and Saudi Arabia among others, where English is used mainly as a foreign language. One of the spinoffs of this diffusion has been the growth and development of several national and regional varieties like Indian English, Nigerian English, etc., especially in the third diaspora, because of the nativization and acculturation of the English language in diverse multilingual and multicultural settings, accruing, as it has, new linguistic and cultural identities and an increasing pluricentricity, with deviations from the standard Anglo-American varieties becoming the order of the day. The plural term 'Englishes' is often used to denote these varieties, stressing, as Kachru in his article "World Englishes: Agony and Ecstasy" points out, an acceptance of the variation in form and function in them, thereby challenging the duopoly of the standard varieties of American English and British English and attempting to reject the nativeness paradigm in which the two have been accused of being dipped. It is another matter that the Kachruvian Three Circles Model, from which the World Englishes paradigm drew its initial impetus, has now been ironically found to be hugely problematic in the sense that the use of the terms 'Inner Circle' (to denote the so-called 'native' English-speaking countries like the U.K. and the U.S.A. and the standard varieties used therein) and 'Outer Circle' (the third diaspora) tend to hierarchise the varieties of English, centring the so-called 'native speaker' Inner Circle varieties and marginalizing the 'non-native speaker' Outer Circle ones. In a way, therefore, the Kachruvian model can be said to have perpetuated the same, dichotic, essentialised categories of 'native' and 'non-native' which have been so pervasive in our consciousness (till recently at least) that we used to take them as simple givens. There is no gainsaying, however, that the World Englishes paradigm has made us more aware of the localizing process which the transplanted English language has had to go through in different sociolinguistic and cultural contexts, especially in the countries of the third diaspora, thereby becoming indigenized, nativized and institutionalized varieties in those

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contexts with home-grown endonormative rules. A model which accounts for this gradual localizing process of English is Schneider's Dynamic Model of Postcolonial English, proposed in his book *Postcolonial English: Varieties around the World*. This model, however, does not provide any graphical presentation of the varieties of English in the manner of the Kachruvian model but rather presents a framework for making a diachronic study of the evolution of Englishes, conceptualizing them as going through a uniform pattern of five stages: Foundation, Exonormative stabilisation, Nativization, Endonormative stabilisation, and Differentiation. However, since this model works on the basis of colonial experience, many Englishes, like the ones in Russia and the Scandinavian countries, for instance, which have been free from the effects of colonialism, cannot perhaps be accounted for using this framework.

In the context of one of the very important postcolonial Englishes, Indian English, which Kachru very convincingly argues as being characterised by what he calls "functional nativeness" (as opposed to the "genetic nativeness" of British English and American English) with regard to the two dimensions of "range" and "depth", the former referring to the domains of function and the latter to the degree of social penetration of the variety (*Asian Englishes* 12), it can be said on the basis of a lot of empirical evidence that it is a variety which is in the fourth phase of the Schneider's Dynamic Model, distinctly marked by endonormative stabilization in which some traces of the nativization phase, the third phase, can also be found. The endonormative stabilization phase of a variety of Englishes is one in which the process of nativization is almost complete and the home-grown or endonormative norms are widely accepted by local users who do not any longer feel it necessary or desirable to look to the varieties of the so-called 'native' speaking countries for norms. In this context, it is perhaps pertinent to mention that Mukherjee very eloquently points out that two opposing forces, one progressive and the other conservative, are at work with regard to the present-day Indian English, "keeping it in a stable equilibrium", making it a semiautonomous variety, which is endonormatively stabilized but shows many aspects of the ongoing process of nativization (163).

