

dialog

A BI-ANNUAL INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL



EDITOR:

Akshaya Kumar

EDITORIAL BOARD:

Pushpinder Syal

Shelley Walia

Rana Nayar

ADVISORY BOARD:

(Panjab University)

C.L. Ahuja

Ishwar Dutt

Nirmal Mukerji

N.K. Oberoi

Ira Pande

M.L. Raina

Kiran Sahni

Mina Singh

Gyan Verma

ADVISORY BOARD:

Brian U. Adler

Georgia State University, USA

R. J. Ellis

University of Birmingham, UK

Harveen Mann

Loyola University, USA

Howard Wolf

SUNY, Buffalo, USA

Subscription Fee :

Rs. 250 per issue

or \$ 25 per issue

Note for Contributors

Contributors are requested to follow the latest MLA Handbook.

Typescripts should be double-spaced. Two hard copies in MS Word along with a soft copy should be sent to

Professor Rana Nayar

The Chairperson

Department of English and Culture Studies

Panjab University

Chandigarh 160 014

INDIA

Email : rananayar@gmail.com

DIALOG is an interdisciplinary journal which publishes scholarly articles, reviews, essays, and polemical interventions.

CALL for PAPERS

DIALOG provides a forum for interdisciplinary research on diverse aspects of culture, society and literature. For its forthcoming issues it invites scholarly papers, research articles and book reviews. The research papers (about 8000 words) devoted to the following areas would merit our attention most:

- Popular Culture
- Indian Writings in English and Translation
- Representations of Gender, Caste and Race
- Cinema as Text
- Theories of Culture
- Emerging Forms of Literature

Published twice a year, the next two issues of **Dialog** would carry miscellaneous papers on the above areas. The contributors are requested to send their papers latest by November, 2011. The papers could be sent electronically at akshayakumarg@gmail.com or directly to The Editor, **Dialog**, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Chandigarh – 160014. A CD of the papers in MS Word format must be sent along with the two hard copies.

CONTENTS

Editorial Note

Of 'Text' and 'Textualities': Performing Mahasweta
Tuntun Mukherjee 1-20

Interfacial Reading as Empowering Ethos: Literary Texts
and Indian Multicultural Context 21-32
Anup Beniwal

“Like Antaeus”: Thoreau's Rooted Warrior Stance 33-43
Brian U Adler

Translation: The Thing as/and a Paradigm 44-51
Rajesh Kumar Sharma

Mira and the Mahatma: A Reading Beyond 52-61
the Conventional Relational Matrix
Ashutosh Mohan

The Discourse of the Dispossessed-A Stylistic Analysis of Selected 53-84
Passages from Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss
Praveen Sharda

Dance as a Means of Social Resurgence 85-99
in Anirav Ghosh's Dancing in Cambodia
Sakoon Kaur Chhabra

The IPL did not take place 100-106
.....and it will not take place
(An Analysis of Indian Premier League, after Its Three Editions)
Shivashish Sah

The Questioned 'Reality' of Reality Television: 107-121
A Baudrillardian Perspective
Supriya Chowdhary

For Some Partition; For Others a Feast: An Analysis 122-135
of the Representation of Violence in Manto's “Thanda Gosht”
Deepti Laroia

Theory of the Impossibility of Knowledge: A Study 136-148
of The Calcutta Chromosome
Smita Jha

List of Contributors

dialog

A BI-ANNUAL INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL



EDITOR : AKSHAYA KUMAR

**A Scene from Shahid Nadeem's EK THI NAANI staged by the students
of the Department in English Auditorium on February 19-21, 2010**



EDITORIAL NOTE

For the present issue of *Dialog*, we received a good number of papers, and it was not easy to short list them for publication. Even papers which received positive reports from referees may not find their way into the present issue of the journal. We are withholding some of them for publication in the next issue. As the journal circulates more, we are sure it would invite more papers and critical inputs. Already its frequency of publication has been increased, now it is published twice a year. In the years to come, we foresee intense competition for publication in the journal. This speaks of the academic respectability that the journal has gathered over the years. From the present issue onwards, there would be a nominal subscription fee.

This issue contains papers on variety of topics. Seemingly it does not have a focus or thrust area. But the very heterogeneity of papers points towards the proliferation of critical horizons that we in the Department of English and Cultural Studies are undergoing at the moment. Films, TV serials, sports extravaganzas, pulp fiction engage us as much as serious canonical literary works do. While we do undertake linguistic analyses of literary works, we also probe into the politics of representation, particularly of the subalterns and the minorities in various discourses of culture. We do grapple with the issues of gender, caste, nationality, race and multiculturalism, and the way they are configured in language. If one is to discover underlying unity in the miscellaneous papers included in the issue, it lies in their inter-disciplinarity. Each paper transgresses the conventional boundaries of literary studies.

The contributors to the present issue are senior professors as well as young researchers. But let it be reiterated that no one gets a walk over. Each paper is reviewed by our referees, who have been prompt enough to send their reviews in time. It is indeed creditable that some of the papers written by the students (not necessarily of our Department) of M. Phil., and Ph.D. have passed the litmus test. Also *Dialog* is not an in-house journal. We receive

papers from all across the country, and from abroad. *Dialog* is an open forum, and we want to enhance our portfolio of authors as well as readers. Though we have not formulated our style-sheet for the papers to be published in the journal, yet we try to follow MLA or APL.

Of 'Text' and 'Textualities': Performing Mahasweta

Tutun Mukherjee

The way a 'text' produces or yields to 'textualities' has been an enduring interest that I have tried to explore through my work on texts and the sites of their productions, whether as literary translation and/or as theatrical performance.¹ The assumed oppositions between the written word on the page and the spoken word on the stage, between literature and theatre, text and performance have been much discussed and debated to have congealed into an uneasy understanding of their relationship. If on the one hand, Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz generalize human life in terms of social drama that is enacted at every stage of life; on the other hand, several critics have distinguished each genre as a disparate realm regarding the border-crossings between them as transgressive acts (Mukherjee 12-26).

The critical insights gained through deconstructive engagement with texts and textualities – mis-readings and mis-interpretations – have highlighted the innate indeterminacy, undecidability and the slipperiness of 'meaning'. It hardly needs to be stressed that a text is open to numerous interpretations and can accommodate discursive and divergent analytical possibilities. The text is *what* is read while textuality/s illustrates *what* structures the text and *how* it can be read. A text may be constituted in a specific manner through its textuality and, as has been made evident through numerous instances, it is possible for a text to accommodate different kinds of textualities. An interpretation of the text arises out of the kind of questions that are asked of the text and the way textualities are understood to provide possible meaning-structure(s) of the text. Edward Said holds textuality as a *practice* (1991, 89) by the way of which the text makes itself mean, realize itself, and/or makes itself understood in a particular way.² But Said cautions that textuality should not become a maze confining the enquiring mind and that only those kinds of textualities make sense which are not isolated from "the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that [make] it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work" (1991, 4). He insists that the understanding of "the

connection between texts and the existential realities of human life, politics, societies and events... The realities of power and authority – as well as the resistances offered by men and women, and social movements to institutions, authorities and orthodoxies” (1991, 5) constitutes the crucial facts that must be taken into consideration while formulating textualities.

Extending the argument, Hugh Silverman explains that a text can also relinquish the affirmation of its identity through its textualities and generate a sense of difference. In other words, textualities make it possible for the text to disperse, de-center and “de-define” itself and by spilling over boundaries, become re-inscribed in a larger texture, creating a network of meanings or a force-field of inter-textuality. Moreover, the borders of textual understanding are continually challenged by new critical awareness of the textual phenomena and their representation which not only expands the sphere of understanding but stresses the fluid nature of textuality/s. To invoke Derrida here: the text is difference itself; its textualities make evident the way it can differ within and from itself. In such differing, it defers and makes possible divergent textualities.

While tracing the growth of Performance Studies in his essay titled “Disciplines of the Text: Sites of Performance,” W.B. Worthen revisits the arguments and raises important questions on the relationship of the ‘text’ and ‘performance’ with the notions of ‘authorship’ and ‘originality’. Drawing on the views of theorists like Roland Barthes, Worthen discusses the connection between texts, textuality, and performance as “an issue deeply inflected by notions of authority – not so much professional authority, but the stabilizing, hegemonic functioning of the Author itself” (11).

In the light of Worthen’s emphasis on the issue of “authority” as “deeply inflecting” the relationship between texts, textuality and performance, I would like in this paper to examine the textualities that two texts of Mahasweta Devi have produced and how strong [or not] has been the “hegemonic” control of the ‘Author’ upon the production of those textualities. The several translations and transcreations of Mahasweta Devi’s short stories, especially “Stanadayini” and “Rudali” illustrate the fascinating

processes of textual re-production or “textual mutation”, as Barthes puts it (155). Let us consider each narrative and its various productions.

Mahasweta Devi’s “Stanadayini”

The English translation of “Stanadayini” was published by Kali for Women in the anthology *Truth Tales* in 1986, translated by Ella Dutta as “The Wet Nurse” before Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translated it as “Breastgiver” in 1987. Briefly, “Stanadayini” is a multi-layered parable-like narrative of a poor woman forced to become a ‘professional mother’ for the children of a wealthy household to support her own growing family and her crippled husband. Jashoda must ‘produce babies’ herself to retain her ‘value’ of being ‘productive with surplus milk’, rather like a milch cow. Yet, despite the many children she has breast-fed – especially those of the rich family who have grown up and are prosperous – no one spares her a thought when she dies of breast cancer. Her body lies unclaimed in the morgue of the government hospital. There is obviously enough in the story to invite allegorical interpretations. The first translator’s choice of ‘naming’ the text as “The Wet Nurse” governs the mood and style of her translation and the elaboration of the emplotment. By playing upon the mythic connotations of the name of the protagonist Jashoda [Krishna’s foster mother] and combining *mythos* with *pathos* in its rhetorical style, Dutta’s version accommodates Jashoda’s story among the narratives of the ‘exploited Other’ and to a large extent neutralizes the subversive impact of the text. The other allegorical aspect of the story is the transference of the image of India as ‘mother-by-hire’ upon the used-and-discarded Jashoda. The suggestion is that although India has served as ‘home’ [mother-land?] for people of different races, cultures, religions through the centuries, she is exploited, abused and uncared for.

Spivak, however, deploys quite a different theoretical strategy of translation as part of her project of exploring and analyzing subaltern subjectivities. Privileging literality over the allegorical, she reads the text as exemplifying the ‘capitalist’ exploitation of a subaltern woman as ‘labour’. By re-instating the symbolical ‘naming’ of Mahasweta Devi’s text “Stanadayini” as “Breastgiver,”

(whereas 'Wet Nurse' would have had 'Dhai Ma' in the original Bengali), Spivak's interpellation or catachresis in the reading of the symbolical text not only restores the writer's rhetorical use of the word but also maps a structure of relations onto another plane or another symbolic system that enriches the textual discourse.ⁱⁱⁱ As pointed out by Mary E. John, the "literalizing move" enables the examination of Jashoda's possible subject position as a subaltern woman, rather than reducing her to being the instrument and metaphor for the nation (49-50). Though Spivak does mention (*In Other Worlds* 244) that the ideological construct of 'India' and its cultural representation as goddess-mother (dissimulating the possibility that this mother is also a slave) is not a light burden for the nation to carry, she does not elaborate upon her decision to foreclose on the question of the narrative's allegorical intent (which also represents the author's reading). She seems to suggest that instead of choosing between a Jashoda as the metaphorical bearer of the nation or as the representative subaltern woman, she would rather opt for the more rewarding possibility of inscribing the gendered subaltern *into* the making and unmaking of the nation. One can argue that this perception might in fact be in consonance with Mahasweta Devi's own take on the issue in the light of her activism in favour of the tribals' and similar disadvantaged people's fight for citizenship rights.

In her essay on "Deconstructing Historiography," (*In Other Worlds* 197-221), Spivak does touch upon the general non-acknowledgement of the *instrumental* role women often play in enabling the emergence of coherent critical analyses. Spivak also claims that "what had seemed the historical predicament of the colonial subaltern [i.e., the irrecoverability of a direct, unmediated subaltern consciousness] can be made to become the predicament of *all* thought, *all* deliberative consciousness" (*In Other World*, 204) and that Ranajit Guha's advocacy of 'the rebel as the conscious subject of his own history' need no longer be treated exclusively as a 'contingent element' in another history with another subject (1-8). Instead, the 'rebel subject' can be fruitfully explored by investigating the *double* sense of 'subject'— of being subjected to processes of domination, as in Foucauldian analyses of subjectification, as well as the excesses, resistances, and more active makings of subjectivity. By drawing attention to the fact that

no simple lines of distinction or forms of measurement for such an ambivalent subject exist, she calls for both deconstructive and political interventions in the re-making and re-writing of history. Spivak's translation has a performative dimension because she sets into motion a remarkable orchestration of interpretative perspectives and creates a space into which deconstructionist, feminist, and psychoanalytical theories can travel and be interrogated by the translated narrative. Jashoda's story can thus be explored in various connotative tiers. In fact, sensitive to the fact that Marxist and feminist readings may ignore aspects of sexuality, Spivak herself ties together Lacan's general propositions on the status of the unconscious with the experience of an 'excess' or *jouissance* that goes beyond knowledge in her essay titled "'Elite' Approaches: 'Stanadayini' in a Theory of Woman's Body" (*In Other Worlds* 253-58).

The question raised is where the second sense of *jouissance*, the more general form of excess, might be located? At a specific level, Mahasweta Devi's text seems to emphasize either the silence of woman or the inscrutability of her sexual pleasure. Jashoda, for example, emphasizes the priority of her husband's desire, never referring to her own. There is also the incident of a servant being subjected to the lustful attack of a son of the family. When fear is expressed that she might "tell", she retorts "What's there to tell?" The speech of the 'Other' remains cryptic/encrypted while the body is exploited for 'excess pleasure'. Hence, the narrative site is not the psychic consciousness of the 'subject' but the body which knows more. It is Jashoda's body with her cancerous breast that responds to her last conscious or 'rational' thought: " 'If you suckle you're a mother, all lies' . . . *The sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes*" (*In Other Worlds* 260).

The text's potential 'excesses' are explored through two theatrical productions which illustrate the way engaging with the text's various dimensions can spiral into distinct textualities and different spheres of performance. The first production that I shall discuss is that of Budhan Theatre founded by Dakxin Bajrang Chhara, who is a playwright, actor, director and activist, as well as an award winning filmmaker from the tribal Chhara community of

Tejgarh, Gujarat. Budhan Theatre, named after Budhan of Kheria Sabar community in West Bengal's Purulia district who died in police custody, was started in the manner of a community development project with the purpose of creating awareness among the tribals of their rights and among the general people about the neglect suffered by and the continuing oppression and exploitation of the tribal/subaltern people.^{iv} The theatre group has about a dozen senior actors and nearly thirty adolescent and child actors. Dakxin's theatre is inspired and urged by the untiring activism of Mahasweta Devi and G.N. Devy to gain dignity, livelihood and other rights of citizenship for the nomadic *adivasi* or the tribal indigenous peoples of India who are still listed as 'Denotified Tribes' and treated in a neo-colonial manner.' They still carry the stigma of being regarded as 'born criminals'. In his insightful book titled *A Nomad called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence* (2006), Devy offers "a random list" of what the mainstream Indian society has given the adivasis through centuries and more relevantly, through the 60 years of Independence: "Forest Acts depriving them of their livelihood; a Criminal Tribes Act and a Habitual Offenders Act; ... existence as bonded labour; forest guards and private moneylenders; mosquitoes and malaria; naxalites and ideological war-groups; ...a schedule of their identity defined from outside and perpetual contempt". (6-7)

Using a street theatre idiom to create a participatory and intimate theatrical space, Budhan Theatre dramatizes 'lived-history' or the real situations in a tribal's life like police oppression, encounter killings, rape and cruelty that tribals experience daily. It is a theatre with a purpose and commitment, and the performances exhibit passionate experiential urgency to mobilize popular support or sensitize the audience to social and political atrocities being committed in front of their eyes. Their theatre is not for entertainment alone but questions political and social 'truths'. According to Dakxin, 'acting' comes 'naturally' to the adivasis. They are born performers [rather than 'born criminals'!] as they must rely on their skills to earn their living. Denied the means of ordinary livelihood, they hone their performing skills like acrobatics, mime, singing and dancing [displaced tribals use them as tricks to beg at city crossroads too]. Often, in earlier times, their performative skills were used as distraction to enable their team members to steal or pick pockets.

On 6th January 2007 at Nizam College, Hyderabad, Budhan Theatre performed their Hindi play “Choli Ke Pichey Kya Hai” [what is beneath the blouse] which was inspired by “Stanadayini”. Since the play was to be performed on the stage, Budhan’s planned presentation was perhaps slightly stylized in setting than their usual street-theatre mode, though with minimal setting and props. Moreover, along with the percussion beats of the ‘dhol’ which is the usual and only accompaniment in their street performances, recorded music was used to open the performance. The song that blared was the popular raunchy number from the Hindi film *Khalnayak* from which the play took its title. Along the walls near the entrance, strings of garish cinema posters were hung showing female actors alternating with pictures of goddesses. The stage was set showing at the background a small temple-like structure with the picture of Durga being worshipped by a priest with a lot of fanfare and burning of incense. A well-dressed be-jeweled lady, representing the rich man’s wife who would offer Jashoda the job of a wet nurse, circumambulated the stage chewing *paan* and looking arrogant. In the foreground sat two lanky emaciated figures facing each other like mirror images. The actors playing Jashoda were male and reason for this becomes clear in a highly dramatic scene towards the end when unable to bear the pain of cancer Jashoda tears apart her blouse [choli] to exhibit her mangled breasts. A tiered effect is achieved through the placing of props at different levels and the positioning of the actors. For instance, the small temple is at a higher level to the rich lady who walks around, and Jashoda, her husband and the many dolls representing babies sit or lie around on the floor. The tiered arrangement also suggests the class hierarchy – from the upper to the lowly. It also serves to contrast stasis with movement. There is a lot of energy in the performance and passion; more action and less dialogue; perhaps aiming more at the ‘spectacular’.

The two figures sitting in the foreground facing each other as in a mirror image enact the character of Jashoda. As the director Alok Gagdekar explained, the experimental technique of ‘doubling’ is used for emphasis, taking a cue from Peter Brook’s theory of experimental theatre expounded in his book *The Empty Space* [of course an unforgettable example of ‘doubling’ or ‘parallelism’ is

Waiting for Godot]. The idea the director tries to convey through the mirroring is the layered concept of human life. It also serves to depict at once the two aspects of Jashoda's life, in her own home and in the house of the rich woman. Throughout the entire performance, Jashoda does not move from her place. The poignant and sordid tale of Jashoda unfolds, recounted from the perspective that of the disprivileged subaltern. Such occurrences are not unusual in the lives of the tribal people also. Exploitation and injustice are inevitable experiences in their 'abject' lives. Jashoda submits to the lust of her crippled husband who wants to keep her producing babies so that she could breast feed the rich men's babies with her surplus milk. She is also the object of lust of the priest. Dolls representing babies lie strewn about on the floor as Jashoda struggles to feed them. Her breasts are gradually wrung dry and it seems it is the blood of her arteries that she converts into milk. When the pain of cancer grows, she is alone with her suffering. No longer of any use, Jashoda is left to die. Her corpse is dragged away like that of a decaying animal by the sweepers who come to clean the road.

The other production re-working the same story and asking similar questions of class and gender but articulated in a very different idiom is the English solo-actor presentation by Parnab Mukherjee from Kolkata. Set designer, scriptwriter, translator, media analyst and journalist, Mukherjee is the one of the youngest Indian theatre directors to have had retrospectives in the four Indian metros. Mukherjee's theatre is also of protest and activism, motivated by Marxist ideology. He travels around the country as well as the world through his theatrical performances addresses and highlights the various issues of human rights violation and environmental hazards like the Uranium Project in Jadugoda and Turamdih, rehabilitation of the victims of the Bhopal Gas tragedy, citizenship rights of the tribals in different parts of the country, Armed Forces Special Powers Act in the North East as much as issues of development in Vietnam and East Timor. He experiments with different genres, taking his cues from the well known classical and canonical plays of the west and the east in a comprehensively inclusive manner that can easily juxtapose Dario Fo's subverting farces and Sadat Hassan Manto's fiction or dramatize poems of Tagore, Neruda, Lorca or his own. He excavates a text in his own

way and prepares a fluid script which can accommodate impromptu additions/ modifications.

Every performance is presented in his own inimitable style, keeping in mind the spectator composition of a particular place. Inspired by Badal Sircar's Third Theatre with its language of sculpture and painting, his presentations are site-specific enactments deriving from the "found places" whose history and architecture match his text and build an intimate rapport with the spectators. In fact, no performance is like another – which reflects the true dynamism of theatre. Mukherjee has a single-minded devotion to theatre and spends much of his time working with college students, activist groups and professional repertories, especially in Delhi, Kolkata, Darjeeling and Varanasi, to promote an awareness of socially conscious and proactive theatre.^{vi}

On 24th June 2007, Mukherjee performed "And Dead Tree Gives No Shelter" inspired by "Stanadayini" at Saptaparni, a small and intimate open air stage in Hyderabad. The echoes of T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land* in the title of the play stressed his preoccupation with hopelessness, pain and death. The focus of attention was Mukherjee the actor alone. Dressed in jeans and a loose black shirt with only a white *dupatta* around his shoulders to indicate femininity of the character he enacts, Mukherjee used his body as the site of performance while tracing the story of Jashoda in a dramatic monologue. As explained above, he worked towards creating a participative dramatic ethos through his performance.

The general conception of theatre, deriving from the Greek word for 'seeing' and 'sight' like the word theory, seems a rather unsatisfactory term to describe certain kinds of events or dramatic presentations. By contrast, performance "though it frequently makes reference to theatricality as the most fecund metaphor for the social dimensions of cultural production," as Joseph Roach puts it (46), embraces a much wider range of human behaviour. Such behaviour may include what Michel de Certeau calls "the practice of every day life" in which there is the possibility for the role of the spectator to expand into that of a participant. Hence, performance becomes "a cultural act, a critical perspective, a political intervention" (qtd. from *PMLA* by Roach 46). Thus understood,

performance indicates the manner in which the different forms of cultural transmission, history and social memory can be combined to create a dynamic understanding of both history and society. Mukherjee's presentation suits the definition of a 'performance' quite well. His performance activates the collective memory of his audience by contextual references to mythic, historical and contemporary occurrences.