The progressive force is the one responsible for experimentation and innovation at different levels of linguistic organization, the primary being vocabulary, where most of the innovations in Indian English are usually found. There is, for instance, a profusion of loanwords in Indian English taken over from other Indian languages in order to give a distinctive local colour to the evolving variety, making it able to carry the weight of new cultural and geographical experiences. Some of the very common loanwords used in Indian English are 'bandh', 'challan', 'crore', etc., for which the British English expressions (which are also used in Indian English,



especially in its standard acrolectal form) are 'strike', 'bank receipt' and 'ten million' respectively. In addition to loanwords, innovation in Indian English is also found in the creation of new vocabulary items from existing English words. Examples are words like 'batchmate' and 'prepone', a word invented by analogy with 'postpone'. Besides, we also find morphological innovation in Indian English in the extension of the use of affixes like '-ee' and 'de-' to form words like 'awardee', 'recruitee', 'de-recognize', etc. Now, if one looks at the use of these innovative forms from the point of view of Selinker's Interlanguage Theory, as enunciated by him in his article "Interlanguage", one could be tempted to regard these as erroneous forms which have got fossilized in the second language learners' language system in their journey towards achieving the target language goals (in other words, the 'native speaker' goals). What this theory does is it defines the language system of the second language users always in terms of their shortcomings in relation to the 'native speaker' (or target language) norms, making it appear that the second language users can only be in a state of permanent non-learning of target language structures. In this sense, Selinker's theory, which used to hold sway over the world of Applied Linguistics till recently, not only put the so-called 'native speakers' in a privileged position, making them the principal stakeholders and owners of their 'native' languages, but also took away the agency of the bilinguals to innovate and experiment with structures and functions of their second languages, creating new, cultural-sensitive and socially appropriate meanings, and thereby enabling the latter to be in sync with the demands of the new ecology. In this context, it could be mentioned that Bhatt gives a couple of instances of bilingual creativity from Indian English where "one finds the linguistic form constrained by the grammar of culture", addressing the relationship between the forms that English manifests and its speakers perception of reality and the nature of their institutions ("World Englishes" 535). The first one is the use of the undifferentiated tag question 'isn't it?' found very commonly in the language of Indian English users, and used irrespective of the kind of structure the main clause has. It is easy to dismiss this tag question as erroneous when used in a sentence like 'You said you'll do the job, isn't it?' for the grammar book (which is usually in accordance the standard 'native speaker' norms) tells us that tag questions ought to be formed by the insertion of a pronominal copy of the subject after an appropriate modal auxiliary. Hence, in the above case, the 'correct' tag question would be 'didn't you?'. However, Bhatt suggests that the undifferentiated tag question 'isn't it?' plays an important local pragmatic role in the Indian context in that it is governed by the politeness principle of non-imposition, "signalling deference and acquiescence" ("World Englishes" 535). In comparison with a Standard British English/American English tag question like the one in 'You

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In addition, Hin variety perhaps, has according to Bhatt "t to global-local tensio formed through resist 178). Bhatt in this ar linguistic hybridity, is

said you'll do the job, didn't you?', Indian English users have been found by Bhatt to have preferred the undifferentiated tag question 'isn't it?' in a sentence like 'You said you'll do the job, isn't it?', since the latter, being non-impositional and mitigating, perhaps fits in the requirements of "a culture where the verbal behaviour is severely constrained by, to a large extent, by politeness regulations, where non-imposition is the essence of polite behaviour" ("World Englishes" 535). Bhatt gives another example of linguistic creativity in Indian English in the use of the modal auxiliary 'may' which is used to express obligation politely ("World Englishes" 535-536). We often come across a sentence like 'These mistakes may please be corrected' in Indian English, a sentence which may be considered to serve a positive politeness function in the local context, instead of a Standard British English sentence like 'These mistakes should be corrected'.

Another domain of bilingual creativity and innovation is what is termed in sociolinguistic literature as 'code-switching' or 'code-mixing'. This kind of innovation has often been explained from the point of view of 'language deficiency hypothesis', ascribing language/vocabulary deficiency to be the reason behind such innovation. It is true that sometimes bilinguals and multilinguals (and even monolinguals) find it really difficult to retrieve an appropriate word in a particular language from memory, especially when it is required the most. It is then that bilinguals and multilinguals are supposed to resort to using a word or synonymous expression from another language they know. However, the 'language deficiency hypothesis' cannot possibly explain, as Bhatia points out, the mixing of "synonyms from both languages in the same utterance to underscore or paraphrase a point they are making" (111). In the Hinglish (a blend of Hindi and English) phrase '*cintaa na kijiye, don't worry*' (where the two parts have almost the same meaning), the use of the Hindi word '*cintaa*', which means 'to worry', in juxtaposition with the English word 'worry', possibly for reinforcing the point, proves that the lack of proficiency in a particular language is not the only reason for language mixing. Bhatia goes on to point out how the 'language augmentation hypothesis' tries to explain this kind of linguistic innovation on the part of bilinguals "for achieving maximum efficacy from the two linguistic systems at their disposal" (112).

In addition, Hinglish, which is more of a medium of communication than a variety perhaps, has been able to create a discursive hybrid space in which, according to Bhatt "two systems of identity representation converge in response to global-local tensions on the one hand, and dialogically constituted identities, formed through resistance and appropriation, on the other" ("In Other Words" 178). Bhatt in this article further argues that code-switching or code-mixing, as linguistic hybridity, is a third space "a discursive space that is shared symbolically



by those who imagine themselves in-between: neither traditional nor necessarily modern. The *third space* offers them the possibility of a new representation, of meaning-making, and of agency" ("In Other Words" 182, emphasis in original). As an example, let us look at the expression 'Twitter Samvad', which is a tweet-enabled digital government service, a part of the digital India initiative of the Government of India. In this expression, there are two words, each with its own set of associations, carrying the specific indexicalities ascribed to them by virtue of their being words of the languages to which they belong. 'Samvad' is a Hindi word, originating from Sanskrit, meaning a 'discussion' or a 'debate'. This word is usually used in formal contexts in Hindi, and denotes a kind of public oratory which has always been greatly hallowed in India. The other word in the expression, 'twitter', is an English word referring, in this particular context, to the microblogging service introduced to the world in 2006. The juxtaposition of these two words (from two different languages), one a traditional local word and another a contemporary global one, leads to a kind of boundary erasure of the two languages, creating a hybrid space in which English functions in tandem with other languages in interesting ways, not to connect the local communities with the globalized world but to serve distinctively local needs among locals. In another path-breaking research, Rubdy shows how in the language of advertising in India English fuses with Hindi to create "new meanings which are not simply the product of two monolingual capacities combined but tend to involve a greater degree of linguistic blending at the lexical and even morpho-syntactic levels, demanding hybrid literacies" (114-115). Rubdy gives the example of the slogan 'Be a little Dillological' of the Lay's potato chips advertisement to show how the new word 'Dillological', a code-mixed hybrid word formed by the fusion of the Hindi word 'Dil' and the English word 'logical', exploits the emotional appeal of 'Dil' ('heart') and urges the people (possibly the urban youth, the target audience) in a subtle way to suspend their logical thinking for a while and indulge in eating Lay's chips, letting their hearts win over their heads for once. It is in this manner as well that English functions, participating in nuanced ways in the linguistic bricolage of postcolonial contexts.

In the discussion above, we have seen how the progressive forces are at work leading to the growth and development of Englishes in various ways in a postcolonial context like ours. However, there are also conservative forces at work trying to hold back the development of Indian English, regarding English "as a genuinely foreign language and a relic of the colonial past" and, in fact, are largely "reluctant to accept the emergence of a local variety of English in its own right" (Mukherjee 177). These are the forces which rather unhesitatingly raise the bogey of English linguistic imperialism arguing, like Philipponson does in his books *Linguistic Imperialism* and

*Linguistic Imperialism* a monstrous language in this context, English is which is put by various elites in postcolonial context (instance). The postcolonial the egg (English), and the (local languages). While because it entails a component of the postcolonial which denies the fact of contexts, taking on their

In conclusion, it has tried to show how country like the U.K. contexts, like the one contexts have helped in with regard to the status be pointed out firmly that necessarily innovations postcolonial context, it internal factors: demographic acceptability (3). Of the most important.

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*Linguistic Imperialism Continued*, how English is a kind of 'lingua frankensteinia', a monstrous language which devours smaller languages, albeit in a subtle way. In this context, English is often called a 'lingua cucula', a language (cuckoo's egg) which is put by various agents (cuckoo = the British colonizers, and then the local elites in postcolonial contexts) in the postcolonial nests (education system, for instance). The postcolonial subjects are tricked into incubating (English teaching) the egg (English), and raising it till a time comes when it replaces the native birds (local languages). While this metaphor seems attractive, it seems hugely problematic because it entails a complete denial of any intelligent and informed agency on the part of the postcolonial subjects. This theory sounds rather like a conspiracy theory which denies the fact of English having fused into the cultural mores of postcolonial contexts, taking on their values and expressions.