Mukherjee's was a totally stark presentation that held the audience riveted by the combined power of his gesture and fluent monologue. Mahasweta Devi's story was not repeated word for word; instead, Mukherjee wove into Jashoda's story many coeval narratives of other women and their sufferings, similar articulations of oppression and exploitation of different kinds, cries of pain, and of helplessness of the poor and the disadvantaged subaltern in contemporary situations. In Mukherjee's presentation, Jashoda is a young urban woman who is forced to marry and has to abandon her dreams of higher studies. When her husband loses his legs in an accident, she must search for means of livelihood to feed her children. She survives as the victim of feudal lords, the trader classes, and her own community. She is employed as wet-nurse in the merchant's home for a meager amount. Her breast milk, sold to support the family, gets 'democratized' and becomes available to every seeker, until the exhausted giver is afflicted by breast cancer. But where can a subaltern turn for help, who can guide her to the nearest charitable medical facility? It is a scathing comment on the so-called 'welfare society' that is preyed upon by the well-to-do.

For Mukherjee's performance, 'space' is a major factor because he uses space-specific techniques to weave his narratives. The script uses every word as a detonative symbol and a few familiar items are transformed inventively into dramatic props; for instance, a white *dupatta* becomes the oppressed woman, a few plastic bottles the babies she has breast-fed, the two halves of a water melon being scraped with a knife shows the agonizing pain of cancer. If after the show, one tells him that the performance was gut-wrenching in its directness, he replies with his natural simplicity: 'Yes, I know. I lose myself between actor and activist. The frustrated journalist in me finds it difficult to cut out the excess.'

Mukherjee promises to return with Jashoda's narrative soon. That performance will surely introduce new twists and inter-texts within its contemporary format.

Mahasweta Devi's "Rudali"

"Rudali" is a story set in south Bihar and describes the struggle of a lone woman, Sanichari in a community of landless peasants. The upper class/caste own the land and the landless are eternally entangled in debt traps. Very often the women are sexually exploited and then set up as prostitutes. Various elaborations of the daily struggle for livelihood of the abjectly poor under the life-denying oppression of the rich landlords and moneylenders, often in connivance with the police and the government officers, are available and have been documented in different ways. In its class/caste hierarchy and oppressive structures, one village appears a replica of another. Poverty unfolds its unvarying narratives of misery, deprivation, and atrocities like rape, death and forced imprisonment. Sanichari's story seems to echo similar stories of the subaltern situation and experiences evident everywhere in India, especially among poor in the villages [though the experience of oppression and exploitation of the poor in urban areas is not very different either as the recent film *Peepli Live* illustrates]. Yet, ultimately, despite extreme adversity, Sanichari manages to make her story 'different' from the hapless narratives of the rest.

Sanichari must struggle frantically to live and keep what remains of her family alive, rather like Mother Courage. In the process, her heart hardens so much that she is unable to shed a single tear when her loved ones die or leave her. One day she meets Bhikni, another single and struggling woman but one who manages to earn a living. Bhikni is a professional mourner or a *rudali*. Professional mourners or lamenters are hired by rich families to wail over their dead. The rudalis are therefore performers and must 'create spectacles' – although of the funereal kind. The otherwise brusque Sanichari finds herself bonding easily with Bhikni, thus surprising herself by doing something she has never done before. Gradually she learns from Bhikni the 'art of lamenting' – the beating of breast and wailing in simulated anguish. It is ironical that when Sanichari has mastered the art of keening, there is no

one left in her family to mourn for. As Sanichari discovers later, Bhikni is actually her mother who had deserted her when she was a child. When Bhikni dies suddenly, Sanichari cries for real for the first time in her life. She moans in anguish and tears roll down her cheeks.

The demand for rudali's services grows and Sanichari is kept busy in her new profession. She decides to enlarge her group. She approaches the prostitutes, who after being forced into the flesh trade, surrender themselves to such a life to be able to survive. She offers them an alternate means of livelihood as *rudalis*. Gradually, many of them join her. Thus Sanichari becomes the catalyst of change by transmuting her personal pain and misfortune — the alchemy of unspeakable sorrow and despair — to produce a positive resolution. Not only does Sanichari become the agent of her destiny and the subject of her own narrative, she becomes the symbol of empowerment for the helpless Dusaad and Ganju women of her village.

Sanichari's story was made into a cinematically appealing and spectacular woman-oriented Hindi film by Kalpana Lajmi in 1993. The film has beautiful cinematography by Santosh Sivan, the lyrical appeal of which is enhanced manifold by the evocative and haunting melody of Bhupen Hazarika. Interspersed are emotive songs written by Gulzar and set to unforgettable music by Hazarika. Although made for niche spectatorship, when it was released the film was appreciated by the general audience as well as the more exacting film critics. Dimple Kapadia who enacted the role of Sanichari won accolades and received the national award as the best female actor of the year. Without doubt the over-all quality and the production values of Lajmi's film are much superior to the usual run-of-mill Hindi formula films. But the point to ponder is whether the film illustrates Lajmi's rejection of the typical formula format of Bombay Hindi films or her clever manipulation of the formula features to both garner critical acclaim and ensure commercial viability of the film.

Lajmi's film *Rudali* is set in the picturesque locales of Rajasthan. The dreary desert seems an apt context for configuring Sanichari's deprived and oppressed life. The struggle of the women

and their subjugation within patriarchy in the Rajasthani society is the indubitable fact that Lajmi uses as the narrative framework. Thus shots of the beautiful yet stark landscape and the grim details of the hardships of life alternate. Sanichari or the Saturn-born, so named because her father dies soon after her birth and her mother Euli runs away with another man, lives a life of unmitigated hardship. One supposes that the conditions of her life are not too different from the life of other women of her community. Married off at an early age to a good for nothing landless tribal, the onus for providing for the family falls on Sanichari. Her son adds to her troubles as he grows up a loafer running after prostitutes, and finally marrying one and bringing her home.

Lajmi's Sanichari [Dimple Kapadia] is beautiful which also makes her the object of lust of the rich landlords. A poignant attraction develops between Sanichari and the local landlord, played by the handsome Raj Babbar. It is obvious to both that despite the romance, no relationship other than the exploitative one of the rich over poor and of man over woman can ever be allowed to develop between them. Hence, their relationship remains irresolute and does not progress beyond a few snatched moments of togetherness and longing looks. Rakhi, another beautiful and sensitive actor plays the role of Bhikni. A tender bonding develops between Sanichari and Bhikni that is very well enacted by the two gifted actors. In fact, all the actors in the film give nuanced performances and bring the characters to life. Cameo roles performed by the excellent Raghuvir Yadav, Amjad Khan and Susmita Mukherjee are memorable. The film is beautifully produced and directed and leaves a lasting impact.

In 1992, theatre director Usha Ganguli adapted and produced Mahasweta Devi's "Rudali" in Hindi with her Kolkata based theatre group Rangakarmee. Talking about the inspiration from the short story, Ganguli emphasizes its immediate dramatic appeal that motivated her play. In fact, Sanichari's story – at once a social critique and a feminist contestation of the patriarchal status quo – seemed to her to dictate its own ambience which, she maintains, she merely formulates theatrically. Allowing the mood of the story to govern the stagecraft, Ganguli's stage is set in earthy colours of brown and terracotta. The props – a couple of wobbly

cots, a pot of water, a clothesline sagging with drab clothing, along with the costumes of the actors reflect the abject poverty and desperation of the family. Ganguli herself enacts the role of Sanichari, a near-destitute woman in the South Bihar region. The dialectal word usage and the pitch and tone of the speech forms of the region permeate the dialogue. The play opens with the most powerful prop on the stage as the metaphor of the pulverizing forces of life: a heavy grinding stone that Sanichari uses off and on to pound handfuls of grain and make *roti* that her mother-in-law keeps screaming for. “*Roti de!*” – the shrill and raucous cry of the old woman hovers over the entire play rather in the manner of “*Phan de!*” – the heart-rending cry of the 1943 famine-driven peasants in Bijon Bhattacharya’s landmark 1944 play *Nabanna*. The use of the grinding stone is indeed a theatrical coup by Ganguli. It succeeds in making an unforgettable impact both visually and in the grating sound effect that is produced. Sanichari’s helplessness and desperation as she sees her family breaking up with hunger, is immediately registered and it appears as though that she herself is being pounded in the grinding stone of life.

Sanichari’s problems – the death of her husband, the sick and dying son, the old mother-in-law – become apparent soon enough and constitute the real load, not like the load of firewood she has on her head, which she must carry. There is no time for Sanichari to spare even a thought for herself. Her tears too have dried up. As the story of her life unfolds, Sanichari meets Bhikni in an extraordinarily crafted scene. Not recognizing each other immediately as old friends, they engage in a swearing bout till their sudden discovery of each other’s identity. The gentle humour of the scene adds a delicate touch to their deepening friendship. Slowly Bhikni introduces Sanichari to the art of lamentation to be performed as a part of the death rituals in the households of the rich and inducts her into the profession. Sanichari hesitates initially because she finds it difficult to simulate overt grief, to shed tears and cry. Yet, it is remarkable that when Bhikni dies suddenly of food poisoning, the dams of Sanichari’s grief seem to breach and she cries out for the first time in her life in inarticulate grief as much for her friend as for herself. Sanichari’s narrative is a remarkable depiction of the problems of the abjectly poor that remain excluded from all possible welfare munificence of the State. It also narrates

the story of women's helpless rage that must remain muzzled in a society which offers them no succor.

To indicate the outlet a woman may typically find in the domestic space to express her helpless rage, Ganguli uses apt and familiar action like pounding dough or vigorous washing of clothes. *Rudali* depicts the drama of survival – not just of Sanichari but of Gulbadan and other nameless women. Together they create a 'community' of women which is built on the understanding of each other's social compulsions and shared sorrow. Together, they make the ritual of 'crying over the dead' a subversive act and a mockery. The dramatization of their resilience and courage – of not admitting defeat in the struggle of life – is brilliantly and sensitively conveyed in Ganguli's "Rudali." The play has rightfully earned for itself a special place in the history of Indian theatre.

In her discussion on the developing textualities of Mahasweta Devi's short story, Anjum Katyal explains that "in both incarnations of 'Rudali' it has been a woman auteur who has wrought and re-wrought this text.... Each version is mediated by differing purpose and agenda of its respective author, resulting in strikingly different texts which have one feature in common – they are perceived as woman-intensive projects and received as feminist texts" (Katyal 193). It is relevant to note here that Mahasweta Devi herself does not describe the short stories discussed here as 'feminist' texts. Her purpose is to document the difference of 'class', she maintains. To emphasize one aspect at the expense of the other would constitute, according to her, a "denial of history" as she sees it. She says:

For you it may be important that this story is written by a woman ...and another woman adapted it into a play....But I think that a writer has written the story, a director has adapted it into a play. It is not very important to me whether it was done by a woman or not ...I write as a writer, not as a woman....These stories are of people's struggle, their confrontation with the system, I look at the class, not at the gender problem...(cited in Katyal 195).

What the transcreations of the short stories discussed above make clear is that while 'class' may indeed provide the macro framework of analysis for Mahasweta Devi's fiction, evidently the issues of gender find special significance. Whether it is unintentional or unconscious attention on the author's part, the fact can not be overlooked that it is after all a woman's perspective and is as such more sensitive to women's issues. Yet, whatever be the special predilections of the 'author', they are neither imposed upon the retellings nor circumscribe them in any way. It is equally clear that the way the stories get textualized by the different 'auteurs' does not privilege any one aspect of social representation, notwithstanding their respective performative orientation and critical edge.

Summation

As is true of any translation/transcreation, through its various textualities the primary text is enlarged and finds an afterlife. Edward Said has emphasized that a text is "exorbitant" and can go beyond itself (1980, 93-94). A text can demonstrate supplementarity by being something more than what it initially appears to be. The closure of textual possibilities or setting limits to a text confines its copiousness and reinforces its boundaries / margins / borderlines / frontiers – or the conditions of circumscription. Textualities of different kinds encourage the text to spill over the boundaries, frontiers and circumscriptions and move towards other definitions and realizations, governed only by the demands of a particular expressive form and the modalities of its circulation. Through its various textualities, the text can be released from the binaries of being visible or invisible, inside or outside, present or absent, text or context, one or many. Thus, textualities [re]locate a text at the interface of such oppositions and thereby highlight the innate undecidability of a text's 'being'.

Notes:

- i. In the process of analyzing texts, translating play-texts with reference to their performance as in *Staging Resistance*, and preparing an anthology of critical essays on the plays of Girish Karnad.

- ii. While acknowledging that “Theory proposed itself as a synthesis overriding petty fiefdoms within the word of intellectual production” (3), Said also warns about the singular kind of ‘textuality’ that Theory tended to impose a singular kind of textuality disconnected from history (4).
- iii. Catachresis describes the process by which a writer or a reader/analyst/translator can interrupt the flow of conventional meaning and insert a contradictory or alternative system of meaning. Catachresis ruptures the propriety - the conventional meaningfulness - of the discursive moment. Without an awareness of this rupture, there is no impetus for treating a text as symbolic. Catachresis and symbolism invoke one another, even though they might occupy different textual modalities. Spivak’s alternative system of meaning is the Marxist feminist analysis of the text demonstrating the use/exploitation of the gendered subaltern by the capitalist society. As Kristeva has explained in her discussion on poetic language, catachresis offers a challenge to the hegemony of meanings dominated by patriarchal culture and organized by certain behavioural norms. Thus, by challenging the conventional meaningfulness of Mahasweta Devi’s short story, Spivak activates the discourse of counter-transference in her translation that addresses the rhetorical richness of Devi’s text.
- iv. See article by B.T. Seetha and C.M. Muralikrishna in *Muse India* for more details.
- v. In 1998, Mahasweta Devi, Laxman Gaikwad and G.N. Devy created the ‘Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group’ (DNT-RAG) as a social initiative to address the rights of the adivasis. In 1996, Devy set up his Bhasha Trust for an Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh for tribal students. From 1998, he runs two journals devoted to tribal studies: *Dhol: A Journal of Tribal Dialects* and *Budhan* (English): *A Journal of Denotified & Nomadic Tribes*.
- vi. See Gowri Ramnarayan’s report in *The Hindu Magazine* for more details.

Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text," *Image / Music / Text*. Tr. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1977: 155-64.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Tr. Stephen F. Rendall. Berkley: U of California P., 1988.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Difference," *Margins of Philosophy*. Tr. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1982.
- "Des tours de Babel," *Difference in Translation*. Ed. Joseph Graham. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985: 165-248.
- Devy, G.N. *A Nomad called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006.
- Dutta, Ella. Tr. "The Wet Nurse". *Truth Tales: Contemporary Stories by Women of India*. Ed. Kali for Women. [First printed: Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986]. New York: Feminist Press, 1990: 25-62.
- Geertz, Clifford. "Blurred Genres: the refiguration of social thought". *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.
- Guha, Ranajit. "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency". *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Ed. Ranajit Guha. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1982.
- John, Mary E. *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory and Postcolonial Histories*. Berkeley, Calif: U of California Press, 1996.
- Katyal, Anjum. *Rudali: From Fiction to Performance*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1997.
- "The Metamorphosis of Rudali,' in *Muffled Voices: Women in Indian Theatre*. Ed. Lakshmi Subramanyam. New Delhi: Shakti Books of Har-Anand Publications, 2002: 192-214.

Mahasweta Devi. *Stanadayini o Annanyo Galpo*. 1979. Calcutta: Karuna Prakashan, 2001 rpt

— *Imaginary Maps*. Tr. Gayatri C. Spivak. Calcutta: Thema, 1993.

— and Usha Ganguli: *Rudali*. Tr. Anjum Katyal. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1993.

Mukherjee, Tutun. "Of Other Voices: Mahasweta's Devi's Short Stories translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak". *English and the Indian Short Story*. Ed. Mohan Ramanan & P. Shailaja. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2000: 94-105.

— Ed. *Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006.

Ramnarayan, Gowri. "In Conversation: Adventures in Theatre". *The Hindu Magazine*. Sunday, Sep 04, 2005.

Roach, Joseph. "Culture and Performance in the Circum-Atlantic World". *Performativity and Performance*. Edited with Introduction by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. New York: Routledge, 1995: 45-63.

Said, Edward. "The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions". *Aesthetics Today*. Eds. M. Philipson and P.J. Gudel. New York: Meridian/New American Library, 1980.

— "Introduction: Secular Criticism". *The World, the Text, the Critic*. London: Faber & Faber, 1984. Vintage: 1991 rpt: 1-30.

Salgado. K.M.. "Tribal Stories, Scribal Worlds: Mahasweta Devi and the Unreliable Translator". *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 2000; 35 i: 131-145.

- Seetha, B.T.& C.M. Muralikrishna, "Budhan, the Third Theatre".
Muse India. Jul-Aug 2007.
- Silverman, Hugh J. *Textualities: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahashweta Devi's 'Stanadayini'".
Subaltern Studies V: Writings on South Asian History and Society. Ed. Ranajit Guha. Delhi, Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1987: 91-134.
- *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- "Women in Difference: Mahasweta Devi's 'Douloti the Bountiful'". *Nationalism and Sexualities*. Eds. Andre Parker et al. London: Routledge, 1992: 96-116.
- "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995: 24-28.
- "Deconstructing Historiography". *In Other Worlds*: 197-221.
- Turner, Victor. "Dramatic Ritual/Ritual Drama: Performative and Reflexive Anthropology". *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1982:89-101.
- Worthen, W.B. "Disciplines of the Text: Sites of Performance,"
The Performance Studies Reader. Ed. Henry Bial. London & New York: Routledge, 2004. 2007 rpt : 10-25.

—*—

Interfacial Reading as Empowering Ethos: Literary Texts and Indian Multicultural Context

Anup Beniwal

India as a Political-Cultural Space and Its Attendant 'Literary' Imperatives

As a multicultural nation, India is a natural host to many possible comparative-literary scenarios. Using Amiya Dev's critical-historical classification, some of these positions can be articulated as under (Dev 23-33):

1. Literature in India can be envisioned in terms of *Unity in Diversity*, a pluralist cultural mosaic constituted by diverse, distinct but not disparate elements, and all subsumed within an overarching literary framework, mostly provided by mainstream/*marga* ethos. Though reflecting the federal character of India as a nation, this position, however, also reflects/replicates the hegemonizing and homogenising agenda inbuilt into this position.
2. Literature in India can also be envisioned in terms of commonalities and differences, i.e., *Unity and Diversity* – an *a priori* location of many languages and literatures, with votaries of each pitching either for the unity of Indian literatures or for a diversity or distinctiveness of literatures in India. It is an either/or position. Herein both the entities become exclusionary entities, charting independent trajectories of understanding literature. Further the debate whether Indian literature a singular entity or a plural forever remains open.
3. Literature in India envisioned more pragmatically as an 'inter-literary process' coupled with a 'dialectical view of literary interaction' within a multi-cultural context.

Amiya Dev's postulation of literature as an inter-literary

process offers a far more inclusive view of Indian literary environment. Being historical, it incorporates in its ambit a more mature reflection of India's politico-cultural imperatives. It encapsulates in it an awareness of critical and creative complementarity and dialogue in the production and dissemination of literature and thus offers a nuanced and inclusive approach to *do* literature within a multicultural nation.

By transcending the limiting pulls of comparatist ethos it paves a way for what can be called as interfacial reading paradigm, a converging yet autonomous reading practice across political and cultural differential. By simultaneously keeping intact the locational perspective of the reader it at once empowers him/her to share the cultural location of the text creatively. Instead of foregrounding any reading as antagonistic or absolutist, interfacial reading ushers in a process of reading texts in tandem, through each other and not against each other. Interfacial reading practice can thus become a source of great creative [and critical] opportunity within a multicultural context.

Working with the Interfacial Possibilities within Multicultural Setting

Bhikhu Parekh postulates multiculturalism as a perspective on human life. This perspective is composed of "creative interplay of . . . three complementary insights, namely the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and the internal plurality of each culture" (Parekh 338). The lessons inherent in Parekh's multicultural perspective, even at the risk of plagiarism, can be re-capitulated to suggest the possibilities inherent in interfacial reading praxis.

The strategy of interface is to obviate the comparatist paradigm that delimits an analysis within the established binaries. The interfacial strategy instead complements, extends and improvises each of the text under focus. It is especially effective when the texts being read together contain inter-textual echoes. Freed from the comparatist framework this intertextuality can easily be evolved into a referential matrix that may act as an analytical

tool for this interfacial analysis.

Interfacial reading praxis is, thus, premised on the fact that no literary text contains or represent the full truth of human life; each text is embedded in a particular culture or ideology and thus, at best, can represent only a particular vision of good life which is necessarily narrow and partial. Since multicultural societies represent interplay of different cultures, they can not be theorised or managed from within any one of them. As such they recognise the need for a dialogue – a dialogue among texts, contexts and conclusions of readings for mutual expansion of the cognitive self and not its hegemonic subjugation by the other.

The continuing contestations and mutually regulating influences inbuilt into a text or texts with a similar subject matter/ focus – when taken together and read through each other, help the reader avert the pulls of hegemony. To remould Parekh's observation in the present context, each doctrine/text carries a bit of the others within it, and is as a result internally diverse, weakly centred and possesses the moral and emotional resources to understand and even respect the others. This insight should be used as an ethical pivot for an act of reading. This understanding and approach to literary texts may lead to mutual fusion of ideas and sensibilities and would enhance the scope for an inclusive cultural vocabulary, "no doubt varied and messy but for that very reason capable of providing a common framework of a reading discourse" (388).

The Interfacial Reading Praxis: Some Positives

1. Herein both the text and its reading, instead of being appropriatory or antagonistic become ethically responsible and empowering acts. And as Ledbetter posits, "An ethic of writing is to discover and make heard silenced voices; an ethic of reading is to hear those voices" (Ledbetter, Mark 1).
2. It is a reading practice that is cognizant of the fact that "No text, no human story . . . is without victims" (Ledbetter 1-2). And as Ledbetter suggest, such a reading resists the

stories of the powerful acquiring meta-narrativity at the cost of the margins. At the same time, though empathising with the margins, it does not pitch their stories in antagonistic opposition to the mainstream. In fact, it dissolves this binary and hierarchical reading dynamics and in its place ushers in the concept of critical complementarity. It is a mutually regenerative reading.¹

3. It is a reading where it is aesthetics and thematic of literature, and not its language or politics, that takes precedence in this reading.
4. Interfacial reading shuns the idea of correct, right or unilateral reading, it also cautions against playful readings, “to be playful is to practice politics and ethics . . . As politics . . . narratives always run the risk of suggesting that there is only the story to tell, an exercise in objectivity that denies difference in people, their places, needs, histories and futures” (Ricoeur, Paul qutd. in Ledbetter 5). Paul Ricoeur calls such reading/writing of text the first naiveté. Yet an ethic of reading and writing calls for what Ricoeur calls as the second naiveté. It suggests that there is not “the” story to tell, but rather a multitude of stories, within seemingly singular narrative, myriad voices wishing to be heard, though silenced by the convenience of larger narrative, a master plot that is neat, seductively ideal, but whose construct is in the hands of the privileged and the powerful and whose imposition is necessary to maintain and perpetuate that privilege and power” (5).
5. Interfacial reading thus inheres in resurrecting for one the voices either lost in the narrative or marginalized by it. Instead of the obvious, surface, conventional and unilateral or one dimensional reading, interfacial reading methods call for reorientation/re-sensitization of our reading practices. Instead of prioritising canons and cultures that inevitably creates silenced voices; interfacial methods reorient the attention of the reader to ‘questions such as “how many voices can be heard?” and “by what means, methodologically, can we hear that?”. . . The issue has

very strong pedagogical dimension. We have become so consumed with teaching students what to read, but we have neglected teaching students how to read” (Ledbetter 6-7). Further the interfacial reading frees reading from “the language of cannon, of measure, as though all texts can be held in judgement by another. Instead it is a plea for all texts to be held raptly in conversation with each other” (7).

Possible Case Studies: Interfacial Reading in Practice

One of the problems that tend to limit the scope of comparative studies lies in its inbuilt hierarchical, binary, even oppositional analytic frame it has conventionally brought to bear on its subject matter. Interfacial readings, on the other hand, open texts, authors and even the extant readings of the two (authors and texts) – both intra and inter language/culture/nation – to the possibility of conversational or complementary reading, i.e., reading not as an imposition of meaning or as opposition to meaning but as dialectical/contextual activity, at various levels and in various permutations and combinations. Some of these possibilities – within Indian literary space – are outlined below.

Inter-text Interfacial Reading:

- A. Simultaneous reading of two texts originating from the same raw material but narrated across genres. For example, interfacial reading of ‘Jhansi Ki Rani’ (Chauhan: from website 4to40.com), a narrative poem in Hindi, *The Queen of Jhansi* (Devi 2003), a biographical fiction by Mahasweta Devi, originally written in Bengali and later translated into English and *Jhansi Ki Rani*, a historical novel in Hindi by Varma.

Both Subhdra Kumari Chauhan and Vrindavan Lal Varma in their works re-present Lakshmibai as an anti-colonial national icon. But their nationalist credo is blatantly chauvinistic. In their works the queen of Jhansi derives her heroism and legitimises her public persona in masculine terms. Mahasweta Devi also re-writes Lakshmi Bai very much within the nationalist frame, but her

subaltern credo, redeems this nationalism from masculinity. Consequently Mahasweta Devi's Lakshmi Bai is intensely female. As gendered subject, she is a subaltern re-written or re-visited. While in Varma and Chauhan the portrayal of the queen reinforces the credo of heroic nationalism through the sedimentation and extension of militant mythologies, Mahasweta Devi's enters her subject through *Bundelkhandi* folklores but reconstructs it via empirical historiography. The difference in these narrative approaches however, does not mean that one reading is right and the other wrong, or that one is fictional/false and the other factual/true. Both the readings are equally valid and persuasive within their respective ideological/narrative frames. If read together with this interfacial mindset, all these varied readings coalesce together not only to enrich our understanding of queen's historical persona but makes us aware of the contestations, complexities and contradictions that surround the construction of history/knowledge. In an interfacial reader this *readerly* practice, thus, converge at one point the divergent/alternative perspectives around Lakshmi Bai into a mutual dialogue.

- B. Reading two texts originating from a common historical pool but with contending prioritization of the focus across ideological and locational fault lines. For example, an interfacial reading of 'Jhansi Ki Rani' a '*swarna*-nationalist-poetic rendering of the 'historical-have' by Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, and 'Jhalkari Bai' (Sainik 11), a dalit poetic narrative of queen's comrade in the revolt but nevertheless a 'have not' of mainstream history.

At one level this reading can bring in a synthesis of protest and imitation. As such it could usher in a simultaneous blend of 'protest' and 'reconciliation.' But this reading is premised on an aware distinction between imitation and imposition. The language of imitation may provoke reactions [ideological/nationalist] but it does not necessarily mean subjugation per se. As such an interfacial reading of the two prisms open for the reader the inclusive nature of the freedom struggle of 1857.

- C. Reading *Amar Balidani Jhalkari Bai* by Sainik in conjunction with *Veerangana Jhalkari Bai* (Naimisharay).

Both of these texts are fictional renderings of a dalit woman, Jhalkari Bai, in the context of India's first war of Independence in 1857.

While the former is an upper caste rendering the latter is a dalit reconstruction of Jhalakari Bai, both are cast in nationalist and not class or caste mould. As such an interfacial reading of the two opens up a possibility of converging interpretive praxis that cuts across patronizing representation and empathising self-presentation of dalit lives within the domain of literature.

D. Reading *Veernagna Jhalkari Bai* or *Amar Balidani Jhalkari Bai* as an extension/ or another facet of Vrindavanlal Varma's *Jhansi Ki Rani* or Mahasweta Devi's *The Queen of Jhansi*.

The Queen of Jhansi and *Veerangana Jhalkari Bai* – the first a Bengali text in English translation, and the second a Hindi text – if approached from the above charted reading perspective would not only complement, extend and improvise on each other but would help discover new meanings by transcending the delimiting binaries inherent in the comparatist paradigm.

The Queen of Jhansi and *Veerangana Jhalkari Bai* narrate the life-history of two iconoclasts (and are also written by two literary iconoclasts), focus on the same period but with characters – Jhalkari Bai and Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi – who belonged to two different castes/classes. However, they focus on these characters in a way that each complements the other when put in an interfacial reading paradigm. Studying them together, against this understanding, help arrive at an inclusive reading praxis – that is imperative for maintaining the multiculturalism of India that inheres in the mantra of its constituent castes/classes being different but equal.

The protagonist of each of these works is a historical figure, purportedly negotiating the same historical reality from two diametrically opposite locations. *Veernagna Jhalkari Bai* by Mohandas Naimisharay illustrates an act of inserting oneself (Naimisharay being a self-avowed dalit writer) in the text one

creates and the context out of which it emerges. But this insertion is in no way in opposition to or outside the mainstream history. In problematizing the historical givens, the text, in fact expands the scope of the mainstream historiography. Naimisharay affects this imaginative and creative expansion through a critical and complimentary insertion of the margin in the persona of Jhalkari Bai (as a foil to Lakshmi Bai) within the narrative of 1857.

Naimisharay's *Jhalkari Bai* thus supplements the privileged narrative of *Jhansi Ki Rani* by inserting in it the dalit voice. In this text the 'critique' the 'grand narrative' comes in handy to question single narrative of the nation. It also humanises the legendary and glorifies the common – without taking recourse to the prevalent 'romantic tradition'. It rather privileges the both the unwritten/unarticulated and the folk but by drawing upon oral traditions. Instead of creating oppositional discourse, it – a minority history – offers a democratic expansion of history. It is a struggle for inclusion and representation that is characteristic of liberal and representative but multicultural democracy

Intra Text Interfacial Reading:

- A. Reading *Amar Balidani Jhalkari Bai* or *Veernagna Jhalkari Bai* as a text where queen of Jhansi and Jhalkaribai are envisioned as each other's alter-egos, one approximating the other and inhabiting similar spaces.

An interfacial reading of the above texts offers various permutations and combinations of reading and in the process help one realise that the:

1. Subaltern is not a monolith, a flat stratified construct, without its inner dissensions and tensions. These tensions, in fact, extend the discourse of the subaltern.
2. Reading in itself becomes a kind of debate in which the two 'contrary' facets of the same 'text' get represented/presented/discussed with much care and sympathy.

Interfacial praxis thus emerges as a reading strategy in

which texts are read with each other as a set of intersecting relationships which are dialogically and continually evolving. It helps approach literature as an ever-evolving continuum, which while keeping the location of the reader in mind helps expand the meaning of the text – and hence the interrelatedness of the context – without compromising on the merit of the literary aesthetics or the identity of the reader.

This reading practice also helps in the creation of what is called as differentiated reading citizenship wherein: (a) each reading individual/community has the right to be culturally different and preserve his/her community identity, and (b) those communities that have for long been victims of dominant canonical/epistemological marginalisation can compete on equal terms with the rest of the society. Consequently Reading/Writing becomes an act of *discovery* and *expansion* of the self/other or a self regenerative creative/critical act.

Amartya Sen in his *The Argumentative Indian* offers yet another take on the efficacy of intra-text interfacial reading/writing particularly in the context of the mythical/classical Indian texts. These texts which mainly consist of heterogeneous tales woven around the Principal Story are engagingly full of dialogues, dilemmas and alternative perspective within the same frame: “We encounter masses of arguments and counter arguments spread over incessant debates and disputations” (Sen 2005: 5). He goes on to argue that:

These arguments are quite substantive in themselves. For example in BhagavaGita – a small section of Mahabharata – presents a tussle between two contrary moral positions – Krishna’s emphasis on doing one’s duty on one side and Arjuna’s focus on avoiding bad consequences (and generating good ones) on the other.

Krishna’s hallowing of demands of duty wins the argument, at least when seen from religious perspective. His moral position has also been endorsed by philosophical and literary treatises. T. S. Eliot in *Four Quartets* summarised Krishna’s view in the form of an admonishment: “And do you think of the fruits of action.

Fare forward.” He says: “Not fare well, / But fare forward, voyagers.” And as yet , as a debate in which there are two reasonable sides, the epic Mahabharata itself presents, sequentially, each of the two contrary arguments with much care and sympathy. .Indeed the tragic desolation that post war-combat and post-carnage-land seems to face towards the end of the Epic can be seen as the vindication of Arjuna’s profound doubts. Arjuna’s contrary arguments are not really vanquished, no matter what the message of Bhagavat Gita is meant to be. There remains a powerful case for ‘faring well’ and not just ‘forward’.

It is important to take on board Arjuna’s consequential analysis, in addition to considering Krishna’s argument for doing one’s duty. The univocal message of Gita requires supplementation by the broader argumentative wisdom of Mahabharata of which Gita is only a small part. We have to take note not only of the opinion that won – or allegedly won – in the debates, but also the other points of views that were presented and are recorded or remembered. A defeated argument that refuses to be obliterated can remain very alive (5-7).

Translation as an Interfacial Reading Ethos

Translation as a creative-critical recreation of the original text into another language offers yet another possibility/facet of interfacial literary reading/writing. It can, with patience and sensitivity, be forged into a complete/composite creative/critical package, wherein translation becomes an act of talking back to the original so as to etch out what is being translated with care and sympathy. Approached this way translation becomes symbiotic and dialogic negotiation between the target and the original.

As an interfacial practice, translation can become an empathising act, where the meanings are contextualised without equivalences. Thus while being honest and committed to the original, it nevertheless, becomes an act of creative re-writing that subtly impinges on the notion of original and correct reading. As an interfacial activity “translation enables a text to continue life in another context, and the translated text becomes an original by virtue of its continued existence in that new context” (Bassnett 151)

Recapitulating the Argument

To sum up, Indian plurality inheres in its comparative but compatible and even more significantly, complementary cultural modes. Any cultural production – be it literature, cinema, or art – on closer examination bears witness to this fact. If the premise is tenable, it can be used as an empowering and equivocal or egalitarian/symbiotic reading practice with a potential to usher in an enabling critical perspective to approach and comprehend literature. In such an interfacial convergence and critique of diverse literary productions, each participating text complements and enhances the potential of the other, thus enriching one another by mutual reflection and refraction. Such a study will not only broaden the critical scope of the works read against, in tandem, along and through each other, but would also be an improvement over the comparative paradigm as we understand and deploy it. The inter-textual echoes, gleaned through this reading, would cut across and foreground each other for each text would act as an analytic and contextual reference for the other.

Notes

- i. The erasure from the master plot can be responded either by re-insertion of one's story within it or by re-visioning the master plot itself. In both the cases these corrective measures may lead to an establishment of a counter master plot, a tooth for tooth vindictiveness. Yet another position can be going beyond the re-establishment of another master plot. It implies discovering a story within the master plot that stands over against it. It calls for, what Adrienne Rich calls, 'the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction' (Adrienne Rich qtd. in Ledbetter 3).

Works Cited

- Bassnett, Susan. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- Dev, Amiya. "Comparative literature in India", in Totosty de Zepetnek

(ed.)". *Comparative Literatures and Comparative Culture Studies*, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2003. 23-33.

Devi, Mahasweta. *The Queen of Jhansi*. trans. Sagaree and Mandira Sengupta. Calcutta: Seagull, 2003.

Ledbetter, Mark. *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative or Doing Violence to the Body: An Ethic of Reading and Writing*. Houndmills: MacMillan, 1996.

Naimisharay, Mohandas. *Veerangana Jhalkari Bai*. New Delhi: Radhakrishan, Prakashan, 2003.

Parekh, Bhikhu. *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*. London: Macmillan Press, 2000.

Sainik, Naresh Chandra Saxena. *Amar Balidani Jhalkari Bai*. Allahbad: Sahitya Sangam, 2002.

Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative Indian: Writing on Indian History, Culture and Identity*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.

Varma, Vrindavan Lal. *Jhansi Ki Rani*. New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2006.

—*—

“Like Antaeus”: Thoreau’s Rooted Warrior Stance

Brian U. Adler

The idea of Henry David Thoreau as a hero in *Walden* is not new. Many critics refer to the persona or character we see living on the shores of Walden Pond as a hero and his actions as heroic. Leo Marx begins his discussion of *Walden* by speaking of its “hero’s with-drawal from society” (242). Sherman Paul mentions Thoreau’s “determined heroism” (322). Michael West, in an article whose subtitle suggestively reads “The Heroic Dimensions of Thoreau’s Wordplay,” links the idea of the hero with Thoreau indirectly, saying “Thoreau sought to present a vision of life lived on heroic terms” (1053). Ian Marshall demonstrates a literary influence of *The Odyssey* on *Walden*, calling it “a modern epic” (61), and says that “essential to the Walden myth is [the idea of the] ‘hero’” (54), and he assumes it is obvious why we should accord Thoreau heroic status. Charles Anderson offers a way of reading the book by observing that embodied in *Walden*’s movement “is the archetypal monomyth of the hero’s retreat from society, his initiation, and final return” (260). This is the central action that Joseph Campbell elucidates in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (30)

In Campbell, the hero struggles; he does more than encounter fabulous forces—he either conquers them or dies trying. The encounter and the ensuing struggle matter greatly, not only for the outcome, but for the integrity of the vision brought back. Thoreau demonstrates bravery in being willing to persist in his individual fight of getting a living honestly and unconventionally. He will “front only the essential facts of life” (88), *fronting* carrying an heroic connotation, almost in an aggressive sense.

The word *hero* had a rather limited range of usage among the Greeks. It originally was a title "given to men of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favored by the gods" (OED). Only men who participated in wars could be heroes. Certainly a large part of being a hero in the classic sense involves armed conflict, and if we accept Campbell's paradigm of the hero's journey, a strongly militant attitude is needed if the hero is to return with his boons. In other words, a hero classically defined is a warrior. Can we construe Thoreau's persona in *Walden* and in his other writings so that the demarcation between hero and warrior makes sense? We can do so in the peculiar way Thoreau roots himself in the natural world, but we must first localize the heroic action.

The activity in *Walden* takes place on at least two levels. One level which has a strong influence on the pattern of the book and the way we perceive the protagonist, is that of the psychomachia. A psycho-machia is thought of as a psychological battle within the individual, "a conflict of the soul" (OED), between the forces of good and evil, a fight for the well being of the spiritual life. *Walden* is obviously about a battle, charting the dangers, pit-falls, illusions, and excesses into which materialistically minded mankind can and does fall. But Thoreau himself is not out of the fray—*Walden*, among other things, is his apology, a defense (we should note the idea of antagonism in the use of such a word) of his actions to the world. And by his very use of language, Thoreau is doing more than describing something *post facto*—as he writes he creates the experience of mediation between the world as it is and the world as he knows it to be in its deepest, truest sense. Thoreau empowers himself by this retelling as he takes us through these shaping encounters so that we too receive the blessings from his text and from his struggle. *Walden* harkens back to the original impulses behind literature—to retell mythic events, and in their retelling, for us to share in the actions of those events ourselves, to be linked to the participants through the retelling. Thus, on this level we can see *Walden* as an experience of one man's formation of his reality through interactions with the world—in this sense all the action of *Walden* takes place internally, within the human psyche. The statement of *Walden* itself is a declaration of heroic struggle.

On another level, on the fictional/thematic level of Thoreau

a psychomachia, dealing with conflicting elements in the soul. But each person can be heroic—the “seeds of a heroic ardor” are in each of us. This is a democratic vision of the hero that will not see full flowering until Whitman. Another journal entry speaks of the universality of aggressive striving; even Nature is not free from it:

War is the sympathy of concussion. We would
fain rub one against another. . . . When the sun
bursts through the morning fog I seem to hear the
din of war louder than when his chariot thundered
on the plains of Troy. Every man is a warrior
when he aspires. (May 14, 1840)

In an undated journal entry, Thoreau writes a poem titled “The Hero”:

What doth he ask?
Some worthy task,
Never to run
Till that be done,
That never done
Under the sun.
Here to begin
All things to win
By his endeavor
Forever and ever.
Happy and well
On this ground to dwell,
This soil subdue,
Plant, and renew. (undated, 1845†47)

The ideas contained in this poem, written when Thoreau actually lived at Walden, suggest the importance he sees himself having, and its last three lines emphasize the importance of rootedness, being planted firmly on one’s ground. Thoreau, through his stance at Walden Pond, would reorder the universe, renewing the worn out soil of man’s soul and fostering favorable growing conditions for our best fruits.

Thoreau tends to pattern his concept of the rooted hero on

as a character, we see him as a fighter, a spiritual warrior, brave, heroic, and aggressive, with the fighting characteristics of a particular kind of contestant—the wrestler. To be successful, a wrestler must have a highly developed sense of balance, knowing where his center of gravity is, or, to put it another way, knowing how he is planted. The equivalent of Milton's right reason in *Walden* is correct attitude, and this attitude is expressed in the image cluster of stance and rootedness. For Thoreau, the ideal of the wrestler is embodied in the mythic figure of Antaeus, the offspring of Posidon and Gia (Earth), who derived his strength from his contact with the ground. References to Antaeus and being Antaeus like run through many of Thoreau's writings (Seybold 126), but in *Walden* the significant reference to the mythic wrestler occurs in "The Bean Field." Thoreau says that he hoed his beans during his first summer at Walden Pond more frequently than he read his precious books, and he comments that his beans and the act of tilling the earth "attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus" (150). This attachment to the earth is the central focal point for all of Thoreau's explorations of the natural and spiritual world. From this attachment or rootedness comes the power needed to persevere in the fight for spiritual and moral excellence and purity. Even with the attachment, however, the work is draining: "If one listens to the faintest but constant suggestions of his genius, which are certainly true, he sees not to what extremes, or even insanity, it may lead him. . . . Though the result were bodily weakness" the results may justify the cost, and if the battle is pursued to its end, Thoreau is certain that "All nature is your congratulation" (208).

The concept of the hero, the mighty wrestler/warrior, is never far from Thoreau's mind. In an early journal entry, Thoreau speculates about the internal battle:

What a hero one can be without moving a finger!
The world is not a field worthy of us, nor can we
be satisfied with the plains of Troy. A glorious
strife seems waging within us. There are in each
the seeds of a heroic ardor. . . . (July 13, 1838)

This battle takes place completely within the person—it is

myths that he knew well. Once such reference point concerns the struggle of the Buddha and the issues of right†conduct and of the spiritual warrior†wrestler who plants himself firmly within the field of battle. From the *Jataka*, we learn of heroic struggle and the correct and rooted stance in order for the Buddha to attain and retain enlightenment:

He *placed* himself, with a *firm resolve*, beneath the Bo Tree, . . . and straightaway was approached by Kama†Mara, the god of love and death. The dangerous god appeared mounted on an elephant and carrying weapons in his thousand hands. He was surrounded by his army, which extended twelve leagues before him, twelve to the right, twelve to the left, and in the rear as far as to the confines of the world; . . . The protecting deities of the universe took flight, but the Future Buddha remained *unmoved* beneath the Tree. And the god then assailed him, seeking to break his concentration. (Campbell 32, emphasis added)

[Siddhatta] looked around on three sides, and said to himself, “There is no one here [with me]. . . . But I have these Ten Perfections, like old retainers long cherished at my board. It therefore behooves me to make the Ten Perfections my shield and my sword, and to *strike a blow* with them that shall destroy this strong array.” (Warren 78, emphasis added)

The Buddha uses his own weapons, along with steadfastness, en-lightened passivity, and an alliance with the earth to win the battle; at its conclusion, the minor gods, too frightened to fight with him, shout, “Mara is defeated! Prince Siddhat-ta has conquered!” (Warren 81). This process is similar to what Stephen Stracner notices in Thoreau’s actions as he seems to be following “one of the dictates of the Hindu Ordinances of Menu,” which speaks of retreat, work and preparation, and renunciation, leading ultimately to “*moksa* or oneness with the absolute” (7). As Markus Poetzsch indicates, “For Thoreau, the simple and sincere life is not

a life of poverty or frugality merely, not a life lived 'cheaply' because of slender means, but rather an existence founded on the conscious paring away of excess and superfluity" (391). Such an exercise requires supreme effort.

Another powerful religious myth replays the story of a spiritual battle that, significantly, takes on the contours of a wrestling match. In Genesis chapter 32, Jacob has an encounter with an angel at night:

And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh. . . . Then he said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel [which means 'He who strives or wrestles with God'], for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Genesis 32.24†28)

Both of these accounts act as shaping paradigms for Thoreau's portrayal of himself. The struggles are metaphorical and sym-bolic, but couched in the vibrant terms of psychomachia, an armed fight for life.

Walden is replete with observations that indicate Thoreau to be at war with the status quo. Looking around himself at farms that are, still in the mid-nineteenth century, powerful economic engines, he scathingly observes: "A model farm! . . . Stocked with men! A great grease-spot, redolent of manures and buttermilk! Under a high state of cultivation being manured with the hearts and brains of men! . . . Such is a model farm" (190). Thoreau must sensitize us to the fact that we are engaged in a serious fight, and that it goes beyond a recognition of our "quiet desperation" (7). Only after he has defined the arena in which he strives can he impart the hard won wisdom he has gained. He begins by telling his perceptions of current conditions. He says,

The twelve labors of Hercules were trifling in comparison with those which my neighbors have undertaken; for they were only twelve, and had

an end; but I could never see that these men slew or captured any monster or finished any labor. (2)

We should note the reference to the hero, Hercules, and the aggressive sense of the metaphor. Thoreau goes on to say that because we are not in control, we are not able to maintain a healthy and strong stance with the earth: "The better part of the man is soon ploughed into the soil for compost" (3). Thoreau looks around and sees bondage and enslavement everywhere. We must struggle constantly to break into the proper clearing: "Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations" (166).