In conclusion, it would be fruitful perhaps to point out that though this paper has tried to show how the once rather monolithic Standard English of a 'centre' country like the U.K. or the U.S.A. has given way to Englishes in postcolonial contexts, like the one in India, for instance, and how the innovations in these contexts have helped in the development of endonormative rules, a note of caution with regard to the status of innovations in postcolonial Englishes is in order. It must be pointed out firmly that all deviations from the 'native speaker' norms are not necessarily innovations. For a deviation to become a linguistic innovation in a postcolonial context, it has to, as Bangbose points out, satisfy the following five internal factors: demographic, geographical, authoritative, codification, and acceptability (3). Of the five factors, codification and acceptability are perhaps the most important.

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**The Tribes of North East India: Commoditization of  
Culture and Globalization**

*Namrata Pathak*

**ABSTRACT:** *In patterns of globalization, we discern a tendency to homogenize the contours of the North East. The modes and modalities of globalization vouch for standardized, identical products for diverse market demands. Here, the paradox being the global multinational giants that cater to the local scenarios. In a tribal society, the intra and inter social differences are somewhat more dependent on what a tribal buys than what s/he grows or prepares (Ritzer, 2007: 338). Such a trend has a direct reliance on revelation of global authority in establishing cultural morality. Through the oblique affirmations of the "general," such cultural locations of the global also aims to exhaust the "indigenous" and the "exotic." The profound mystifying force is the exclusion of some people from the realization of such political dynamics. Globalization perversely keeps some people away from the restorative belief of creating an alternative social system. This alternative universe is based on the raised expectations of poor countries, their inadequate social welfare programmes and infrastructure, inept governments etc. Ironically, such states crippled by violence, exploitation, epidemics, drugs etc. consider themselves outside "globalization" and looks for other avenues. This paper aims to read the constantly-evolving nature of cultural products in the North-East; the locus of exchange; and the types of wasteful and expensive consumption in tribal societies.*

**KEYWORDS:** Globalization, Culture, Tribal Identity, North-East India, Consumerism, Global, Local.

In North East India, tribal identity is often crystallized into "ethnic identity". Even though tribal identity alludes to many dimensions of heterogeneity, we cannot rule out the banality of the term "ethnic-boundary" in this context. However, we have to acknowledge the fact that there is a constant attempt to forge connections of "wholeness" by aligning to a sense of territorial integrity in every tribal culture. Group adherence of various tribes in the North East creates a "cultural model"



based on the principles of commonality – the members advocate for a shared and socially distributed paradigm of cultural power. But, the whole effort touches upon differently placed tribal subjects in terms of global accessibility of wealth, political interests, and indigenous “localism.” In this era of globalization, the tribal cultures are also marked by the opposite drive to “document, preserve, cultivate, and re-interpret the customary practices and beliefs with a view to justify their (tribal) continuance with a form that is relevant from community point of view” (Das, 32). But the question is, to what extent a tribal subject has the freedom to exercise choices that are “culture-free”? In both territorial and non-territorial networks, how specific cultural items and symbols mark a tribal identity as insular and singular? Can we really ignore the administrative highhandedness of the Indian government and dubious games of military intrusion that have poisoned every aspect of North Eastern tribal societies? How tribal culture gets mutated at the wake of episodes of violence, public anger and notoriety? Perhaps these questions debunk any single explanation.