Thoreau makes constant reference to the internal battle taking place within the heart. The struggle of the psychomachia is unrelenting and brutal:

there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both north and south. It is hard to have a southern overseer; it is worse to have a northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave driver of yourself. . . . Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our own private opinion. What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate. (6)

The author hammers away at the theme that man is enslaved to the lowest forces within him. He says:

I am wont to think that men are not so much the keepers of herds as herds are the keepers of men, the former are so much the freer. . . . Man thus not only works for the animal within him, but, for a symbol of this, he works for the animal without him. (55)

And Thoreau realizes the effort of bravery required to engage in the psychomachic battle. He says "it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a

government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone" (312). Who has the power to help us help ourselves, Thoreau punningly asks: "Self emancipation even in the West Indian provinces of the fancy and imagination—what Wilber-force is there to bring that about?" (317). The force is with Thoreau, and he will tell us how the force may be with us.

As with a wrestler, the stance is all important. One must stand correctly in order to direct the issue to a successful outcome. Stance, or the way one is rooted to one's ground, becomes the most important ingredient in the contest, and this reminds us of Emerson's impelling thought in *Nature*, that we must seek our own original stance and relationship with the universe. Thoreau exclaims, "Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new" (7). And he comments,

When we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, . . . it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left. But alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear. (7)

How do we become alert and healthy again? How do we place ourselves in a positive relationship towards life? Thoreau says we must be conscious of the possibilities of our strength:

The soil, it appears, is suited to the seed, for it has sent its radicle downward, and it may now send its shoot upward also with confidence. Why has man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above? (15)

Being attached to the earth is a central image and metaphor in *Walden*; our task as spiritual wrestlers is to get our footing, to find sincerity and integrity through the contact with "some solid and honest though earthy foundation" (37). Thoreau tells us "There

is a solid bottom everywhere” (321), but we must strive to find it. The fruitful search for that foundation causes us to establish close ties with the earth, with the spirit of Nature, and with the deepest elements of our human nature. Inspiration comes from nature: “Instead of calling on some scholar, I paid a visit to particular trees. These were the shrines I visited both summer and winter” (194). Walden Pond, of course, serves as the chief locus for spirituality for Thoreau: “The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges” (288).

Sherman Paul calls *Walden* “a fable of the renewal of life” (293), but this description belies the seriousness and the strenuousness called for to meet one level of Thoreau’s message, which is about transformation and complete and naked contact with the natural world. No mediation between mankind and nature: “No yard! But unfenced Nature reaching up to your very sills” (124). Wordsworth speaks more appropriately of the place we go when we enter the world of *Walden* in his “Prospectus” to *The Excursion*:

Not Chaos, not
The Darkest pit of lower Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
My haunt, and the main region of my song. (34 41)

The spiritual warrior in the mold of Thoreau goes to a place few have visited. Such a person, fully awakened, is rare: “I have never yet met a man who is quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?” (88). The journey out requires so much courage in order to have contact with what is truly real in nature: “not till we are completely lost, or turned round,—for a man needs only to be turned round once who has eyes shut in this world to be lost,—do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature” (166).

To be like Thoreau and to be with him to meet “the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn” (325) means we must be training and conditioning

ourselves, our senses fully opened to the natural world. Such a transformation will require one to wrestle with the normal avenues of life, but the results are worth the struggle, if one can live in the changed mode long enough. Even Thoreau must struggle to hold on to that change, as he indicates: "Once it chanced that I stood in the very abutment of a rainbow's arch, which filled the lower stratum of the atmosphere, tinging the grass and leaves around, and dazzling me as if I looked through colored crystal. It was a lake of rainbow light, in which for a short while, I lived like a dolphin. If that had lasted longer, it might have tinged my employments of life" (195). The stance is required constantly; the struggle continues ever through one's life; the boon cannot be weighed in volume but rather by worth: "The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of a rainbow which I have clutched" (208). What Thoreau clutches at most strenuously transforms the world. These are the actions of a successful warrior wrestler, rooted sublimely and superbly in the earth.

Works Cited

Anderson, Charles. *The Magic Circle of Walden*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962.

The Bible. Authorized King James Version. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: Bollingen, 1949.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature and Other Essays*. New York: Dover, 2009.

Marshall, Ian. "Thoreau's Walden Odyssey," *American Transcendental Quarterly*, 59 (1986), 53-62.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden*. New York: Oxford UP, 1964.

Oxford English Dictionary. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.

Paul, Sherman. *The Shores of America*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1958.

Poetzsch, Markus. "Sounding Walden Pond: The Depths and 'Double Shadows' of Thoreau's Autobiographical Symbol." *American Transcendental Quarterly*, 22 (2008), 387-401.

Seybold, Ethel. *Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1951.

Stracner, Stephen. "Walden: Thoreau's *Vanaprasthya*." *Thoreau Journal Quarterly*, 5 (1973), 8-12.

Thoreau, Henry David. *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*. Ed. Odell Shepard. New York: Dover, 1961.

. *Walden. A Fully Annotated Edition*. Ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer. New Haven: Yale UP, 2004.

Warren, Henry C. *Buddhism in Translations*. New York: Atheneum, 1963.

West, Michael. "Scatology and Eschatology: The Heroic Dimension of Thoreau's Wordplay." *PMLA*, 89 (1974), 1043-1064.

Wordsworth, William. *The Excursion*. Ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, et al. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007.

—————*—————

Translation: The Thing as/and a Paradigm

Rajesh Kumar Sharma

The King is a thing . . . of nothing. Shakespeare

. . . the actual act of writing or translating teaches that this someone 'equally at home' translates as someone equidistant from both languages, i.e., at a loss in any one language, in exile from that single and fictional 'mother-tongue,' the 'natural' language. (Pierre Jorris, translator of Maurice Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community*, xxvii)

Maurice Blanchot, reading arguably the best known essay on translation "The Task of the Translator" by Walter Benjamin, remarks that translators are "the hidden masters of our culture" and "writers of the rarest sort and truly incomparable" (57). Against common sense, he even sees them as "writer[s] of singular originality" (59). We know that both Benjamin and Blanchot contemplated literature, philosophy and politics with an intensity that melts the icy edges of domains. Their work has become, for their style of thought, paradigmatic of the crisis of disciplinary domains. Indeed, both have meticulously ripped the fabric of identities off truths and subjectivities, yet meditated steadfastly on the elusive yet irreducible human condition with the compassion of bodhisattvas.

What is it in translation that fascinates them both? Is it that translation is the parallel space, like some parallel universe, that opens up a space for thought between the languages? Is it that, as the parallel space of difference, translation makes possible the thinking of language as such? Blanchot likens the translator to Hercules who would draw together distant shores of the sea (59). His intention, apparently, is not to suggest impossible labours but a messianic dream that is nevertheless underwritten by the recognition of different, and far apart, splendours.

What is translation? What to make of its ontological status? Perhaps it is a paradigm in the sense in which Giorgio Agamben,

following Plato and Aristotle, understands the paradigm. Working out its implications in Michel Foucault, Agamben sees the paradigm as a singularity that exposes its own “knowability” and hence “allows us [like the hypothesis in certain cases] to reach an un presupposed principle”. It is “a means for comprehending the set, yet at the same time it’s a singularity,” “a singularity which in some way stands for all the others”. To be paradigmatic is to be beside; etymologically, a paradigm is what appears beside. The singularity discloses more than itself: a whole set of relationships, a whole way of relating. It discloses the structure of its own “knowability”. In a way then, the singularity neutralizes itself, but not entirely, and continues to glimmer beside what it discloses. It is like an example, Agamben notes, in which the thing (of which it is an example) is excluded, but not quite enough. It is because the thing lingers in the paradigm that the paradigm is able to carry us where the inductive and the deductive methods do not go: beyond the realm of the universal and the individual, and beyond also the fallacies of historicism, right into the field of genealogies populated by singularities, as traced by Foucault (3). Can we then suggest that translation is trafficking in the other? That translation is the other? That translation is the trace of its own disappearance?

The field of translation theory (a rather slippery field!) seems torn between two fiercely opposed positions. On one side stand those for whom translation is literal or it is not translation. On the other are the champions of the translator’s freedom. “Fidelity” versus “freedom”, as Benjamin puts it (25). Jorge Luis Borges and Vladimir Nabokov stand in the first camp. “The term ‘free translation’ smacks of knavery and tyranny. It is when the translator sets out to render the ‘spirit’ –not the textual sense– that he begins to traduce his author. The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase,” thunders Nabokov. He penned these words in 1955 in an essay in which he recounts his experiences of translating Pushkin’s *Onegin*; he had been translating the work for a good five years then. Before concluding, he states in all solemnity, “And when my *Onegin* is ready, it will either conform exactly to my vision or not appear at all”. (87) And his vision of translation is literalist: “to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text”(77).

Writing in 1935, Borges tears apart the translators of *The Thousand and One Nights* for the wanton liberties they have taken with the purity of the original composed probably in the thirteenth century. The translators lined up to be thrashed by one of the wittiest tongues in the repertory of the twentieth century letters are Jean Antoine Galland and J.C. Mardrus (both Frenchmen), Edward Lane and Captain Richard Francis Burton (both Englishmen) and Enno Littmann (a German). Borges hilariously accuses them of indulging their perverse, often Orientalist, taste for “convolutions and occultations”, “archaisms” and “futurisms”, “discretions” and “interpolations”. Among the priceless gems of translation he digs out is this sentence which occurs in Edward Lane: “And in this palace is the last information respecting lords collected in the dust” (44).

But notwithstanding the severe tongue-lashing meted out to the dead translators, Borges rues that “[i]n Littmann, who, like Washington, cannot tell a lie, there is nothing but the probity of Germany. This is so little, so very little. The commerce between Germany and the *Nights* should have produced something more.” And he goes on to whisper dreamily: “There are marvels in the *Nights* that I would like to see rethought in German”(46). His dream, uttered briefly towards the end of his essay, compels one to reread the essay and ask: Is not his witty tearing apart of the translations really a celebration of excesses perpetrated by the translators who were “rethinking” in their own languages and times the old Arabic tales? Himself the author of the immortal “Library of Babel”, in which every text is both identical *and* different, is not Borges affirming –in a manner that deconstructs under cover of a joyous demolition– the uncanny creativity of the translational act?

As a matter of fact, but noticeable only *after* a first glance, Nabokov’s literalism too is not to be taken literally. His intention is signalled clearly enough in his desire for “translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity” (83). It is a strange literalism for it requires the hermeneutic labours of a Hercules. Moreover, it recognizes the original author’s mixed and complex inheritance: in this case, Pushkin’s French as well as Russian literary and cultural

background (75). And it understands languages as transformed and transforming under the impact of other languages: in this case, again, “the Russian literary language [undergoing] the prodigious impact of French” (76).

Nabokov’s literalism, then, does not stand or fall on a naive belief in some essential linguistic and cultural purity. There are no “smooth”, transparent literary translations: one cannot “[substitute] easy platitudes for the breathtaking intricacies of the text” (71). His literalism emerges, rather, after the translator has lived through and buried the matter-manner distinction, a distinction that may not even appear to the writer who works with only one language (77). And it invests the translator with a responsibility that is inseparable from the most terrifying freedom.

To what is the translator responsible and to what does s/he seek to respond, if not to the other in the original work, in the language of translation, and in language as such? As trafficking in the other, translation is an attempt at a transaction in the forbidden and a foray into the unsayable. Although it is Benjamin who strives most subtly to unravel the mysteries of translation, Antoine Berman too, following in the great master’s footsteps, sees translation “as the trial of the foreign”. Deriving from Heidegger the key phrase that defines the translator’s vocation for him, he regards Hölderlin’s translation of Sophocles as a kind of archetype of the essential poetic experience – “not only because it gives us rare access to the Greek tragic Word, but because while giving us access to this Word, it reveals the veiled essence of every translation”. That “veiled essence”, he goes on to explain, is to be understood in two senses. In the first place, it refers to the way Hölderlin discloses in his translation “the Greek tragic Word” in its utter “strangeness” (that is “foreignness”) vis-à-vis the language of translation. In the second place, it refers to the way Hölderlin discloses the foreignness of that “Word” in its own, that is Greek, soil by “reveal[ing] the foreign work’s most original kernel, its most deeply buried, most self-same, but equally the most ‘distant’ from itself”(284). As the essential poetic experience, translation thus enacts, for Berman, the realization of the work’s potential, the way it does for Benjamin.

How does translation do it?

For Hölderlin, according to Berman, translation does it by bringing to bear on the work a series of “intensifications” in the translating language that would knock open the former’s unrealized “strangeness” (or “foreignness”, or “otherness”) (284-85). In the process the translating language too is shaken, electrified to its core (as the word “intensifications” suggests), to be impregnated with the other, the strange, the foreign. Indeed, it is of this regenerating process that Benjamin speaks so approvingly, citing Rudolf Pannwitz’s observation that “[t]he basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue” (22). On his part, Berman quotes Foucault in his essay on Pierre Klossowski’s translation of the *Aeneid*. “...[T]here are translations,” Foucault writes,

...that hurl one language against another [...] taking the original text for a projectile and treating the translating language like a target. Their task is not to lead a meaning back to itself or anywhere else; but to use the translated language to derail the translating language (285).

As a trial of the foreign, as against its neutralization or “naturalization” (285), translation is impeded, as Berman argues, by several tendencies (twelve, to be precise) including, significantly, “clarification” and “expansion” (288), which goes to show, yet again, the untenability of the conventional distinction between literal and free translation. It may so happen that the so-called free translation turns out to be more oppressive and “naturalizing” than literal translation.

Paul Ricouer’s reflections on translation, opening with a reference to Berman’s essay, broadly follow a similar trajectory. His concept of “linguistic hospitality” has room for the other on both sides of the act of translation: “the pleasure of dwelling in the other’s language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one’s own welcoming house”. (10) It involves “expropriat[ing] oneself” as much as “appropriate[ing] the other” in a double movement (xvi). What drives translation, “beyond [any] constraint and usefulness” (21), is, according to Ricouer, “desire”,

the urge to open up to the other, to the point of hurling oneself into the enigmatic untranslatability of language which may actually be “revealed, and even produced, by translation” (34). Ricoeur thus arrives, along the hermeneutical route, at the point where Benjamin too stands, contemplating the thinkability of “pure language”, which includes but is not exhausted by “the flesh of words” (that is the “letter”) and which marks the horizon against which *languages* can be thought. This is also the horizon of the language-to-be, of the messianic language, which may be glimpsed in identity-as-alterity, or, in other words, in “the ontological paradigm” of translation. It was perhaps this horizon which Hölderlin had glimpsed when he was translating Sophocles. And so he had, as Blanchot wonders, perhaps

discover[ed] . . . an understanding so profound, a harmony so fundamental, that it substitute[d] itself for meaning”, or he had perhaps “succeed[ed] in turning the hiatus that lies open between the two languages into the origin of a new meaning (61).

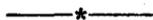
Clearly, Blanchot is here taking a dip into the holy waters of German Romantic poetics. It is a mystical affinity he shares with Benjamin. But one can ask, legitimately, following the trajectory thrown open by Jean-Luc Nancy and Alain Badiou: Does not every literary translation expose, by juxtaposing, the irreducible singularity of both the “original” and the “translated” text? Is not the “hiatus” (which Blanchot speaks of) the space of an infinite multiplicity of singularities? Doesn’t translation lay bare the fragile hypostases of linguistic identities? Doesn’t translation affirm that the only universality is that of irreducible singularities unmediated by any larger identities? “[...T]he unfathomable, the mysterious, the ‘poetic’”, which Benjamin says the poet-translator aims to reproduce, is not some transcendental essence but a play of immanent contingencies, a contingent aggregate, a *samghâta*. As such, it is singular. The translation too is singular. And hence, the translation of a translation back into the “original” language is also singular: we can see this provided we can free ourselves from the founding translational myth of the “original”.

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. "What is a Paradigm?" Lecture delivered in August 2002. 31 July 2007. <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/agamben/agamben-what-is-a-paradigm-2002.html>>.
- Badiou, Alain. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Trans. Peter Hallward. London and New York: Verso, 2001.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*". Trans. Harry Zoh. *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 15-25.
- Berman, Antoine. "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign". Trans. Lawrence Venuti. *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. 284-97.
- Blanchot, Maurice. "Translating". *Friendship*. 1971. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1997. 57-61.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "*The Translators of The Thousand and One Nights*". Trans. Esther Allen. *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. 34-48.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. 2004. Trans. Graham Burchell. Ed. Michel Senellart. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Jorris, Pierre. "Translator's Preface". *The Unavowable Community*. Maurice Blanchot. 1983. New York: Station Hill, 1988. xi-xxix.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. "Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English". *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. 71-83.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Trans. Peter Connor, et al. Minneapolis and Oxford: U of Minnesota P, 1991.

Ricoeur, Paul. *On Translation*. Trans. Eileen Brennan. 2004. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.



Mira and the Mahatma:
A Reading Beyond the Conventional
Relational Matrix

Ashutosh Mohan

My contribution to the great problem [of women's role in society] lies in my presenting for acceptance of truth and *ahimsa* in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations.¹

The Indian Novel in English, over time, has betrayed a marked proclivity for mythico-popular metaphors as narrative tropes to comprehend, construct and critique the idea of India as a nation. In their exploration of the historical and psychological contours of India, the Indian writers have virtually rummaged through popular, folk, secular and spiritual iconography to foreground their understanding of its antecedents and prospects. More often than not, this has also led them to appropriate, modify or reconfigure the given metaphors, to make them into a supple carrier of their ideological-activist burden. Sudhir Kakar's *Mira and the Mahatma* (2004) as a narrative of the nation falls within this literary lineage. It appropriates Mira-Krishna lore as a narrative trope, superimposes it on Gandhi-Slade relationship to critique the historical at the cross-section of the secular and the spiritual. The fictionality of *Mira and the Mahatma*, encapsulates within it a trajectory wherein the personal (in the persona of Gandhi/Slade) gets politicized as a loaded critique of the political. Kakar, being a psychologist by profession, revels in projecting the potentialities hidden within a politically surcharged moment. The canvas of the novel provides him space fecund enough to play with the history and the attendant politics it triggered. The present paper attempts to understand these possibilities and potentialities embedded by the author within this narrative location.

I

When history is scrutinized from the point of view of naming and renaming people, it throws up interesting examples that makes one take note of this human proclivity as a subtle, even enigmatic art. Here Sudhir Kakar's fictional work *Mira and the*

Mahatma, presents itself as a special 'case study.' It not only seeks to repackage a historical chapter from India's freedom struggle, but also attempts to contemporanise the love-lore of Mira, albeit in a skewed and partisan manner. Mira as a trope has been a much-used figure in Indian social and familial circle. However with time and tide the trope has traveled in a manner that instead of fossilizing Mira as a historical individual has enhanced her textuality.²

The novel is a peep into the latter phase of India's freedom struggle to capture the advent of another Mira, a hyped and superimposed one. While the prototype Mirabai, can be clearly seen as an assertive, gregarious and singularly motivated historic figure, the imitation Mira, the heroine of *Mira and the Mahatma*, is essentially a self-doubting and reclusive individualist.³ Her original name was Madeline Slade, the daughter of a British admiral, who came to India in 1925 with her heart set on becoming Mahatma Gandhi's greatest disciple, her candidature recommended by none other than the great French poet Romain Rolland. After her arrival at Gandhi's Ahmedabad Ashram, she was renamed Mira by Gandhi himself.

Gandhi was as much a victim of tropes as he himself was their perpetuator. Stereotyping people and their roles was what he could not break free of as the task of the consolidation of the nation as an entity required such a play of tropes during those peculiar times. Giving honorifics as a self-satisfying, even presumptuous exercise is a favorite indulgence of our national elite. At times this indulgence has gone beyond being a pastime and has seen people being actually renamed in a manner that cannot be viewed as innocently apolitical and value neutral. The overnight metamorphosis of Madeline Slade into Mira by Gandhi is one such instance of patronizing appropriation of Mira's name for a foreigner by the father of the Nation. This peculiar father daughter/Mira Mahatma dialectics for Sudhir Kakar betrays a complex psychological sedimentation with political overtones. The very naming process assumes serious role play overtones and when read between the lines reveals what a psycho-analyst would term as the process of 'transference.'⁴

After Gandhi, through 'his fondness for giving new names

to his European follower,' has given her the name of Mira, Madeline distinctly starts viewing herself as such, and by logical extension, Gandhi whom she earlier saw as Christ under Rolland's influence, now views him as her Krishna: "Mira's wish to be close to Gandhiji now transformed into a strong need and, when thwarted, an almost unbearable craving. Lying sleepless in bed on the evenings when she had not been able to spend time alone with him, Mira suffered acutely from the pangs of separation."⁵ To mitigate these pangs of separation, Madeline has in her possession Mirabai's song *HERI MAI TO PREM DIWANI MERA DARD NA JANE KOI*, reporting this, the narrator says:

To improve her Hindi penmanship, I had once given her a song by Mira Bai to copy. I had thought this would also make her more familiar with the saint after whom Gandhi ji had named her. Mira had copied the song, over and over again, till she knew the lament of the Rajput princes by heart, the only piece of Hindi poetry she could recite in an accent that remained stubbornly English. (MM 141).

As times progresses, Madeline revels in seeing herself in Mirabai's mantle. In a letter to Rolland, she proudly refers to Gandhi as Krishna and herself as Mira:

P.S. when my teacher here asked if there was any particular book I would like to study for my Hindi class I immediately answered, *The Songs of Meera*. My namesake has built the gap of centuries and cultures to enter my heart and make a corner of it her own. I find a resonance and melody in her words that till now was the province of Beethoven's music. With the humility of a bad translator, I send you one of her short verses to Krishna which haunts me these days, like the snatch of a song that plays over and over in one's head, refusing to go away.

My eyes have fashioned
An altar of pearl tears,
And here is my sacrifice:

The body and mind
Of Mira,
The servant who clings to your feet,
Through life after life,
A virginal harvest for you to reap (*MM* 145).

I wonder what you will make of it, and whether it moves you....a little. When Madeline's infatuation for Gandhi becomes too strong, impeding his work and hers too, she is sent away to another place for further training. In her dogged determination to be worthy of Gandhi, she throws herself into the task of serving the poor by undertaking improvement of dairying practices in villages surrounding that area.

Revealing her feelings in a letter she says:

But, dear friend, you must not think that my love for him is solely the stuff of raw nerves, bleeding wounds and sheer pain. It may be built on a trembling foundation of sadness and feared loss, yet my ache is anything but a void. My love for him, often rejected, sometimes humiliated, does not deplete me but fills me to the brim. It is a source of simultaneous joy and anguish. Even in its worst moments, as its most painful, my adoration for him is a rush of life, divine life. Even in my tears, I feel my love heightening my sense of myself and of the world around me, as if both were being discovered anew. (*MM* 160).

But the obverse aspect of this relationship, and more significant from the point of view of the present argument, inheres in the attitude Gandhi brings to bear on it and the way he manipulates it. To ward off the 'counter-transference' inbuilt into this relationship and to, even if unconsciously, maintain the culturally and politically (en)gendered hierarchical status quo, Gandhi as Kakar also observes, would neither let "Mira get away further than the distance he unconsciously held to be optimal for his own feeling of well

being," nor let her slip out of his own charismatic hold (*IR* 116). Much of what Sudhir Kakar, a distinguished psychoanalyst and writer, writes about Miss Slade and Mahatma Gandhi relationship, in the fictional mode can be corroborated with historical accounts of the same.⁶ This ambivalence of Gandhi vis-à-vis Slade/Mira however got transferred into the public domain of the times.

II

The narrative form, within which Kakar packages the Mira-Mahatma inter-relation, also catches the attention of the reader. The very choice of language and the sequencing of the incidents and the positioning of the narrator within it tend to gear the novel towards voyeurism. The author seems to indulge in the erotic and the exotic potentials of the relationship via a playful re-sketching of the seventeen years association between the eponymous protagonists of his narrative. His partisan end, conforming to most Indian English novelists of contemporary significance, resolutely guides his undisguised and skewed narration. His talent as a brilliant fiction writer is navigated by the contemporary ethics of bestselling works. The author not only stifles the potential dialogism of the text by typecasting Gandhi, his Mira too is visualized in a reductive framework. With minimal juxtaposition of qualitative characteristics between the two Miras that serves to posit the latter day Mira as a rehashed successor to the former, the author is primarily interested in presenting a palatable Mira, satisfying the dominant baser instincts of a readership whose tastes are largely dictated by popular cinema and television soap operas.

Kakar is overtly interested in presenting a Mira who instead of being a *param viyogini* is like a Gopika, ever devising newer ways of symbolically enticing her divine lover into an earthly companion. The novel is replete with overtly physical references. At one place thinking of Gandhi, Mira is spontaneously reminded of her ex-lover Lamond and can feel "the fire in which she had burnt, conjuring in its flames hallucinatory images of entwined bodies that had deeply shamed her, finally pushing her into guilt-ridden despair." (*MM* 85) On another occasion when she gets to meet Gandhi after a long interval, she feels like a miserably ecstatic beloved: "Without saying a word, Ba went to her room, leaving the two of them alone; Mira felt her body begin to tremble. She knew

what was coming . . . She did not hear his exact words, nor was she aware of what she was saying or doing.” (MM 112) Naturally by the time the novel comes to an end, we see a Mira who has been completely discredited, and a Krishna whose halo has substantially diminished.

The above deconstructive reading of the novel is a rehash of an overtly simplistic interpretative possibilities deliberately inbuilt into the text by the author himself so as to privilege his own political agenda vis-à-vis Gandhi. It purposely deflects the potentials inherent in the novel with which the present argument is intimately concerned. While there is every chance of falling into this well laid reading trap laid by the author, a careful, close and patient reading – with the help of subtle interpretive traces that lie alongside the dominant reading – throws open new perspectives that go beyond mere character bashing of Gandhi.⁷

III

Mira and the Mahatma is a text containing multiple narrative and discursive trajectories that take root/route in the historical/factual, cultural, psychological and politico-ideological. All these strands pass through the grid of the mythico-mystical lore of Mira the Bhakti Saint, Gandhi the Mahatma, providing them a cultural legitimacy to ultimately problematize the political. Kakar uses this narrative mesh as a textual space to launch a critique of Gandhi the statesman and politician, and the praxis it generate and its fallouts that can be traced in the contemporary political arena that obtains in India. One way of deciphering this authorial intent is by projecting the Mira-Mahatma relationship on to the national political canvas. Read this way this novel yields itself to unexplored reading possibilities.

What on the face of it has been apotheosized as Mira-Krishna parallel, on closer reading of the text becomes untenable. In the lore Mira takes satisfaction in a devotion that replicates the pleasure between the devotee and the divine within the matrix of mystical intercourse. In other words Mira-Krishna bond is symbiotic, despite the mundane-divine hierarchy. On the other hand Mira-Rana conjugality remained a historic fact of suppressive denial of sexual physicality. Rana represented the power and authority, and

used it as a means to subjugate the rebellious in Mira which, in part, was a function of the denial or willful withholding of the phallic. The psychoanalytic in Kakar seems to analyze Gandhi-Slade case study within Rana-Mira framework.

In itself this parallel also remains reductive, for it only replicates patriarchal perpetuation. The analyst in Kakar knows the dangers and delimitations of such a facile parallel. Therefore, to give this parallel a viable width he creates a relational tirade consisting of Rana-Mira-Krishna, wherein Rana and Krishna get fused into the persona of Mahatma/Gandhi. Mira thus finds herself in a double-bind ensuing from the same persona. On the one hand she is sealed within the patriarchal historicity (that continues in the present), on the other hand the ramification of Mira's lore provides clues to the author to comment on Gandhian politics. Once read within this ambit the Mira-Mahatma relationship, with all its fictional-factual overlap seems to fall in place. Understood thus, their relationship becomes a useful index to understand India's socio-political reality at the macro-level.

Gandhi the leader, as a Rana-Krishna dyad fused into one thus comes to encapsulate in his persona all the complexities and contradiction that such a blending encodes. Mira as a nation becomes victim to all its playful eccentricities and whims – an interpretive matrix that is already in circulation among the masses. Kakar's forte is to build a political reading on that which already exists. In the conventional readings of Mira, she is depicted as a rebel who acts out of her own free will, and who subverts the patriarchal mechanization to enter the public sphere. In the text Mira/Slade, in contrast, exists only to obey the diktats of the patriarch, who endeavors, despite his avowed position, to domesticate through the trap of celibacy. This subtle reversal of the Mira-Krishna relational equation is then exploited by Kakar to introduce a field of play wherein Gandhi could experiment with his idea of 'domineering passivity' on India/Mira through the tools of ahimsa and celibacy.

IV

Kakar's textual politicization when extrapolated on to the contemporary Indian political scenario makes an emphatic statement on its acquired character. A violently libidinal and libidinally violent

creed is being unabashedly unleashed on the masses by those who propagate fundamentalist-cultural-nationalism. Ironically enough this libidinal energy seems to capitalize on the suppressed traces of the same in Gandhian nationalistic creed in the guise of ahimsa and celibacy, so admirably delineated in the novel by Kakar. Unable to break the shackles of all sapping passive-resistance warped in a secular agenda, the inheritors of Gandhism are at a loss and find themselves at the receiving end of this political Frankenstein – a insidious mix of patronizing mysticism and political expediency pitch forked as the cultural reality. In the given textual framework of *Mira and the Mahatma* the relevance of this psycho-political diagnosis lies in a suggestive ‘pairing’ of Mira/Slade and Gandhi/Mahatma. It can also be seen as a suggestive blueprint that in its attendant ‘violence’ may enable the later day Miras to resist and rebel to (re-)evolve through Rasalila with a Krishna, an original epitome of ‘activism’ in all aspects of life, sexual or political.⁸

To conclude Sudhir Kakar does not stifle the potential for dialogism between Mira and Mahatma, as suggested by conventional readings of the novel. Instead of typecasting Gandhi-Mira in within the sealed cultural mould, he opens this relation up to conjectural reading that move beyond mere binary encounters at the libidinal level. These suggestive narratorial trajectories build up a potential of a matrix wherein the historical, the mystical, the cultural and the political get enmeshed in various combinations for play of interpretive possibilities.

Notes and References

1. M.K Gandhi, *Harijan*, (Feb 24, 1940) in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol LXXI (Navjivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1982) 208.
2. Parita Mukta while drawing attention to the lore of Mirabai in Rajasthan re-iterates this fact. She says, “What is even more remarkable is that the memory of Mira has been kept safe and has continued to be evoked through the centuries of Sisodia rule, in the midst of repression by the Rajput rulers. There have been systematic attempts by Rajput princely family, and more generally the Rajput

community in Rajasthan to blot out the name of Mira within its own social fabric and within the society over which it held power." (Parita Mukta, *Mirabai in Rajasthan*" in *Manushi*, No 51-52 (January-June, 1989) 95. Mira has become as free-floating idea today. While on the one hand a virtual iconography in Bhakti tradition is being perpetuated in her name, on the other she is castigated as *Raand* by Mewar Rajputs. She is caught between the extremes of being a rebel and a cultural stigma.

3. Sudhir Kakar talks about the flesh and blood Slade thus: "I visited her with a friend in 1964, in the forest above Baden near Vienna where she now made her home in an isolated farmhouse . . . Gracious but reserved, she offered us tea and biscuits and perfunctorily enquired about current events in India. She refused to talk about Gandhi, claiming that he did not interest her any longer . . . she had come back to the composer [Beethoven, her first love] after a thirty-five year *detour* with Gandhi" [Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relations* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1989) 118.] All further references from this text are shown as *IR* followed by the page number.
4. The novel goes on to depict that Madeline's yearnings for the Mahatma equals that of Mira in whose name she had been baptized by the Mahatma. Her infatuations however become a battlefield of forces stronger than those amenable to reason. She if seen from the psychoanalytic lens of Greenson seems not to seek insight but to enjoy the physical proximity of the patron. "Such patients," according to Kakar, "relate a history of achievement and an adequate social life but an unsatisfactory love life characterized by wishes for incorporation, possession and fusion. Gandhi's attitude to Mira . . . combined sympathetic listening with the frustration of wishes for gratification . . . it further enhanced . . . her transference to the Mahatma, a type of intense love felt for people who fulfill a role in our lives equivalent to the one fulfilled by our parents in our childhood" (*IR* 115).

5. Sudhir Kakar, *Mira and the Mahatma* (New Delhi: Viking, 2004) p 120. All further references from this book are abbreviated as *MM* followed by the page number.
6. For factual details of the correspondence that took place between Gandhi and Slade at this historical juncture see Mira Behn, ed., *Bapu's Letters to Mira (1924-48)* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1949).
7. There has been a well designed tradition that aims at maligning Gandhi the person than actually confronting Gandhism in its complexity. This has necessarily been a reductive reading. Rajmohan Gandhi's book *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People and an Empire* is a latest addition to this Gandhi-bashing corpus. The book got scandalous publicity for its expose of the "indefinably special relationship" between Sarla Devi Chaudhurani – a niece of Tagore with the Mahatma. For details see Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People and an Empire* (New Delhi: Viking/Penguin, 2007).
8. Rasalila here stands for a participatory act that is symbolic of continuum and uninhibited celebration of Life.

Works Cited and Consulted

- Behn, Mira ed., *Bapu's Letters to Mira (1924-48)* Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1949.
- Gandhi, M.K. "Harijan" in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol. LXXI Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust, 1982.
- Kakar, Sudhir. *Intimate Relations* New Delhi: Penguin, 1989.
- Kakar, Sudhir. *Mira and the Mahatma* New Delhi: Viking, 2004.

—*—

The Discourse of the Dispossessed- A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Passages from Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

Praveen Sharda

The Inheritance of Loss is a narrative which deliberates upon the idea of a homeland – both for the swarm of illegal aliens in New York as well as for the Kalimpong residents who face the dangers of a Nepali insurgency. The novel foregrounds the anguish of the displaced people torn apart from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography. The multi-racial set of the diasporas staying illegally in New York and other metropolitan centers in America are an unhappy dispossessed lot of migrants, driven out primarily by economic circumstances from their native lands; entering these centers with the hope of finding jobs but condemned to be the “shadow class”, without a home and job (Desai 102). The homeless migrants hop from place to place while chasing the green card which always eludes them and yet haunts them day and night like a nightmare. There is an unusual dilemma- they are neither happy in their land of migration, nor can they return without obtaining a green card. They usually have to confront the hostile attitude of their host countries and of their own legally settled countrymen who exploit them because of their illegal status.

In the case of the illegal Diasporas, the homeland occupies an important position in their memories and its absence is invariably linked with tropes, or what Nietzsche referred to as “a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms” (Mishra 30). Their memories of their nation are structured as tropes of absence as the absent nation can be felt through the presence of other things around them which serve as a painful reminder of their nation. The present article aims to bring out the discourse of the displaced and dispossessed illegal migrants through an analysis of two passages from the novel. In both the passages, Biju represents the various Diaspora groups residing illegally in New Jersey and New York. Since the Diasporas of this category are always on the move due to the fear of being caught, they seldom experience stability and possessiveness about a place. Many of them disappear overnight,

leaving for other jobs, other towns or even get deported. Insecurity constantly stares them in the face. Many of them change names and even their religion to dupe the immigration authorities. The illegals belonging to dispersed ethnic groups are all the victims of emptiness as no friendships have been given the time and space to sink deep. However theirs is more a crisis of unidentified status than it is existential. Their constant anxiety is homelessness which corresponds with the Diaspora's being displaced and the rift created "... between the self and its true home" (Said 173). The immigration lottery is a far cry for the Indian Diaspora as there have been too many waiting for years together and they continue to be excluded from the list in which people from other nationalities figure. This class being the most affected one; hence the content of Biju's thoughts and their representation in language is the focus of the stylistic analysis of the chosen passages from the novel. In the first passage, Biju's thoughts are represented through various tropes and in the second passage; it is graffiti which metaphorically represents the hopes, fears and desires of the Diasporas.

The first passage has been deliberately chosen to bring out the discourse of the displaced and dispossessed by showing a close correspondence between the inner and outer worlds of the protagonist Biju, representing the illegal Diasporas of various nations. Emotions of dejection and loneliness overpower him and the places he visits become a metaphor for his state of mind as there is a correspondence between the attributes of both as would be shown in the analysis. The Diasporas' perception of dullness, strangeness and negativity all around them is largely attributed to their insurmountable sadness and often melancholic state of mind. The structure of what they conceptualize and the language in which they do it would be brought about through a stylistic analysis of the passage at the levels of lexis, syntax and point of view.

The Use of Direct and Indirect Reference: The vocabulary of the passage is descriptive with the only character in the extract, Biju describing various places more in terms of negative features than positive attributes. However Biju's position is like that of many others who sit despondently on the rocks watching New Jersey's monotonous vehicular traffic on the river thus making him their representative. All the places mentioned in the passage

belong to the semantic field of public places in 'this country' (see Appendix). The deictic 'this' shows that Biju's father was extremely familiar with it (i.e. America) as other people before Biju had gone there and maybe were illegal migrants before him. The decision of sending Biju to 'this' country and not any other is ample evidence of his father's familiarity with it as a land of opportunity. The deictic 'this' conveying proximity for Biju who has landed there is in contrast to village life which is without any indicator, inferring that it is now remote, removed from active consciousness and only a part of Biju's memory. The places mentioned through direct reference in the passage are 'the river', 'the synagogue', 'the park', 'the rocks' and 'this country'. The direct reference leads to the inference that both the narrator and the subject Biju who is the deictic centre (as will be proved in the section on point of view) are familiar with these places and Biju frequents them like other ethno-national Diasporas such as the Jewish. All the places belong to the semantic field of public places in 'this country' and are not suggestive of a shelter, a sense of enclosure and privacy. The synagogue is the only public religious and essentialist space which can be frequented by the Jewish Diaspora and not by any other. Diasporas other than the Jewish have only public places as their home. The use of the definite article gives the implication of 'you know which I mean?' leading to the inference that even the readers are supposed to be familiar with the idea of only public places being used by a mass of people belonging to Diasporas from various nations. The indirect reference is used for 'a dense chamber of green', 'a fertile city crud', 'a tail of pilings', 'a dull stretch of New Jersey', 'a homeless chicken' and 'a plain girl', inferring that they are not part of either the reader's or the protagonist's background knowledge. They are examples of places and entities which are the only ones of their kind in the place beside the river and a dull stretch of New Jersey is the only one in the metropolitan center. These unusual places are visited by only members of a particular class, i.e., the homeless belonging to various illegal Diasporas or even a local homeless man or any stray chicken. That Biju is drawn towards these places is representative of his own state of mind which is experiencing an unusual loneliness, lack of stability and despair.

The Use of Mass Nouns: Significant in the passage is the use of mass nouns like 'crud', 'stretch', 'soil', 'dirt' and 'garbage',

all of which cannot be used in the plural and point to dirty and disgusting substances; also characteristic of places inhabited by the mass of homeless people staying illegally. The novel enumerates the retreats of such Diasporas as “cubby holes, odd shaped corners that once were pantries, maids rooms, laundry rooms, and storage rooms at the bottom of what had been a single family home,” (Desai 51). So inhuman, miserable and scarce are the habitats of “fellow illegals” (ibid) that the basement quarters are rented out by the week, by the month, and even by the day to this group with ever growing numbers. This accounts for the sad plight of those forced to continue with their illegal status. Worse still is the condition of those who are forced to live amongst “sawdusty sacks of masalas” (Desai 147) or places infested with rats. The growing numbers of people living illegally has led to an acute scarcity of even unusual places because the Diasporas of this category can only inhabit such places. This scarcity and their unidentified status thus make habitat or home a constant obsession with them. The synagogue is the only public religious and essentialist space which can be frequented by the Jewish Diaspora and not any other. Diasporas other than the Jews who are not legal are forced to seek refuge in either public places which are open or odd corners unfit for habitation. Whether it is ‘a dense chamber of green’ (an ironic usage) or the rocks looking onto a dull stretch of New Jersey; these are often the habitats of homeless people.

The Use of Adjectives: The attributes embodied by the adjectives are psychological; embodying Biju’s state of mind (as a place) as well as of everything perceived by him. The ‘homeless’ protagonist anthropomorphizes with the ‘homeless’ chicken living in the park. He thinks that it is in the same state as he is, i.e., without a home, ill at ease and lonely. The reason for the chicken’s being assigned so many human attributes like ‘flustered’, ‘plain’, ‘shy’ and ‘endearing’ is due to Biju’s intense loneliness and also his need to communicate with someone of the feminine gender. The chicken’s behaving like a simple and shy girl running away from the advances of Biju is an indicator of Biju’s desperate need for a companion. Although the chicken is homeless yet it feels quite ‘homey’ or comfortable in the dirt. Biju is drawn towards the chicken primarily because of its simplicity, the ease and comfort it experiences even in alien surroundings and also its feminine virtues.

The 'homey' manner of the chicken reminds Biju of the warm and simple village life in India which is now a part of his memory. However the land in which he is presently, i.e., New Jersey is dull in his perception as dullness is a prominent characteristic of his own mind. Thus the manner in which Biju perceives is determined by his own cognition.

Biju's 'restlessness', used predicatively, induces him to walk from one place to another without experiencing stability and rootedness anywhere. In the passage, it is expressed metaphorically as "... he could barely stand to stay in his skin." Biju's body is like a container and the restlessness in it is so much that it can hardly be contained in it. George Lakoff explains the container metaphor thus "Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation" (29). The flow of excessive restlessness within Biju's mortal frame is so much that he can barely stand; again traceable to the orientational metaphor 'happy is up and sad is down' (Lakoff 15). Inferentially, Biju seems to have been overpowered by his restlessness and lack of companionship. He likes to walk besides the 'old-fashioned' Jews dressed in black thinking that they too are desperately holding on to their past and deriving sustenance from it just as he is nostalgic about his own past.

Adjectives Attributive of Strangeness and Negativity:

The attributive adjectives characteristic of various places are 'hanky-sized' (squares), 'far' modifies the stretch which Biju walks to reach a 'dense' chamber of wild and dirty bushes growing on city waste which is disgusting because of its dirtiness. There is irony in the use of a dense chamber of green because it is neither a chamber, nor is it a pleasing green. Biju is drawn towards a homeless man sleeping in the green bushes which have sprung up on the city debris all around because of his own homelessness and obsession with the green card. The peculiar boats which Biju sees are 'pug-nosed' and 'big-bottomed' which can again be seen to carry sexual connotations and point to his loneliness and longing for space in an alien society. He is drawn towards vehicles of movement primarily because of his homesickness. The purposelessness of some of the strange boats points to the protagonist's own lack of clear objectives. Biju then walks towards

a 'tail' of pilings, where useless and discarded things are piled on top of one another to sit on one of the rocks overlooking New Jersey's vehicular traffic in the river. There he finds many others like himself. Whatever Biju's eye perceives is either abnormal in size or dirty and disgusting. Significantly "perception and cognition go hand in hand..." (Leech and Short 88) for Biju conceptualizes that the homeless men like him belonging to the category of illegal Diasporas are fated for either open and dirty spaces or the isolated corners like the rocks looking onto a river full of unusual carriers. If unusual habitats are meant for the homeless, it is strange and rather awkward spectacles which are the lot of the illegal Diasporas. Distance, dirt and isolation are the defining features of places which Biju visits. The lexical analysis lends credibility to the argument that illegality denies the migrants even a normal habitat and places of leisure. Therefore they anthropomorphize and experience the absence of the homeland through things present around them. Such a perception is suggestive of a mind which is extremely homesick, lonely and broods over its distancing from the homeland.

Adjectives of Color: Green is a metonym for the green card which Biju desperately desires and without which he can neither return to his native land and nor have any status in an alien land. Biju is invariably drawn towards the green color whether it is the bushes' growing on city debris or it merges into discarded things piled on top of each other. Biju being psychologically upset is using one entity to refer to another that is related to it. The color black is the dress code of the Jews who wish to cling to their traditional way of life even in their land of migration and the attributive adjective 'old-fashioned' used for both girls and men leads to the inference about the Jews preserving their conservative cultural stance. A significant approach to the persistence of Diasporas is the "primordialist" or the essentialist which emphasizes the role of physical markers and cultural attributes such as a common history, revered myths and legends, language, food, costumes and folklore in preserving the identities of ethno-national Diasporas (Shefffer 19). Thus by implication the Jewish Diaspora has carved a niche for itself in the American society because of the binding force of its past history and its cultural traditions. The most recent large scale population survey released in the 2006 American Jewish Yearbook places the number of American Jews at 6.4 million or

2.1% of the total population showing their importance in all walks of life (wikipedia). Biju is drawn towards the Jews due to their historical persistence despite many tribulations and hence in some corner of his mind he too would like to sustain despite the exploitation and inhuman behaviour of the Indian Diaspora in America. Black is also the color of the smoke being spewed out by the strange vehicles and has a semantic link with the illegal migrant's depressed state of mind. Rusty relates to the rust infested cranes and cogs being watched by Biju and others like him who feel that life has nothing more interesting to offer than earning a dollar a day.