In the grammar of cultural-political discourse, globalization globalizes universality (Held and McGrew, 164). At the same time, globalization has a specificity that cannot be subsumed under a grand “totality,” rather the intertwining of culture with place gives forth to the dominance of geographically defined cultures. The North East India is one such place that claims the *de facto* common denominator of a capitalist economic system, and equally important in this context is the nature of “deterritorialization” as an entailment of postmodernity. The North Eastern states are situated between two great traditions of “the Indic Asia and the Mongoloid Asia” (Raatan, 11). It can be said that the Indic-Sanskritic culture is the major determining factor to identify a subject as a “tribal” or “non-tribal”. In the North Eastern region, there are four plain areas – Assam’s Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, the Tripura plains, and the Manipur plateau; and the rest three quarters of the region is constituted by hilly terrains. It is important to state that the tribal base in such an area takes into its fold the ever-changing conceptions of the word “politics”. We cannot disentangle politics from the realm of globalization and commodity culture. In this regard Das maintains:

Politics to the North East India tribes do not represent an absolutely separate sphere. Activities modeled in accordance with cultural rules can set the pattern of a political process. Such a course of action has become necessary partly because of the conflict generated between the local boundary system on the one hand and regional and national alliances on the other (36).

In the North East, the dystopian production of a homogeneous consumer culture is debunked to some extent. Moreover, the “existential needs” of ongoing

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life narratives of various tribes in the North East give birth to a unique cultural diversity.

We all know that in the recent times culture is reduced to a thing bought and sold in a shopping mall; and also it has become a matter of regulation and checks of global governance (Held and McGrew, 165). According to David Held and Anthony G. McGrew, the regimes of these regulations are directly proportionate to the dominance of commodified culture. Religion can be one factor in perpetuating both the constraints and freedom of the global network. Moreover, there can be a stiff competition to capitalism as an unusual organizer of cultural experience by religion. For example, the 9/11 foregrounds the militant versions of the Islam, ideally termed as the "globalization losers" of the world. This religious orientation generates "pressed together dissimilarities variously arranged" (Geertz, 226) by clashing headlong with global connectivities. Such an instance deftly acquaints us with the chasms that not only cause conflict and political violence, but also the mythical tendency towards invariant cultural differences.

In the North Eastern scenario, consumerism and the culture-ideology offset of it, can be termed as the "nuts and bolts and the glue that hold the system together" (Ritzer, 344). Following Sklair, we can contend that the things that we possess add a meaning to our life. The criterion to be fully alive, as maintained by Sklair, is to consume. Therefore, we must incessantly consume in order to be fully alive (Ritzer, 344). By emphasizing on a spread of a cultural system of desires, Sklair initiates a shift from homogenization of products to the urge to commodify. However, in the North Eastern states, we trace a desire to commodify different religions (with different consequences, of course) by converting cultural contents into benign economic vessels. This process is so strong that even a valuable religious artefact turns into a kitsch at a shopping arcade inside an international airport. Another important aspect that we can promptly associate with globalization is "value." For Arjun Appadurai:

...focusing on the things that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange, makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is politics, construed broadly...commodities, like persons, have social lives (3).

The same is true for the North Eastern states keeping in mind the diverse orientations towards the reciprocity, sociability, and spontaneity of exchange. Moreover, we cannot forego the nuances associated with the "objectification of persons" and "personification of things" in a commodity market. It will be an ignorant move to overlook how cultural things move in phases—the movements can be normative or deviant, reversible or terminal etc. (Ertman and Williams, 37). But in



such a situation, there is no room for the "individual". The liquidation of the individual gives birth to a situation where real signature is manipulated for reasons of marketability.