Use of Verbs and Participles: Since there are a number of places mentioned in the passage, there are verbs expressing movement of the protagonist towards them. The two verbs describing Biju's movement towards various places are 'crossed' and 'walked.' The psychological compulsions of the protagonist such as his homelessness make him walk towards various places. The Jewish Diaspora also walk on the river bank while thinking of their past just as Biju thinks of his past village life. The two verbs denoting the actions of the homeless chicken are 'scratching' and 'ran'. If Biju is restless in his actions, the chicken by contrast is natural and thus comfortable in its manner of digging in the dirt. It is the chicken's naturally feeling at home in the dirt which nostalgically reminds Biju of his simple and unsophisticated village life.

Significant in the passage are a number of present participles or verbal adjectives like 'picking', 'pushing', 'sending' and 'trying'. The first relates to the action of the dog-owners, the second relates to the big-bottomed coal carriers and the last two seem to relate only to Biju's father. It is a characteristic feature of the present participles to represent continuity of action which is usually not restricted to a single individual. 'Sending' and 'trying' used in the last sentence (see Appendix) lead to the inference that the action of sending sons to America is not an isolated case of Biju's only but has been a persistent action of many fathers seeking better opportunities for their sons. The present participle 'trying' again denotes how fathers keep trying for greener pastures for their wards. The continuity of immigrants flowing into 'this' country is reinforced by the direct reference (already discussed) which

shows how numerous parents are aware of the land of opportunity and want to send their wards only here and not elsewhere. The stative verb 'knew' at the end of the passage introduces the state of Biju's dilemma of being caught between two worlds, i.e., his homeland and the land of his migration or the host country.

Use of Adverbs: a number of adverbs have been used as modifiers for the adjectives. 'So' and 'barely' convey the extent of Biju's restlessness (sentence two, Passage I, Appendix). The dogs are playing 'madly' in hanky-sized squares. The adverb 'where' used four times in the passage points to the protagonist's movement to various places

Adverbials of Time: The parallel between the adverbials 'after work' and 'after singles night at the synagogue' shows that the illegal migrant experiences some bonds with the oldest Diaspora because both walk beside the river bank and both are haunted by their past. The Jews desire to nurture their cultural traditions by clinging to their customary black apparel while visiting their place of worship where as Biju has no means to recapture his past. Biju as the representative of the illegal Diasporas is drawn towards them because they have successfully endured as a Diaspora over a number of years. The adverbial 'at all times' points to the innate desire of the Jews to keep their past 'alive' by adorning their traditional dresses and also nurture their religious space by frequent visits to their synagogue. 'Often' refers to the homeless man sleeping in the green growing on the dirt and the debris of the fertile city crud referring inferentially to the plight of the newly arrived homeless migrants. The adverbials 'every now and then' and 'immediately' refer to the homeless chicken who finds the dirt as a suitable home. The immediacy of the chicken's reaction of running away on Biju's calling reminds the migrant of his emptiness and loneliness.

Biju does not want to forgive his father's action of sending him 'alone' to America. But there being no better opportunity at home, he accepts his father's continuous efforts in sending him to the most developed country in the world. Having arrived on alien soil, he is terribly homesick and restless. It is his restlessness which induces him to walk from one place to another without experiencing stability and rootedness anywhere.

Grammatical Categories: An analysis of Syntax: The syntax of the passage is complex on the whole and the largest sentence is the third sentence with seventy one words. The passage begins with an incomplete sentence opening with the interjection 'oh' expressive of intense longing and ends with a sentence whose very form points to the Diasporas being entrenched between two worlds. The complexity of the sentences is attributed to the long post-modifying adverbial clauses qualifying the particular part of the river bank which Biju wishes to frequent. There are five clauses beginning with the subordinating conjunction 'where' implying the protagonist's obsession with place. His restlessness forces him to walk to various places and attribute negative characteristics to them. The third sentence is a seminal sentence as it characterizes the thematic content of the passage- the conflict in Biju's mind and the description of places dovetailing into the psychological state of the Jewish Diaspora. The sentence is a cataloguing of adverbial clauses and ends with an adverbial clause of manner. Here is an analysis of the sentence:

After work(Adv. Phrase of time)
 He crossed to the river(Main Clause)
 not to the part where the dogs played madly in
 hanky-sized squares,(Adv. Clause of place)
 with their owners in the fracas picking up feces
 (participle clause qualifying owners)
 but to where,(elliptical adverbial clause implying
 verb crossed)
 after the singles night at the synagogue long-skirted
 and sleeved
 girls walked in an old-fashioned manner with old-
 fashioned looking men(Adv. clause of time parallel
 to opening phrase)
 as if they had to keep their past with them at all
 times so as not to lose it. (Adv. clause of manner)

The sentence is extremely descriptive of two places with contrary characteristics besides the river bank- the large crowded squares full of noise and a silent zone where the Jews attired in their traditional dresses are walking after a singles night at the synagogue. Biju being homeless and single finds comfort in being

close to these old fashioned men and women walking after their worship at the synagogue. Biju's dilemma as an illegal migrant is represented in the two parallel choices available before him- "not to the part where" and "but to where" just as Biju had the choice of coming to America or staying back in India. Biju chooses to align himself with the old-fashioned Jewish community as this group of Diasporans has survived since a very long period in history. Despite their extreme tribulations, the Jewish Diaspora has created its success story and has a sizeable number in America. The Jews have been able to protect their identity by seeking sustenance from their culture. The adverbial clause of manner "at all times" at the end of the sentence shows the manner in which Diasporans look for sustenance by always nurturing the bonds with their past history or traditions. The topical theme of homelessness is reinforced by other adverb clauses of place

to the far end where the homeless man often slept in a dense chamber of green

to where the green ran out into a tail of pilings. The frequency of adverbial clauses of place is attributed to the illegal Diaspora being christened as the moving class- always on the move from place to place and therefore without any permanent addresses or phone numbers.

An important feature of the adverb clauses of place is the use of the preposition 'to' to specify the direction in which Biju moves. In sentence number three alone this preposition is used five times to point to the part or the place on the river bank which Biju wishes to frequent. It also specifies possession in the case of the Jews who wish to hold on to their past heritage. The preposition 'in' is used nine times in the passage to specify both place and manner. The only direct speech in the passage is Biju imitating the chicken in its call to overcome his intense loneliness. However Biju is caught in a dilemma as shown in the last sentence and the 'but' clauses emphasize not the contrast in the clauses as is the case in a compound sentence but the emotion of anger is expressed through both. Here is an analysis of the sentence:

Biju couldn't help but feel a flash of anger at his father (verb complement) for sending him (object complement) alone to this country (preposition) but (conjunction) he knew (Superordinate clause) he wouldn't have forgiven his father (verb complement) for not trying to send him, either (object complement).

The sentence is divided into two parts coordinated by the main clause "...but he knew". The first part is a simple sentence containing the negative contracted form 'couldn't' and 'but' is used as a preposition giving the connotation of 'except'. The second part of the sentence functions as a subordinate clause with the subordinating conjunction 'that' being implied. Here the use of two negative words 'wouldn't' and 'not' is an affirmation by Biju of his father's action. Inferentially, Biju knows that whatever his father did was the best option available for him. However the larger picture emerges on an analysis of the participles already carried out. The participles 'sending' and 'trying' enumerate the continuity of these actions over a period of time. The sentence can thus be summed up in the simple propositional content – Biju was angry at being sent but accepted his father's action in view of the circumstances in his native land. This is actually a defence by Biju of his father's action of sending him to America. The propositional content emerges as much from the narrative as from the form of the sentence which is split into two parts by the main clause '...but he knew'. If the first part of the sentence is an expression of anger, the second expresses a rather calm acceptance of what his father had done. Thus meaning resides in "its form as much as its meaningful content" (Hillier 132). The ambivalence experienced by the Diasporas is given voice through the contradictory feelings of the protagonist expressed in the last sentence. Biju's being skeptical about his stay in his native land defends his father's action and his desire to gain a foothold in the land of his migration.

The Viewpoint of the Passage: Understanding the narrative framework of a story or a novel is important as it directly relates to the manner in which readers read and comprehend a fictionalized world. The passage like the whole novel is narrated by a detached third person omniscient narrator but it is Biju who

sees the events being unfolded as he walks from place to place. There is in the passage a clear distinction between "*who tells* and *who sees*" (Simpson 27). Biju's viewpoint as the chief reflector of fiction is established as the passage which is in third person narration can be transformed into first-person narration by replacing the name Biju and the third person pronouns with the first person. This easy and smooth transposition shows how strongly in the reflector mode the passage is. Biju's viewing position in the passage is confirmed by his walking to various places and seeing them from his perspective. The point of view markers are the adverbials like "... the far end where...", "where the green ran out into a tail of pilings" and "where men like himself sat on the rocks...". These locative expressions are the markers for the narrative camera angle and Biju's spatial point of view. He is again the chief reflector when looking onto a dull and monotonous scene of New Jersey. As there are many others like him who sit and watch the strange vehicles passing by, Biju becomes the representative of the homeless Diasporas as well as being the deictic centre of the passage.

Biju's constant movement shown by the verbs 'crossed' and 'walked' in the passage mimics the illegal immigrants constantly on the move as they are without their papers. Biju's movement to various places dovetails into a representation of his mind. In fact Biju is drawn towards those places which are in alignment with his psychological characteristics- homelessness, restlessness and obsession with the green card. These places such as 'the dense chamber of green' 'where the green ran into a tail of pilings' and 'a dull stretch of New Jersey' don a psychological mantle and it can therefore be said that Place represents mind. Biju's being instinctively pulled towards the part of the river bank frequented by the original Diaspora is because of their survival despite numerous difficulties. He too longs to feel homey like the chicken and is looking for some means by which he can integrate in an alien land and hence is drawn towards the Jews. The illegal migrant's overlooking the strange boats in the river, many of which were without an objective, represents his own indecisiveness and futility of coming to America.

The passage ends with "a spatial perspective shifting almost seamlessly into the character's cognitive field..."(Simpson 80) as

Biju contemplates whether he should be angry with his father for sending him alone to America or not. His predicament is that of many others like him who fail to come to terms with their new reality and are equally unsure of the consequences of going back to their native lands. However the passage is not without narratorial interference. The narrator comments on the traditional manner in which the Jews dress up to visit their synagogue. The comment of the narrator is as follows "... as if they had to keep their past with them at all times so as not to lose it" (see Appendix). The narrator is amazed at the actions of the Jews in keeping alive their past traditions. The extreme possessiveness about their past only speaks of their persistence in their struggle for survival in a host country having many differences from them. The narrator's comment indirectly points to the struggle the Diasporas face in keeping alive their identity as Diasporans and the Jewish Diaspora is a strong example. The survival of the oldest Diaspora is an example before Biju who represents the class of illegal migrants who are neither sure of their stay in New York nor can they go back to their native lands without a green card. Theirs is truly a dichotomous situation.

An Introduction to the Second Passage: The snapping of the telephone lines leading to a loss in communication with his father in India acts as a traumatic moment in the life of the diasporic, Biju. This moment of uncommunicativeness crystallizes for him not only the loss of his homeland but also makes him greatly apprehensive about his father. Biju's memories of his homeland and experiences as an illegal immigrant are in common with other Diasporas and form a part of the diasporic imaginary. Without a home of their own, the diasporans or members of a particular Diaspora personalize de-personalized or public space by using graffiti to give vent to their repressed emotions. Although graffiti is illegitimate writing, it becomes a potent tool in the hands of the Diaspora to give vent to their unconscious desires and emotions. The graffiti on the walls of the telephone booth –words representing disappointment in love, hearts shot with arrows and the symbol of swastika- all speak of their repressed emotions. The swastika originating from the Sanskrit word 'svastika' meaning any lucky or auspicious object or that which is associated with well-being portends that the Diasporas want good news from across the seas. The Swastikas etched on the walls of the booth is an indicator of

how intensely the illegal migrants miss and mourn the loss of their homeland. The juxtaposition of swastikas with 'hearts shot with arrows' inferentially signifies the Diaspora's missing their loved ones and the warmth of their homes. A stylistic analysis of this passage in terms of lexis, point of view and syntax will lead us to the discourse of the dispossessed as it did in the earlier passage. First, it is the lexical analysis.

The use of Nouns: The passage is distinct for the use of abstract nouns like emptiness, hope, love, affection, excitement, absence and façade. Abstract nouns are uncountable nouns referring to neither a limited number nor a specific class but a mass which in the present passage are the numerous illegal Diasporas of various nations. Thus whatever is felt and contemplated upon by Biju is true of the class of immigrants residing illegally. They are more prone to negative emotions such as emptiness and experiencing only the façade of love. The form of the nouns used in the passage coincides with the referents giving vent to their emotions through the medium of the Graffiti on the walls of the telephone booth. The deictic centre of the passage is the illegal Indian migrant Biju who visits a telephone booth which he hopes would connect him to his father in India but the clichéd conversation fails to dispel his loneliness and emptiness. He nurtures the hope of being relevant to his father's life but is unsure of the benefits of going back.

A notable feature of the passage is the use of the noun plus noun structure which is characteristic of American English. Some of the structures used are 'emergency sentences', 'telegram lines', 'Graffiti garden', 'photograph negatives' etc. The usual function of such structures is that both the nouns describe a single idea but in the present passage the first acts as an adjective or modifier for the second thereby changing its meaning. In the construction 'emergency sentences', the modifier emergency completely transforms the meaning of sentences which are a medium of conversation or an exchange of ideas. The juxtaposition of emergency with sentences gives the impression of a forced conversation sustained only by clichéd phrases. The collocation of graffiti with garden inferentially implies that the garden is a very special kind of garden in which the plants are replaced by the scribbling or the drawings made on the walls of the telephone booth.

The mass nouns 'graffiti' and 'mulch' lead the reader to the interpretation that whatever Biju sees in the telephone booth is not an individual experience but is representative of the state of all illegal Diasporas. The images and the letters scrawled on the walls of the booth are truly defacement but this illicit medium is the only available one to the set of multi-racial Diasporas to give vent to their suppressed emotions. The emotions of excessive anger or love are however in a state of decay as they fail to find suitable outlets. Much of the graffiti on the walls of the telecommunication link bespeaks of perversion. The telephone booth is akin to a graffiti garden as it is a well-chalked out area like a garden where the immigrants come and scribble carelessly. This scrawling on the walls of the booth represents their natural instincts similar to the growth of natural plants in a garden. The graffiti continuously grows like the increase in the number of illegal immigrants every year. Like the Diaspora suffering from anonymity, the graffiti too has an anonymous character.

Since the entire passage is contextualized in a telephone booth, many of the nouns relate to communication such as 'phone booth', 'telegram lines', 'phone call', etc. The effort to communicate with his father is made by Biju who is rather unsure about the results of going back to his country. The use of the adverb phrase 'all the time' relates the usual fate of all immigrants who returned back- "... the love was gone; for affection was only a habit after all", (see Appendix). Thus the Diasporas return only to discover the façade of affection and the absence of love.

Use of Adjectives: The passage is more descriptive of the telephone booth than the relationship between Biju and his father. The predicative adjective 'relevant' used twice in the passage characterizes the non-relevance they had in each other's lives. Parents of the Diasporans are characterized as negatives of photographs rather than as vibrant beings because of immense transformation in their physical appearances brought on by time. The three adjectives used attributively to characterize the scribbling on the walls of the telephone booth are 'sugary', 'angry' and 'perverse'. These are actually the attributes of the Diasporas from various nationalities in New York City. The excessively sentimental nature of their short-lived romances, their excessive anger at being

sent to a land where there was no stable shelter or a job; had led them take up the meanest of jobs for a livelihood. Their lives were far from normal as their hearts had become sites of decayed emotions. The attributive adjective describing the Diaspora's heart is 'rotting' because the emotions of the Diasporas which are both 'sick' and 'sweet' failed to find an appropriate outlet. The sick and sweet emotions of the Diasporas are their negative and positive feelings. The inside story of a Diaspora's return is worse as people in the homeland had got accustomed to a person's absence and only the superficial niceties could be exchanged on the return of a migrant.

Use of Verbs: There is not much action described in the passage, hence most of the verbs are stative (i.e. referring to a Diaspora's state of mind). The only action described is that of the exchange of short, clichéd sentences between the father and son. The reduced verb in the infinitive 'to dispel' represents the shortened nature of the relationship between the father and son. There are verbs referring to the nature of the conversation between the father and son. The sentences are 'clipped' or cut short and the disturbance in the telephone network literally makes them shout at each other. The second passage is significant for using stative verbs to describe the thought process of the deictic centre of the passage, i.e., Biju. A good test of the verbs used in the second paragraph is that they do not admit the progressive aspect being used with them in the passage. For example a sentence reading like this "after the initial excitement was over, it often became obvious that the love was gone, for affection was only a habit after all, and people they forgot or they became accustomed to its absence" cannot be changed into its progressive form. The unchanging state of affairs represented by the stative verb 'was' is as follows—

The parent was gone
The child was too late
The love was gone

Since 'was' does not admit the progressive aspect in all three cases, it becomes evident that all Diasporans faced these unchanging ambivalent conditions on returning to their homelands. The verb 'happened' functions as a stative verb as it does not refer

to any seminal event but the usual and customary attitude of one's own kith and kin. The bonds of love which once existed had been 'eaten' from inside by the intervening years. There is an analogy between the past participle 'eaten' and the nonfinite verb 'being gouged'. Just as time had hollowed out the bonds of love, similarly termites had indented the majestic building of Cho Oyu at Kalimpong. This comparison ties up the two plots of the novel together by indicating that physical distance and the long intervening years hollow out everything. Verbs in the past perfect tense such as 'arrived', 'gone', 'had missed', 'forgot', 'accustomed', 'has been eaten' (see Appendix) – all describe the painful realization of the Diasporas on their return to their native land. Significant is the stative verb 'found' used twice in the passage expressive of the time-gap and the absence of love. There is no positive affirmation in their findings.

Grammatical Categories: The syntax of the passage on being analysed reveals a mixture of compound as well as complex sentences. The coordinate clauses in the compound sentences are joined together by the conjunctions 'but' and 'except' to show the contrast between the clauses as in sentences two and three. The negation of communication between Biju and his father is contrasted by the coordinate clause "... but emergency sentences, clipped telegram lines shouted out..." as if in the midst of a war (post-modifying adverbial clause). In the third sentence the nominative phrase "except for the hope" again states the contrast of the earlier conjoin which was in the negative, "They were no longer relevant to each other's lives..." (see Appendix). The contrastive situation as brought about by the coordinate clauses shows a seminal thematic concept represented in the passage. The dichotomy in the lives of the Diasporas is brought about through the form of the syntax. Without a green card, the illegal immigrants are neither happy in the land in which they have migrated and nor can they return. Biju, the deictic centre of the passage contemplates the fate of all Diasporas who return—either the parent was gone or the child was too late. Since the passage narrates a thought process kindled by a particular moment of uncommunicativeness there are sentences beginning with 'and' 'or' to emphasise the continuity in the thought process of Biju. Besides these connectors, there are clauses piled on top of clauses representing a mind which is confused because of the

dilemma it is in. Here is an analysis of sentence number four

It happened all the time(Main Clause)
ten years passed(M.C)
fifteen(numeral adj.)
the telegram arrived,(M.C)
or the phone call(coordinate phrase)
the parent was gone(M.C)
and the child was too late(coordinate clause)

There are as many as five super ordinate or main clauses and each carries new information. This succession of clauses shows the Diaspora's mind being fully conscious of the sequence of events following their return to their native land. Yet they long to go back, missing the warmth of their homes in an alien land. The worst shock for them is to find that even love like any other habit has fallen into disuse. The narrator has consciously chosen the passive voice to foreground love "...it had been eaten from inside", for the passage of the intervening years have reduced it to a passive force.

Significance of Italics: The use of italics is a very special device which gives "...the flavour of spoken emphasis" (Leech and Short 213). Graffiti, evocative of the suppressed desires of the Diasporas is given in italics by the third person omniscient narrator. The use of italics is appropriate for this medium as it is expressive of what the Diasporas intensely long to say but cannot do so openly. Secondly the kind of emphasis indicated by the nucleus in spoken language has its counterpart in the italicized word or words in written language. Graffiti being an important theme of the passage is hence given in italics. The native caption for Biju's father, Pitaji is also given in italics to show that he intended to be meaningful in his father's life but is skeptical whether he can bring any change in it at all. Thus *pitaji* will never become 'Dad' for Biju.

The View-point of the Passage: The passage begins with the narrative report of Biju's actions, his movement towards the telephone booth to talk to his father and thereafter his reflecting on the graffiti scrawled on the walls of the booth by the multi-racial set of Diasporas. It is his contemplation on the suppressed emotions of this mass of people as represented by the etchings on the walls

which makes him their representative. Graffiti being a mass noun represents the repressed emotions of romance and anger of this multi-ethnic set who are often led to become perverse. Then is stated the generalized narratorial comment “the sick sweet rotting mulch of the human heart” where the first four terms are value-laden expressions indicating the perverseness and the decay of emotions of the Diasporas. Unable to find any representation or voice on any platform, the Diasporas tend to become perverts. The view-point in the first paragraph moves from the deictic centre Biju reacting to the lack of communication between him and his father to a generalized narrative tone dwelling upon the decay in the emotions of the human heart. The passage has to do with “a generalized mind-set or outlook on the world that a person, often as a member of a group of people, might have” (Short 277). Biju’s belongingness to this group of illegal Diasporas makes him voice their innermost feelings.

This movement from the particular to the general is seen in the second paragraph as well where Biju conjectures about his return to India but realizes the fate of all Diasporas when they returned to their native land after a gap of ten to fifteen years. The persistent use of the third person pronouns like ‘they’ and the possessive ‘their’ and the use of the distal deictic ‘there’ shows that Biju is thinking of Diasporas from various nations and the common fate of all those who returned. Their tragedy more often than not had been the discovery that affection faded away with the passage of time and they found that what they countered were the superficial niceties without the least trace of genuine affection. The generalized comments in the passage are present in the form of the comments made by the third-person omniscient narrator. Leaving aside the first sentence of the second paragraph, the rest appears to be the narrator’s comment on what invariably happened when the Diasporas returned after a long interval to their homelands.

Discourse Emerging from the Analysis of Two Passages: In both the passages the particular merges into the general as Biju’s circumstances and psychological state are in common with other illegal Diasporas. The use of mass nouns and the use of plural referents in both the passages is ample evidence of this. The analyses reveal that all Diasporas idealize things which

are absent. In the first passage Biju recalls village life with nostalgia and in the second keenly desires to be of use to his father who was far away from him. The second passage reveals through the graffiti scribbled on the walls of the telephone booth how badly Biju and others like him are missing the warmth of their hearths. If anthropomorphizing is a device to highlight the protagonist's loneliness and state of mind in the first passage, graffiti is a tool to study the psychological landscape of the Diaspora in the second passage. Thus both passages reveal the psychological state of the Diasporas.

Diasporas are constantly entangled in their obsession with place as Diasporic experience always involves a crossing of boundaries. The illegal migrants are constantly negotiating spaces leaving no room for any kind of stability in relationships. The frequency of adverbial clauses of place, especially in the first passage is a clear indicator of this characteristic. Both passages reveal that such people are always making use of public places either to seek refuge or to give vent to their suppressed emotions. On the one hand they wish to integrate themselves in the mainstream of the host country and desire a green card and on the other the memories of their homeland constantly ruffle them. Ambivalence is a prominent characteristic of all Diasporas. On the one hand, they want to feel at home in their host countries and on the other they are worried about the ambiguous attitudes of their homelands. Their dilemma is whether the bonds of affection with their homeland would have survived the passage of time or not. The use of stative verbs in the second passage shows that the Diasporas are conscious of the disappointing and unchanging state of affairs faced by those who returned to their homelands.

The dichotomy in the lives of the Diaspora is brought about through the form of the syntax. Sentences express contrast through the use of 'but' clauses or their being divided into two equal parts by the use of a mediator main clause. The repeated use of conjunctions like 'or' 'and' 'but' etc. help in establishing the alternative possibilities existing in Biju's mind and his inability to be decisive. The use of negative words like 'not' and the contracted forms like 'couldn't' and 'wouldn't' inferentially bring out the strong currents of conflict in Biju's mind but the double negative confirms

or defends his father's action of sending him to America. The second passage too has the lexical items like 'not', 'nothing' and 'no' lending credibility to the argument that Biju despite his willingness could not do anything to better the lot of his father. The representative of the illegal Diasporas undergoes a lot of psychological strain like the other members of his community. The suffixes -less and -ness bring about the negative traits of his character- he is restless and homeless and therefore experiences an unusual emptiness.

The discourse emerging from the first passage points to the endurance and the stability of the oldest Diaspora despite its harrowing experiences and the second passage leads to the inference that Diasporans are seldom welcomed back after a long interval of time. The adverbial phrases 'at all times' and 'all the time' used in both the passages clearly relate these two stark realities. Biju has the example of the Jews surviving and thriving in America as is evident from their numbers and also is conscious of the common fate of Diasporics who returned to confront the unwelcoming attitude of their kith and kin. Both the interpretations inferentially beckon to even the illegal Diasporas to integrate and acculturate themselves in the life of their host countries.

Works Cited

Coffin, Caroline, Ann Hewings and Kieran O'Halloran, eds.
Applying English Grammar: Functional and Corpus Approaches. Great Britain: Hodder Arnold, 2004.

Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. New Delhi: Penguin India Books Pvt.Ltd, 2006.

Hillier, Hillary. "Researching the Grammar of a Literary Text".
Applying English Grammar: Functional and Corpus Approaches, eds. Coffin, Caroline, Ann Hewings and Kieran O'Halloran. Great Britain: Hodder Arnold, 2004.

Lakoff, George and Johnson, M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980.

Leech, Geoffrey and Michael, Short. *Style in Fiction*. Harlow: Longman, 1981.

Mishra, Vijay. "Diasporas and the Art of Impossible Mourning". In *Diaspora*, ed. Paranjape, Makarand. New Delhi: Indialog Publications Pvt.Ltd, 2001.

Quirk,Randolph and Sidney Greenbaum. *A University Grammar of English*. London: Longman,32nd Impression,1996.

Sheffer, Gabriel. *Diaspora Politics At Home Abroad*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Short,Mick. *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*. London and New York:Longman, 1996.

Simpson, Paul. *Stylistics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Appendix

Passage I

Oh the green card, the green card, the—Biju was so restless sometimes; he could barely stand to stay in his skin. After work, he crossed to the river, not to the part where the dogs played madly in hanky sized squares, with their owners in the fracas picking up feces, but to where, after singles night at the synagogue, long skirted -and- sleeved girls walked in an old fashioned manner with old fashioned looking men wearing black suits and hats as if they had to keep their past with them at all times so as not to lose it. He walked to the far end where the homeless man often slept in a dense chamber of green that seemed to grow not so much from soil as from a fertile city crud. A homeless chicken also lived in the park. Every now and then Biju saw it scratching in a homey manner in the dirt and felt a pang for village life.

"Chkchckchk," he called to it, but it ran away immediately, flustered in the endearing way of a plain girl, shy and convinced of the attractions of virtue.

He walked to where the green ran out into a tail of pilings

and where men like himself often sat on the rocks and looked out onto a dull stretch of New Jersey. Peculiar boats went by: garbage barges, pug-nosed tug-boats with their snoots pushing big bottomed coal carriers; others whose purpose was not obvious— all rusty cranes, cogs, black smoke flaring out.

Biju couldn't help but feel a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country, but he knew he wouldn't have forgiven his father for not trying to send him, either.

Passage II

The call was over and the emptiness Biju hoped to dispel was reinforced.

He could not talk to his father; there was nothing left between them but emergency sentences, clipped telegram lines shouted out as if in the midst of a war. They were no longer relevant to each other's lives except for the hope that they *would* be relevant. He stood with his head still in the telephone booth studded with bits of stiff chewing gum and the usual *Fuck Shit Cock Dick Pussy Love War, swastikas*, and hearts shot with arrows mingling in a dense graffiti garden, too sugary too angry too perverse—the sick sweet rotting mulch of the human heart.

If he continued his life in New York, he might never see his *pitaji* again. It happened all the time; ten years passed, fifteen, the telegram arrived, or the phone call, the parent was gone and the child was too late. Or they returned and found they'd missed the entire last quarter of a lifetime, their parents like photograph negatives. And there were worst tragedies. After the initial excitement was over, it often became obvious that the love was gone; for affection was only a habit after all, and people, they forgot, or they became accustomed to its absence. They returned and found just the façade; it had been eaten from inside, like Cho Oyu being gouged by termites from within.

— * —

Dance as a Means of Social Resurgence in Amitav Ghosh's *Dancing in Cambodia*

Sakoon Kaur Chhabra

In one of the early reviews of *Dancing in Cambodia and Other Essays* (2002), the author relates an interesting experience (Tripathi 8). He visits Tuol Sleng¹, in Phnom Penh, one of the several museums in Cambodia that are devoted to the infamous genocide between the years 1975-79. He records that the guide at the museum had an observation- she noticed that while the European and American visitors to the museum were visibly disturbed after looking at the exhibits, the Asians on the other hand just walked through very nonchalantly, 'as if looking at pictures.' Even though it was a very general observation, she thought that the reason behind this indifference could be that as compared to the Asians the Western world is better sensitised to what Cambodians have undergone as a nation. In her own way, she did spell out a significant home truth to the Asians. According to the author, 'one possible explanation is that not enough Asians have told Asia's stories in an accessible manner to other Asians... Ghosh's essays contribute to this effort.' Why I should foreground this incident as a point of departure for the present essay is really to emphasize one of the most important theoretical underpinnings of all of Ghosh's oeuvre as a writer- which is to highlight important pre-colonial encounters between nations and cultures and further deal them with his special touch where while talking about these encounters in the past, he powerfully brings out the subterranean connections which persist till the contemporary times.

It is no exaggeration to say that the beginnings of Colonialism have become the new Anno Domini for a lot of writing coming out of the world today, and it has gone to an extent where vital relations that thrived between many pre-colonial societies have today been pushed into oblivion. In a text like *In an Antique Land* which is more in the vein of an ethnography and takes the readers through Ghosh's experiences on the field in an Egyptian village he endeavors to excavate these relations between India and Egypt, two of the world's oldest civilisations bound by the experience of British Colonial rule. Ghosh admits that the book essentially is a result of

the many layered and complex experiences he had with the Egyptian people and also his constant desire to break free of the rigid 'empirical' parameters he had to adhere to as a researcher. The field work was geared towards his PhD but there was a very limited and prescriptive content he could put into his dissertation, the rest - which was equally important, took the shape of this book. In this book, the author begins by talking about Bomma, the slave of MS H.6ⁱⁱ. MS H.6 is the name of a document preserved in the National University Library in Jerusalem.

This consists of a letter written by a merchant called Khalaf ibn Ishaq around 1148 AD for his friend Ben Yiju, a merchant living in Mangalore. Towards the end of the letter, he mentions Yiju's slave Bomma and sends him 'plentiful greetings.' In the translated version of this letter, he is allotted a footnote and described as "Yiju's slave and business agent, a respected member of his household.' This reference intrigued Ghosh and in an attempt to uncover the identity of the slave he travelled all the way to Cochin. In undertaking this research as a kind of 'subplot' in *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh does two important things- one he retrieves the identity of the Indian slave which was no more than a footnote and two, by talking about the pre-colonial Indian Ocean trade he also critiques the Western academia that does not look further than Western experience to make sense of the contemporary reality. So Ghosh, while recounting his own experience as a student researcher traversing *mofussil* towns of Egypt, goes on another irresistible journey in time to put life into this Indian slave whose existence had been reduced to a mere footnote. He uncovers the truth of the thriving Medieval Indian Ocean trade between Western Coast of India and Africa, a fact that is muted in the cacophony of the Post Colonial banter that highlights only the Western brush with Ancient Civilisations of India and Egypt. So while he slogs for his PhD and worries for acceptance in Western Academia, in the ethnography he goes on a more whimsical trip that not only uncovers a facet of Medieval Indian Ocean trade but becomes a critical subtext of an obsession of the academia with Post Colonial studies that talks about these cultures in the Colonial context alone. So while he does talk about Colonial experience, in many of his books he engages with cultures which were sometime in history collaborators with India and more importantly these relations were not based on naked

exploitation² which was a basis for most Western imperialism.

It is with this intent that Ghosh does this elaborate essay piece on Cambodia, a nation, which in the contemporary times is at best on the fringes of the Indian consciousness. Countries of South East Asia including Thailand, Laos, Burma and Cambodia have had ancient economic and trade links with India. Cambodia, the name has been derived from Sanskrit *Kambujadesa* successor of the powerful Hindu and Buddhist Khmer Empire which ruled during 11th and 14th Centuries AD. There are historical linkages between India and Cambodia which he wants to point towards. Brian Harrison in *South East Asia- A Short History* talks about these links:

The Ramayana... refers to Suvarna-dvipa and Java-dvipa. Among the sea faring people of East Coast of India, these countries were known as lands of gold and it seems certain that from atleast the sixth century BC, Indian traders were sailing to these lands in search of gold and tin. In the third century BC, Emperor Asoka sent Buddhist missionaries to suvarna- bhumi. (10)

Similarly, RC Majumdar writes in his book *Hindu Colonies in the Far East* (1963) in this context:

The three principal religions of India viz- Saivism, Vaishnavism and Buddhism flourished in Fu-nan. Indian philosophical ideas, religions and mythology were familiar and the rituals and form of worship were well known. Sanskrit language and literature were cultivated and Indian alphabet was used in writing. (176)

Culturally, the continuity between Indian and South East Asian cultures is still noticeable. Tripathi elaborates:

There is an Indian—and Indic—influence on southeast Asia, which is visible in the form of the popularity of dangdut music in Malaysia, the

temples throughout the region from Vietnam to Burma and Indonesia, and the special role the Hindu epic Ramayana plays in the lives of southeast Asians even today. (When Jakarta burned in May, students in buses were singing songs extolling Anomon who had destroyed Dasomuko's Lanka; Anomon being the monkey-god Hanuman and Dasomuko being the Lankan king Ravana, from the Ramayana). (7)

D G E Hall, talks of the Indian influence on S E Asia :

Indian influence, which unlike the Chinese had no political implications, was in the process of absorption by the native societies in S E Asia , transformed just as much as, for example, that of Ancient Greece was in its impact upon Western Europe. (4)

However this continuity is hardly ever reflected in the contemporary Indian experience. Talking of contemporary Indian authors and the ever burgeoning diaspora writers, the fixation with west metropolis overtakes all other affiliations. It is in this context that Amitav Ghosh's *Dancing in Cambodia* is a welcome departure. Amitav Ghosh's present location in Brooklyn, New York, too adds another dimension to this particular essay. A large number of survivors of the Cambodian genocide settled in the US during the 1980s especially in the state of Massachusetts and during this time were trying to revive the traditional Cambodian dance through a sustained effort (Earthinflower). Thus Ghosh's location as an Indian author trying to revive the Ancient links with Cambodia and also as a member of the Asian Diaspora in the US trying to give perspective to the problems of Cambodian refugees- both locations are pertinent in the appreciation of this essay.

II

I would dream of dance when I was alone or at night. You could get through the day because of hard work. It was the nights that were really difficult; we would lie awake wondering who was

going to be called out next. That was when I would dance, in my head. (Ghosh quoting a classical dancer who survived the Khmer Rouge sponsored genocide 15)

Dancing in Cambodia is primarily a travel essay interspersed with history, political commentary and reportage. It takes an interesting trajectory - the essay begins in the year 1906, when Cambodian dancers made their first ever visit to France to participate in the grand Colonial Exhibition, then fast forwards to the year 1993 when Ghosh himself is visiting Cambodia. He arrives in the midst of a war ravaged nation which is still coming to terms with the one of the worst political carnage unleashed by the totalitarian Khmer Rouge regime led by its leader Pol Pot in the years 1975-79. According to some estimates 'three million Kampuchians, out of a population barely over seven million died between April 1975 and January 1979.' (Kiernan 211). When he arrives, it is a country still grappling with the brutal violence the ordinary Cambodians have experienced and are trying hard to get a semblance of normalcy into their broken lives. Ghosh probably sees art forms like music and dance as potent means of cathartic expression while achieving a healing touch. While on this visit he meets the country's most accomplished dancers and using these conversations, takes the readers through the entire twentieth century history of Cambodia. What is interesting about this essay is how the history of Cambodia is studied around the history of the Cambodian dance ballet, making the ballet dancers as the central protagonists through whom the history of the country unfolds. Critics such as Meenakshi Mukherjee have criticised Ghosh's choice of the Cambodian Dance as a metaphor around which Ghosh's discourse unfolds:

Dance becomes the metaphor for resistance to violence, the triumph of the human spirit. It is a curious choice of metaphor because by Ghosh's own account, dance in Cambodia seems to have been mainly a palace art, to which the common people rarely had access. Only a few girls were chosen for training in classical dance out of thousands who aspired to the privilege it conferred on their families. (Mukherjee 6)

The dance ballet draws heavily from *Raemka*, which, in turn is the Cambodian adaptation of Ramayana. The dance which is considered an icon of the Khmer identity has been associated with the royal court since antiquity. The dancers were considered as the earthly counterparts of the heavenly *apsaras*, entertainers of Gods (Earthinflower). However, this dance which boasts of an unbroken tradition since Angkor period had to undergo the worst socio-political upheaval, like a rite of passage, to emerge as a more egalitarian form, available to all sections of the society. According to estimates during the years 1975-79, Pol Pot got 90% of all practitioners of ballet killed. (Ghosh 14). It was Pol Pot's way of destroying all aristocratic and artistic practices that existed in the Pre-'Revolution' era. However after the fall of Khmer Rouge in 1979 the survivors kept this dance form alive in their refugee camps and taught the new generation. There is a justification in using the ballet as a source of emotional succour for ordinary Cambodians because it is only Post 1979 that Cambodian ballet struck a chord with ordinary people; it was made available to them for the first time through the egalitarian dance schools. Ghosh interviews Proeung Chhieng, who was one of the country's best known dancers and choreographers, and had survived the genocide. He had trained at the court and specialised in the role of Hanuman, a part that calls for combining skills like athleticism, mime and rhythm. This background literally gave him a new life when he used it to his advantage at an interrogation camp- 'his expertise and clowning helped him persuade the interrogators at his labour camp that he was an illiterate lunatic..' (Ghosh 44).

Earlier, in the essay Ghosh explains how many people 'reinvented their lives in order to protect themselves from the obsessive biographical curiosity of Angkor's cadres..' (Ghosh 13) Viewing this incident in the light of the earlier argument, as to why Ghosh should give so much importance to the dance ballet is also in a sense hidden in this incident. By highlighting this incident about the veteran dancer using his artistic talent to convince the interrogators that he was a lunatic and thereby saving his life, he actually highlights the implicit power of art to subvert because it has the power to depict. And in the times when the Khmer Rouge was killing people ruthlessly on the most frivolous grounds and the air was heavy with an ominous silence of people literally awaiting

their 'turn' to die, to think that in such times dance drama could provide a diversion, interlude or more surprisingly power through impersonation was an elevating thought.

Towards the end of the essay the author describes a public dance performance which takes place in Phnom Penh in 1988. Ghosh captures the emotional response of the audience very powerfully. He poignantly describes as to how the dancers who performed that evening could not afford the brocade silks and had to make do with cheap calico dresses, their musical instruments, costumes and masks had been destroyed over the last few years and theatre lighting was dim and unreliable. However, the performance drove hordes of Cambodians into the theatre and had a cathartic effect on the audience -"It was a kind of rebirth: a moment when the grief of survival became indistinguishable from the joy of living" (Ghosh 45). It reminded them of all that was elevated about their country and how debased they had been forced to become during the "Revolution." It is in this emotionally charged moment that the dance broke out of the confines of the court and struck a chord with ordinary Cambodians in public auditoriums. It is in this sense it becomes a symbol of this reconstruction of Cambodian spirit and society so ravaged by the excesses of Pol Pot's regime.

It is interesting also that Ghosh should choose the ballet to present Cambodian history to Indian readers because in an oblique way it draws attention to the Indian strand in Cambodian religion and Art. The cultural links between Cambodia and ancient Kambuja began with the rise of Funan dynasty around the first century AD. It is believed that an Indian named Kaundinya married a local princess and ruled the land for some time. Between 1113 and 1150 when King Suryavarman II occupied the throne at Angkor it had developed a culture incorporating a unique blend of Cambodian and Indian elements. It was under his patronage that the grand temple complex of Angkor Wat was built. The Wat portrays the Hindu cosmology- the bas reliefs depicting the myth of the churning of the Sea of Milk and the central towers depicting Mount Meru, the abode of the Gods. (Bhandari 41). In another essay on Cambodia, 'Stories in Stone' Ghosh talks about the 'discovery' of Angkor Wat by the Imperial French archeologists. He talks about

how the dominant Hindu influence in Cambodia gave way to Theravada Buddhism which was introduced around the 13th Century through monks from Sri Lanka. With the rise of Buddhism as a popular religion, the Angkor Wat complex came to be dotted with the presence of several Buddhist shrines.

Hidden behind the rows of trees , in the temple's first great courtyard, at a discreet distance from the flag stoned causeway ...are two modest pagodas...local people, pilgrims, religious supplicants and so on veer off towards the Buddhist shrines, bearing offerings and flowers (Ghosh 51).

When the imperial archeologists initiated the process of 'restoration' of the Angkor Wat, they wanted to demolish these 'living' shrines in order to restore the original character of the temple. Ghosh relates this with an obvious sense of irony- There is no doubt in his mind about the splendour and magnificence of the Angkor Wat but according to him removing the existing Buddhist shrines, which were the epicenters of the living religion of the people then was equivalent to imposing a defunct shrine, though sanitised, over the dynamic religious practices of the common people. These conditions would resonate equally well for Indian readers who are in the midst of living and dead religions, forever straddling the influence of many centuries in a given space and time.

III

Dancing in Cambodia opens with the description of a journey that the Cambodian King Sisowith undertakes to Marseilles, France in 1906. He is travelling with a group of dancers to participate in Coloniale Exhibition held to exhibit the colonial possessions and peoples of the colonies of France- 'there was little by way of exotic and opulent fantasy that the exhibition did not offer, from Tunisian Palaces to timber studded West African mosques and Indo-Chinese pavilions..' (Ghosh 2). The Mersailles newspapers excitedly reported the arrival of the dancers and gave a lot of space to the description of the institution of Cambodian ballet dance.

This cultural encounter however is fraught with its own complexities. The newspaper reportage builds up expectations of

the French and they are expecting to be treated to 'Oriental fare.' However looking at these athletic, lithe women, the onlookers were hugely disappointed.

They had expected perhaps a troop of heavily veiled, voluptuous Salomes: they were not quite prepared for this.. Interestingly so indescribable did they appear, so far outside the expected boundaries of categorisation, that one observer later wrote that 'they seem to belong to no definite sex.'
(Ghosh 4)

However the dancers along with Princess Soumphady, King Sisowith's daughter strike an instant rapport with the French. They are the centre of attraction for the days they spend here. Auguste Rodin, the celebrated French sculptor took an intense liking to the dancers.

... the delightful Cambodian princesses have reawakened my old impressions and increased them a hundred times. They have brought antiquity to life again for me. They have shown me, in reality, the beautiful gestures, the beautiful movements of the human body which the ancients knew how to capture in art. They suddenly immersed me in nature, revealed a completely new aspect and taught me that artists here below have no other task than to observe nature and find sustenance at its source. (Rodin 2)

He accompanied them everywhere and rendered them in sketches that were later widely celebrated. The present collection comes with a reproduction of some of these sketches he drew. One of the most interesting fact about these sketches is that these are completely devoid of detail. These are more in the nature of abstract human figures with eloquent gestures and fluid movements. It might have something to do with the tendencies of art movements in early twentieth century but it certainly is in sharp variance with the images of the orient we would like to believe western art propagated in tandem with Colonialism.

The essay then shifts to contemporary times- Ghosh travelled to many parts of Cambodia in 1993 and tried to understand the institution of Cambodian dance first hand by interviewing the practitioners of the art.³ He meets Chea Samy who is one of the greatest dancers in Cambodia. Samy recounts her life experience and tells Ghosh how she entered the Court as a little girl in 1925. Dance in those times was one of the ways in which common people could gain entry into the hallowed premises of the court. She recalled her days at the court with nostalgia and recounted the patronage of King Sisowith and Princess Soumphady. She then recounted the time of Pol Pot's reign and how she along with her family was evacuated to collective farms. Under this oppressive regime called 'The Revolution' an attempt was made to completely restructure Cambodian society into an agrarian utopia. To attain this end people, particularly the urban middle class were forcibly evicted from their urban dwellings and sent to farms and labour camps. In addition to this, all urban institutions including banks, schools, hospitals were targeted and completely obliterated. Ghosh describes the repression of the Pol Pot regime in the following lines and its effect on the Cambodians:

They had lived through an experience nearly unique in history: they have found themselves adrift in the ruins of a society which has collapsed into a formless heap, its scaffolding systematically dismantled, picked apart with the tools of a murderously rational form of social science...(Ghosh 15)

This systematic destruction of 'all forms of knowledge' encompassing education, religion, philosophy, banking and economy and entertainment was something hitherto unknown. One of the casualties of this repression was also the large scale killing of practitioners of all arts including the ballet. This was done because in times such as these art becomes a powerful medium to challenge the powers and their actions. Arts in their oblique manner can raise questions about those in power and become a source of threat for them. The Cambodian state under Pol Pot would make people evacuate their homes and take them to agrarian camps where each

one would be subject to interrogation about one's profession and past identity. Some professions including dance were thought to pose a potential threat to the regime and these people were routinely executed. Chea Samy talks of her own experience on one such farm and how she is saved by a stroke of luck. When with the Vietnamese invasion Pol Pot's regime came to a sudden end in 1979, she trekked back to reclaim what was left of her old life. It was announced by the new Government that it was keen to revive the ballet so that it wasn't lost forever. Samy responded to the call and was offered to take charge of a new ballet school that the government wanted to set up. Samy, with her labour and persistence 'slowly brought together a ragged, half starved bunch of orphans and castaways and with the discipline of their long, rigorous years of training they began to resurrect the art...' (Ghosh 15). When Ghosh turns up to interview her she is in charge of this school, its doors are open to anybody who cares to learn the dance. With Samy's story Ghosh not only goes into the details of the Cambodian political situation but also highlights a certain trajectory the ballet has traveled in the country. From a high art form that was practiced for the patronizing royalty behind closed doors to the democratic institution of a school that caters to all.