The icons, symbols and practices of culture, in the domain of the present risk-acceptant capitalism and market economy, transform themselves into "opportunities". Market demands, not cultural norms, *en route* the network of information technologies, entrepreneurship and other economic ventures, make cultural values and objects lean on profits. These are the profits that they can make among the category of transnational business class, than within the aesthetic spaces of a local tribal community. As such, how is an ethnic Naga culture different from a trade service of goods and valuables? A Naga shawl, through migration of products, gets distributed in different locales in inherently random and erratic ways – but, in some pseudo-dialectical patterns, the distribution of an ethnic shawl transforms each recipient culture in a hybrid synthesis of the global and the local. However, a disorienting acceptance of a fake Naga shawl in various non-local spots also points towards the bizarre market games recycled time and again by global textile industries. A fake shawl can be an example of a fragmented tribal culture which is constantly remoulded by a cosmopolitan taste, the darker side being the detachment of the indigenous tribal self from the larger society in pockets of local isolation. Culture, at times, acts as merchandise. But is the Naga shawl an example of a compelling-utilitarian move to propel confusing dialogues, interaction, and mediation with other alien cultures? Or is it an instrumental prop in the buyer-user spectrum, used as a tool to consolidate economies of expansion in the clothing-fashion industries? Does this tool wield power through a vital supply of mass-produced products and scales of diverse self-expression? The electronic media, by catering to all the classes, from elites to the middle class to the poor, also alters the traditional vein running across Naga culture by popularizing not the "bland" ethnic shawls, but trendy modern designer Naga shawls with unique embroidery and texture. A pseudo Naga shawl, thus, exhibits a political action of providing resources for consumption, but strangely enough, it identifies both a traditional Naga and a foreigner-tourist as a consumer, not as a global/local citizen. Such a difficult projection to "sell" handicrafts, clothes, art, music, literature, fiestas, etc. in the cultural supermarket has given birth to a different North East, strange yet familiar, unitary yet diverse, flattened yet punctured by solid differences. Moreover, there are anthropological nuances that open up globalization as a confusing weapon to establish the self and the other binary. In the case of the production of the Naga shawl in the world market, an appetite for the product determines the prime motor behind its popularity. What if a diasporic Naga intentionally prefers a fake shawl than an original one

woven in Nagaland? What at the wake of an indigenous industries primarily based other in this context, essential and a system, an identity are intricately connected an array of material content goals etc.? If yes, then v and individualism which forces of liberalism?

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woven in Nagaland? What are the structural parameters of his identity-constitution at the wake of an inexhaustible craving for such fabric-industries? Are these industries primarily based on intellectual property and material needs? Who is the other in this context, especially when consumption is designated both as a practice and a system, an identity and a social construct? When self-expression and lifestyle are intricately connected, can consumption re-conceptualize Naga culture through an array of material contradictions, power struggles, willful action, taken-for-granted goals etc.? If yes, then who is morally responsible for the characteristic Naga values and individualism which are definitely under siege by homogeneous socio-economic forces of liberalism?

The cultural imperialism hidden at the heart of consumerism tries to homogenize the contours of the North East by vouching for standardized, identical products for diverse global markets. Here, the paradox being the popular declaration of global multinational giants that they are going local and regional. For example, the famous multinational company Coca Cola goes to the length of declaring itself as a major source of retaining traditional cultural identities. Coca Cola is going native with a variety of locally tailored teas, fruit juices, and energy drinks (Ritzer, 337)). The initiatives and intentions of such multinational companies are integral in defining a tribal identity. A slice of the lifestyle of a tribal in the North East shows a peculiar pattern – s/he buys dinner at Mc Donald's, sips innumerable bottles of Coca Cola, buys dresses at Prada, and prefers to take a humble breakfast at a continental restaurant. The intra and inter social differences are somewhat more dependent on what a tribal buys than what s/he grows or prepares (Ritzer, 338). Such a trend has a direct reliance on revelation of global authority in establishing cultural morality. Through the oblique affirmations of the "general", such cultural locations of the global also aims to exhaust the "indigenous" and the "exotic". For instance, a piece of traditional Mising jewellery displayed at international malls reconfigures the singularities of creative inheritances, but it also opens up a polemics of "accepted," "refined," and "consumer-ready" cultural goods against a lost legacy of what is "discarded" and "discredited". As such, the profound mystifying force is the exclusion of some people from the realization of such political dynamics. Globalization perversely keeps some people away from the restorative belief of creating an alternative social system. This alternative universe is based on the raised expectations of poor countries, their inadequate social welfare programmes and infrastructure, inept governments and so on. Ironically, such states crippled by violence, exploitation, epidemics, drugs etc. consider themselves outside "globalization" and looks for global non-governmental organizations, foreign aids, and healing and caring programmes to combat the dreadful diseases of the society.



For example, the religious systems of Mizoram provide a cross-section of such processes – various units and segments either in churches and community-centers function locally to generate not only the flexible structures of modern Christendom, but also futuristic visions of a global village. William H. Mott elaborates on a covert drive of such “new” religious centers to stimulate and carry globalization further, but this intrinsic goal is carefully concealed under local pursuits so much so that they are shown to counter the effects of globalization. This dichotomy unravels a peculiar mission to form a maze of human relationships worldwide, and then to embrace a new religion (Mott, 195). In Arunachal Pradesh, we discern an effort to give shape and identity to a new faith called *Do:nyi-Po:Loism* (literally Sun-Moonism), a totally new initiative to worship the sun and moon. These Adi people sing prayers in congregations in church-like temples and the influence is so magical that a section of Mising residing in Dhemaji has started coming under its spell. But what strikes us hard is the fact that even such cultural bondages fail to cast away the popularity of Christianity for such tribes. In spite of strong attempts to create a new religion adhering to the local customs, a huge number of Mising have started embracing Christianity in different pockets of the North East. In this context Mott further says:

As people project the new relationships generated by globalization backwards into their lives, they form new religions. The demographic centers of orthodox religions, especially Christianity, are differing from the Northern Hemisphere — Europe, North America, and China— to Africa, Central and South Asia, the Pacific, and Latin America in the Southern Hemisphere (195).

However, as the new political realities wash over indigenous tribes in a state like Mizoram, expansive communities based on new religious relationships help people deal with the magic word called “globalization”. In a postcolonial world, such religious movements teach people to “survive” – and in the process of surviving the odds of life, these religious orientations open up both transethnic and transnational ties in communities, “so that when somebody moves from city to city or country, there is a sort of surrogate family structure in place” (Mott, 195).

In the North East, especially in the tribal populated areas, the concept of self-understanding is very important in the context of the commitment to the land and the blanket dismissal of patronizing forms of governance. Religious hostility, violence, regionalism – there are many segments in the North East that collide headlong with the global-political and humanitarian issues. In most cases, an international society supportive of pluralism is imagined and re-imagined in the name of human rights regime. But the tribal societies in the North East give a feeling that the application of full human rights programmes cannot usually be enforced in

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a socio-cultural setting defined by intrinsic pluralism, wider scopes of jurisdiction, myriad exercises in power politics, and diverse definitions of moral growth. As such, the establishment of a global civil society in the states of the North East not only demands different conceptions of "globality" based on specific understandings, but it also caters to a kind of apolitical compensation for the loss of indigenous forms of existence. Further problematic is the argument that the global political and social forces "are increasingly narrowing the options available to humanity" (Held and McGrew, 183). It is noteworthy that preservation of different life forms cannot run parallel with narrow packages of democracy-promotion and nation-building.

Unlike the linear one-to-one penetrations carried by trade and war, computer-mediated interactions boast of complex patterns of inter-penetrations. Despite a sheer sense of isolation at the demographic level, the North Eastern states, spurred by market-based technology, are reaching global audience in popularizing their local, exotic art forms. The North East has become an exportable product giving birth to a diffusion of strict cultural parameters – there are convergences, dynamism, and plasticity of cultural emissions. The media not only serves as a catalyst to cultural invasions, but in the context of the North East, it also leads to the evaluation of a differentiated and layered culture. The intense contacts with other cultures gives birth to a sense of competition – after all, we cannot negate the sensitivities towards eulogizing local, territorial concerns, but at the same time new cultural cores are constantly being created and recreated with the driving force of alien influences so as to break the monotony of cultural insulation. Media, at times, claims to be a vehicle for democratic citizenship, and equally important is its role to control and regulate exclusionary development through fanatical tendencies. Critics such as Giddens would have us believe that at the chasm of what media projects and for what interest/ for whom/ for what intention media projects, cultural connectivity discloses the increasing reflexivity of global modern life. Hence, culture not only integrates individual agency into the workings of institutions, but it also comprises of mediated practices, experiences, and interactions with technologies, and the instant "infinite" availability of resources. At the wake of *mediatization* of culture, the North East provides different technological contexts in time and space for emotional and ethical shifts along with the possibility of the development of cosmopolitan cultural dispositions (Held and Mc Grew, 157). Moreover, immediacy is the keyword here that gives a lift to the speed of communication in present societies. In the North East, in contemporary tribal culture, the principle of instant access extends to categorize myriad immediate consumption practices – we have the telegraph, the Net, computer-mediated convergences, downloading-retrieval-storage of data (for e.g., music in iPods etc.) etc. Some good examples in the North



East are the Hornbill festival of the Nagas and the Nongkrem dance in Meghalaya. Due to the constant media coverage and digital recording of these festivals, they have earned increased popularity in a global platform. In recent times, through ingenious strategies, such traditional forms create attractive mass culture content and then market the result by "selling out" these products. Therefore, outside Nagaland or Meghalaya, such festivals evolve from their roots to add a zing to the world of paid product placements and recording industries. Moreover, we can also point to the instances of taking melodies from folk music of certain communities and transforming them into "re-mixed" songs that can be internationally acclaimed. This has been done by both local and international musicians alike. But, as argued by Baran and Davis, the act of lifting bits of the culture of everyday life out of the context, repackaging them, and then marketing them back to people is not without consequences. Such a process, no doubt, involves dramatization in the sense that certain things are exaggerated and highlighted, while others are ignored and debunked. Some folk songs are infused with tales of gun fight, sex, violence, and other taboo topics to turn them into more attention-getting and emotion-arousing segments. The prime structuring principle herein is the demand of the audience. Also such a process carries at its core the potential to "disrupt" various social institutions by propagating "misconceptions" about tribal life.

With the onset of commodification of culture, there arises a challenge to legally protect the cultural products in the market. But how fruitful is this attempt to put cultural products at par with other forms of creative production? Under the system of intellectual property law, creative forms are extensively protected from copying, but applying the tenets of intellectual property law to the global market is problematic. We know that cultural products are "indefinite works of unincorporated group authorship" (Scafidi, 11). It is but natural that the legal framework applicable to "group" authorship can go awry. Even in a multinational corporation, a patent vies for the extensive system of protection that attempts to create a mediating ground between the public domain and the private (Scafidi, 12). Equally significant is the fact that in the recent times, globalization has rendered "ideas" into wealth-generating capital. As such, the differences, both intrinsic and extrinsic, for each unique tribal community in the North East hinge on factors like the recognizable and invisible cultural traits and the degree to which such traits of a particular tribal culture are exposed to commodification. As consumers, what is legally permissible or not is ruled by both the local and global laws. It is very true that our associations through acquisition are determined by a complex range of legal circumstances and characteristics. Laws, rules and regulations pertaining to the tribal areas keep on changing depending on the geographic concentration or distribution, the movement

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and displacement of the tribes, the fast-mutating behavioural patterns of the members, the tribal community's interactive exchange with the majority public, a community's political and economic influence etc. On top of it, we have a set of non-codified rules and not-quite-flexible customs in each tribal area. Hence, the terrain is a bit tricky here. Let us take the example of the tourists who flock to the North East every year to explore this paradise of the East. If such a tourist fails to get attracted to the cultural products of a tribe, or if these products are not readily available, s/he may lose interest and move on to the next stop. When such a tourist encounters other cultural groups, s/he looks forward to "consume" not only cultural experience, but also goods, merchandise, and souvenirs. For example, to polish his or her foreign identity as a modern gastronome or to add lustre to his or her gracious presence, such a tourist would love to hunt for the perfect *dlim sum* in a "primitive" tribal village. This selective version of cultural appreciation is described by Pierre Bourdieu as the act of acquiring "cultural capital" (Scafidi, 7). If this transaction is not voluntary, it fails to benefit both the general tourist and the source community. However, the dearth of well-formulated laws to regulate, monitor, and govern such "conspicuous" behavior of the consumers turn the cultural market into a theatre devoted to aggrandizement of power. Now it is indeed a different aspect whether this theatre makes room for wasteful or expensive consumption.

The commercial availability of cultural products also ropes in informal or inadvertent locus of exchange – tribal commercial identities are even bought and sold in street festivals, at homepages of cyberspace, local magazines etc. Presently, tribal culture thrives in a world of choices—the more one is ushered in a world of "parades, radio stations, publications, and decorative house wares," the more culturally active s/he is (Scafidi, 8)! This cultural intoxication is so strong that even morality and behaviour have become hot items to be appropriated from other public cultures. As such, at the end, what remains is a difficulty exacerbated by the constantly evolving nature of cultural products – things get muddled up when we fail to judge which version among many is a "real" tribal recipe!

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