One of Ghosh's strengths as a writer is his powerful ability to excavate certain historical linkages. As mentioned in the beginning of the essay, he is able to bring out the ancient cultural connect that existed between the Cambodians and Indians by writing about a subject so close to Cambodian culture and history and combining it with the worst possible human tragedy. He is also able to deploy dance as a pivot around which he situates the Twentieth Century Cambodian history in all its complexity. He is able to link up the Colonial experience of the Cambodian dancers in France to their subsequent repression and later to a magnificent resurgence in times after the downfall of Pol Pot regime. He investigates these connections in Cambodian history with the rigour of a Social Scientist and in this essay relates it with the élan of an ancient story teller. In an interview to John Hawley, he talks about his fascination with history as it "provides instances of unusual and extraordinary predicaments." (Hawley 6). In his meetings with a cross section of Cambodian people, he is able to bring out the terror they experienced during Pol Pot's regime and also their own ingenious re-

sponses to these situations. Through these conversations he is able to resurrect the painful Cambodian history, in the process giving it a voice, especially because for a long time there was only silence. This work tries to bring out lost connections between nations and between disparate historical events and with ingenuity that situates it all around the Cambodian dance.

Notes:

- i This experience that the reviewer quotes is his own. Amitav Ghosh in the present essay too mentions Tuol Sleng. It was originally a school building with 'large, airy, black boarded classrooms', later these were lined with crudely constructed cubicles to keep the prisoners during the Khmer Rouge regime. Untold privations and countless executions were the order of the day within this premises. This building has now been converted into a museum.
- ii Authors like RC Majumdar and Ram Ranjan Das use the term 'colony' to describe the Indian presence in Cambodia. Majumdar's book is titled 'Hindu Colonies in the Far East' (1944) and Das uses the term 'Greater India' to indicate the extent of India's influence on South East Asia. Historians such as DG E Hall refute this position in his book and talks about '...the insidious tendency to overstress the part played by 'imported cultures and to underrate the indigenous ones of the area...since they obscure the fact that the areas involved are not mere cultural appendages of India/China but have their own marked individuality...Indian influence, which unlike the Chinese had no political implications, was in the process of absorption by the native societies in SE Asia. (Hall 4). My position is more aligned towards Hall and in this discussion I go with the understanding that India has had religious and philosophical impact on Cambodia since Ancient times, however these influences have seeped into the South East Asian societies in an adapted form and the sanguine nationalistic fervour to declare these countries as 'colonies' of India would be along imperialist lines.

- iii Ben Kiernan, an eminent authority was amongst the very first scholars to study the situation in Cambodia in depth. He also extensively interviewed Cambodian refugees and survivors of the genocide to present the extent of the tragedy and persistently lobbied to bring the Khmer Rouge leadership before the International Court of Justice along with the legal adoption of the term genocide to describe the ghastly carnage. Given the repression of all kinds of information in Cambodia, he relied on the accounts of refugees as the 'primary source of information' for his authoritative study on the subject. Ghosh, too, expresses his debt to Kiernan in an endnote and primarily uses the same technique, of interviewing survivors and refugees to reconstruct the years of the 'revolution.'

Works Cited

- Barron, John and Paul, Anthony. *Murder of a Gentle Land*. New York: Readers Digest Press, 1977
- Bhandari, C.M. *Saving Angkor*. Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1995.
- Bhattacharji, Shobhana. 'Amitav Ghosh's Travel Writing ' Travel Writing in India. Ed. Shobhana Bhattacharya. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2008. 56- 76.
- Bose, Brinda. 'Footnoting History: The Diasporic Imagination of Amitav Ghosh', In *Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts*. Ed. Makarand Paranjape. New Delhi: Indialog 2001.
- Chambers, Claire. 'The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations : A Discussion with Amitav Ghosh.' *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 41:1 (2008): 26-39.
- Chatterji, BR. *South East Asia in Transition*. Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan. 1965.
- Das, Ram Ranjan. *Art Traditions of Cambodia*. Calcutta: Firma KL Mukhopadhyaya. 1974.

Dixon, R. ' "Travelling in the West": The Writing of Amitav Ghosh.'
The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 31:1 (1996):
3-24.

Earthinflower.com . Ed. Dr Paul Cravath. 2008. 18 March 2010
<http://www.earthinflower.com/eif.php?page=links>

Ghosh, Amitav. Dancing in Cambodia and Other Essays. New Delhi:
Penguin, 2002.

Hall, DGE. A History of South East Asia. London: Macmillan, 1955.

Harrison, Brian. South East Asia- A Short History. London:
Macmillan, 1955.

Hawley, John C. Amitav Ghosh. New Delhi: Foundation Books,
2005.

Khair, Tabish.. Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion, New Delhi:
Permanent Black, 2003.

Kiernan, Ben. Genocide and Resistance in South East Asia. New
Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008.

Loomba, Ania. Colonialism/Postcolonialism, New York: Routledge,
1998.

Majumdar, RC. Hindu Colonies in the Far East. Calcutta: Firma KL
Mukhopadhyaya, 1963.

Mukherjee, M. 1998. 'Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in
Burma,' IndiaStar Review of Books 10 March 2010
<http://www.indiastar.com/mukherjee1.html>.

Rodin ,Auguste. 1906. 'The dancers of King Sisowith of Cambodia'
15 March 2010. Wisdomportal.com. Ed. Peter Y. Chou.
<http://www.wisdomportal.com/Rodin>.

Srivastava, Neelam. 'Amitav Ghosh's Ethnographic Fictions:
Intertextual Links between In An Antique Land and

His Doctoral Thesis.' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 36:2 (2001): 45-64.

Tripathi, Salil. 'The Past is Now' 2003. 15 March 2010. <http://www.salitripathi.com>

Vijay Kumar, T. ' "Postcolonial" describes you as a negative.' *Interventions*, 9:1 (2007), 99-105.

Viswanathan, Gauri, 'Beyond Orientalism: Syncretism and the Politics of Knowledge,' *Stanford Humanities Review*, Stanford, CA, 5:1 (1995), 19 - 34.

— * —

**The IPL did not take place.
.....and it will not take place
(An Analysis of Indian Premier League, after
its Three Editions)**

Shivashish Sah

Since, there is too much of cricket, there is no cricket. For two consecutive years, Indians had great fun in the *tamasha* named IPL and for two consecutive years, India ended up performing terribly in the T20 World Cup. Had it been truly a cricket tournament, it would have translated into India's performance in the World Cups. M S Dhoni, who proudly won the IPL 3, once again presented a sorry figure after an early exit from the world cup. It was almost a repeat telecast of what happened in England. What happened in England happened again in West Indies. There is a serious possibility that the same would keep happening in the future. IPL bandwagon has been a witness to some of the strangest things. It has been that kind of tournament where Shah Rukh Khan ended up giving advice to Sunil Gavaskar, on issues of strategizing for cricket matches. Mashrafe Mortaza —the fast bowler of Bangladesh, (who is the spearhead of team that has no standing in international cricket) was purchased for crores by Kolkata Knight Riders. Interestingly, he sat on the bench throughout the tournament. Men are being sold and bought, like horses of a stable. This is a simulacrum of the finest kind. Never was this a sporting tournament and never would it be. It is the simulation of a sporting tournament that is threatening to gulp sports itself. At the end of his book, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Jean Baudrillard wonders how one would succeed in differentiating between a real war and that war of simulation. Interestingly, this simulated tournament has such a razzmatazz that it threatens to destroy the real sporting competition itself. Very soon a real sporting event would be buried and unaccepted because only superreal and clandestine sporting events like IPL would pass as sports. This is the victory of the virtual over the real.

The Indian Premier League was supposedly a tournament that would give representation to various states of the country. A curious incident happened in the first season of the tournament

when Harbhajan Singh,(a pannjabi sikh boy who plays for Mumbai) slapped Sreesanth(a south Indian who plays for Punjab). The aftereffects of this incident were that the whole of Mumbai took up cudgels against Punjab team, in support of Harbhajan. Interestingly in introduction to Boria Majumdar's book, *The Illustrated History of Indian Cricket* it is stated, "Cricket has been the binding spirit for a fractitious India...It has been social mobility, and it has been tolerance and secularism." To the reverse of it, IPL is causing confusion by creating fractions and by dividing loyalties into various royal provinces. The royal legacies of Rajputs of Rajasthan and the Nizams of Hyderabad rest in the hands of two Australians. Australia has taken the responsibility to fight for the pride of Maharana Pratap and also for the pride of the Char Minar. Matthew Hayden, who owns a chain of restaurants in Australia, is busy cooking *rasam* and *dosa* with M.S. Dhoni, who is the adopted son of Chennai. This phenomenon can be related to Arjun Appadurai's concept of "Reterritorialization," as well. In case of reterritorialization, the trajectory of the ethnic groups is decided on the basis of their imagined lives. In these cases, the adoption of these imported sons of our country have become a part of our imagined lives and ethnicity.

IPL has been voted as one of the most glamorous sport franchisee. Who's who of Bollywood is ruling the roost in IPL. The main Knight (cricketer) in Kolkata Knight Rider is one and only Shah Rukh Khan. A visit to the Nike Sports Showroom reveals that Knight Rider jerseys of S.R.K are patented by their company. Whose coffers are being filled by this? Is the money coming to India? Can we still dare to say that this is a domestic tournament? Shah Rukh Khan, himself, is a man caught in the extreme hyperreal. The success of *Chak De* made him believe that he is the ultimate coach and his words and advice, would launch the team to ultimate success. The virtual role of the film had become real for him. Alas! it did not translate into the team's performance. But who cares? Shah Rukh Khan's franchisee was the only one that won profit in the very first year despite the team's dismal performance. It is a sport of spinning the ball to hit the jackpot. The hyperreal has taken over the imagination of the masses too. This phenomenon is aptly described in Adorno's concept of "The Culture Industry". Adorno opined that in the height of capitalism fetishness, packaging

overpowers the quality. People were unconcerned about the quality of Knight Rider team. The glitzy and glittery packaging of this band of underperformers still was successful in pushing the masses to buy sports gear of their team. Despite losing the tournament, Sahrukh khan(an astute businessman) was rolling in wealth from the profits he made from the sale of the knight riders merchandise.

The basic requisite of a domestic tournament is that it is domestic. Is IPL domestic in any sense? The second season of this so called domestic tournament was organized by South Africa. This is anything but an Indian League. Perhaps, an Indian Corporate League would have been a more justified name. However, that would become ICL, which would lead to a controversy of another sort. The Indians watched their domestic tournament through television. In the second season, the most influential face of the tournament was a silly yet interesting creature. Most definitely, it was not the face of a cricketer because cricket and cricketers have taken a back seat in this cricket tournament. The attraction shifted from the cheer leaders and celebrities to the face of a stupid, silly cartoon of Vodafone ads that outshined the pretty faces of the costliest stars for which companies spend crores of rupees. Marshal Mc Luhan's in his essay, "Medium is the Message" points out towards the confusion and muddiness prevalent in postmodern age of computers, graphics and capitalism. In this electronic age, there is dissolution of the message and the medium. The program seen through television is inclusive. The cricket on the field is not the content and it is not which reaches through the medium of television. So, if I see after every over, a cartoon flashing on the screen, it is as much a part of my viewing as the match and I cannot compartmentalize the impact of the cricket and the advertisements. Interestingly these cartoons have proved greater hit than the costliest brand ambassadors that Pepsi and Coke employ.

The overtaking of a sporting tournament by the capitalists cannot be more prominently felt. The name of the tournament in the second season was changed to DLF IPL. Now, this seems like six alphabets of English, somewhat disarranged. But this disorder earned them millions of rupees. Indeed from the sporting point of view everything here is disarranged. Corporate priorities overpower every sporting norm and concern. When a six was hit, it was not a

six. It was a DLF six. When a wicket was taken, it was not a simple wicket; it was a “citi” moment of success. The commentators too are paid to use these brand names. How oft when a wicket did not fall, the commentator uttered, that could have been a “citi” moment! He succeeded in pinching some more money from the sponsors even without the fall of a wicket. Not surprisingly, when a six was hit a commentator uttered, “Now that is a DLF.” He did not care to add a six to it. This is a new jargon, where sporting terminologies are being sold for corporate names. However, there is a larger question. Does the attachment of a brand name to a six or wicket in any way add to the sellability of the product? The doubt is of the severest kind. Unfortunately, Citibank was unable to earn popularity in that “citi moment of success”. Interestingly, it is this very company that was almost on the verge of bankruptcy due to recession. If not now, in the future, it would definitely turn bankrupt if its ideas of advertisement continue to be so bankrupt. The case of the other one is even queerer. DLF is a real estate builder. This sort of company is not a mass producer. Yet, it is hell bent on advertising like one. The mystery of such an urge is beyond cognition. This whole urge to advertise endlessly reminds us once again of Baudrillard’s book, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, where he has been severely critical of targeted promotion. He compares the targeted promotion to the Scud missiles that Saddam Hussein kept launching, which fell on no target. Similarly, these advertisements do succeed in creating a lot of noise but whether they make the correct impact or not is highly questionable.

The corporates are very casually juggling and diddling with the sanctified norms and modes attached with a particular sport. The success of the T-20 format lied in its fast pace. Result did not mean a long wait and this brought in the spectators as well as the interested corporate parties. However, interestingly these very corporate houses were bent on destroying the pace of the game, which was its USP. The once smart manager, Mr. Lalit Modi and not the ousted chairman of IPL introduced ten minutes break after ten overs in the second season. Such a thing acted as a serious hurdle in the flow of the match. Very often, the whole complexion of the match changed because the batsman in flow lost his rhythm. All the teams cried fowl on this specific issue. However, no one listened to their bootless cries because at the end of the day, this

was not a game of cricketers but of business houses. Yet, these business houses that work only for profit motive are prepared to take such sacrilegious decision which earn them anything but profit. Their foolishness can be found in the manner in which they spend money on star batsmen that fall like shooting stars when the real match arrives. Mr. Vijay Mallya's Kevin Petersen proved one such curious case in the second edition. Interestingly, the somewhat avaricious owners of Rajasthan Royals, made an aging and retired leg spinner, as their captain, coach, trainer, motivator and what not. This team had more success than many other teams that spent ten times over in the first year. The reason is not because Shane Warne is the smartest cricketer, ever. The reason is simple. Success in sports, especially in one like T20 does not come with money. It depends on a wide variety of factors and luck is one crowning determinate, in this regard. The strange behaviour of these business houses can at least not be understood in terms of profit making. Bentham's concept of utilitarianism is not coming into play, here. It is more than profit making that is drawing owners like Vijay Mallya and Shah Rukh Khan into such reckless spending. It is not business sense but pride that is coming into play. This is another sort of deep play, where pride of the owner has become more important than other monetary conditions. So quite interestingly, even the corporate world which runs solely on profit motive, has gone somewhat haywire in recognizing its goals in this simulation of cricket and entertainment. Another very important concern is related to the problem of match fixing. There are serious doubts regarding the authenticity of all the matches. In the second season, in one of the matches Kolkata Knight Rider dropped the in-form Brad Hodge and continued to loose. After what has happened in Pakistan Cricket, it is almost clear that a good amount of matches in international cricket are still being fixed. It was not with Hansie Cronje that the ghost of match fixing stopped haunting this sport. In fact, a lot of experts opine that Cronje was still an honest man, for at least he accepted his mistake. There are many who fixed matches but never accepted it. If international tournaments are being fixed so incautiously, there is no reason to believe that a tournament like IPL can be free from it. More so, when we know that the only aim of conducting such a tournament is the desire of profit making. Such a state puts serious questions on the very reality of the contest. Interestingly and ironically in the second season, the issue of match

fixing was looked into by the ever tainted Lalit Modi, who is himself is wanted by the Jaipur Court on a case of fraud. In the end of the second season, the worst team of the first season emerged as the winner and Mallya's team emerged as the runner up, in the captaincy of the old warhorse Anil Kumble and not the flamboyant KP.

Cricket has taken a back seat. Everything other than sports has become relevant in this *tamasha* named IPL. There was a time, when an overseas tournament was eagerly awaited. The first ball of such a tournament would lead to true excitement in the hearts of the viewers. There used to be a nervous energy in the batsmen and the bowler at the beginning of the new season. Now, the excitement is generated by pompous shows and laser performances. With purposeless cricket everyday, the zest for the game in the heart of the cricketers has subsided already. Not surprisingly, Shane Warne does not mind taking a sip of beer during the proceedings of one of the matches. The sanctity associated with sports has been flung out of the window. The permanence and the longevity of such tournaments has stolen the elusive charm of a true competition. The third season was no better. There was greater intervention, more partying and more razzmatazz. Alongside, there was some cricket on the fringe. The long third tournament resulted in a long list of injured players. Some of them hid their injuries to retain their place in the Indian Squad. With this kind of a contingent, India went to play in West Indies and most definitely, the result was a retelecast of what happened in England T20 Cup. They introduced another clone of IPL, named as Champions League. However, it failed miserably, at least in India. Now they are organizing this tournament outside India. People are still skeptical about the success of this tournament. Interestingly the level of cricket in the Champions League was of a very high class. It was a keenly contested tournament. Yet, it failed

An Indian Premier League was supposed to provide a new high to domestic cricket, which was ignored earlier. It did succeed in doing so, but at the cost of cricket itself. The domestic cricketers too have hogged the limelight but the true competition itself has disappeared. Cricket broadcast too has become another daily soap that goes endlessly and relentlessly. The new rules of the games

are being written in the board -room of corporate houses. The end of cricket is birth of IPL. But is there anything real like IPL? Baudrillard had once commented that there is no Baudrillard and he is the simulation of Baudrillard. Similarly, what we see is no IPL but a fake simulation of cricket.

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception". *The Culture Industry*. London Fontana Press, 1992.

Appadurai, Arjun. "The Production of Locality." *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* Delhi : OUP, 1997.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place." *Jean Baudrillard: Select Writings*. Cambridge and Oxford : Polity, 1998.

Bentham, Jeremy. *Utilitarianism*. London : Progressive Publishing Company, 2009.

Boria, Majumdar. *The Illustrated History of Indian Cricket*. UK: Roundhouse Publishing Group, 2006.

Geertz, Clifford. "Notes on Balinese Cockfight." *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Mc Luhan, Marshall "The Medium is the Message." *Understanding Media*. London and New York : Routledge, 1964.

—————*—————

The Questioned 'Reality' of Reality Television A Baudrillardian Perspective

Supriya Chowdhary

Real, reality and realism are not settled notions or constructs. The struggle for the expression of real has undergone many changes. The traditional binary of appearance versus real does not enable us to reach the truth as both real and appearance defy definitions. With the coming of virtual systems, we have become numb to reality. The virtual systems have been able to mimic the full range of our textures and we are witnessing a journey from realism to real time. Immersing the masses by impressing and not simply indulging them into passive consumption is the goal of this new technology. This simulated reality is the most lethal variant of realism. Realism in television can refer to an adequate relationship between what television represents and how it is represented. Television realism is a flexible category. It is a matter of both content and of the conventions or codes which structure the representation seen on the screen. Television cannot be a true representation but can be a medium in which the beginnings of a true state of affairs could occur. In this context, realism is no longer a reflection of exterior reality but one of the forms in which audience and representation connect with each other.

Reality television is a genre of television programming which presents purportedly unscripted dramatic or humorous situations, documents actual events, and usually features ordinary people instead of professional actors. Although the genre has existed in some form or another since the early years of television, the term reality television is most commonly used to describe programs of this genre produced since 2000. Reality television covers a wide range of programming formats, from game or quiz shows to dating shows and talent hunt shows. Such shows frequently portray a modified and highly influenced form of reality, with participants put in exotic locations or abnormal situations, sometimes coached to act in certain ways by off-screen handlers, and with events on screen sometimes manipulated through editing and other post-production techniques. Reality television saw an explosion of global popularity starting in the early 2000s. Two reality series, *Survivor*

and American Idol have been the top-rated series on American television for an entire season. Currently there are at least two television channels devoted exclusively to reality television: Fox Reality in the United States, launched in 2005, and Zone Reality in the UK, launched in 2002.

The era of soaps and family dramas on Indian television is coming to an end. People prefer a reality show to a prolonged television drama. The times are changing and the buzzword today is reality shows. These shows provide television programme producers a huge opportunity in India for them. KBC and Indian Idol have made history in terms of people's participation and have been great revenue generators as well. The popularity has been so widespread that Aastha, the leading religious television network in India, is to introduce a reality TV show, based on the global Idol formula, in an attempt to reach out to a younger audience. The show, tentatively named Religious Indian Idol, will be an interactive musical talent contest between teenagers from universities and religious colleges. Instead of pop tunes, they will perform devotional songs from the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Jain faiths.

In the sixties, Andy Warhol, the cultural icon responsible for contemporary pop art-forms that merged high and low art predicted that in the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes. It was in reference to how society tends to make celebrities out of ordinary people for brief periods of time. Some people have speculated that reality TV is the manifestation of Warhol's 15 minutes of fame because it elevates mass numbers of ordinary people to celebrity status, if only for a short time. The reality television becomes a true simulation, of pure re-appropriation and copying. In an interview with Francis Gillard in 1990, Baudrillard remarked that simulation is:

.... kind of a short circuit between reality and its image, between reality and its representation. In the end they are the same elements that once served to constitute the reality principle except that they collide and cancel each other out, somewhat like matter and anti matter. What comes out of it the universe of simulation is fascinating and

phantasmorgic (Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art* 48).

The same simulation of the reality television appears so convincing that people believe in them per se becoming indifferent to the conniving unreality of it all. Talking about the reality shows, he maintained that they are dust breeding grounds where the whole idea is to raise the dust of gossip, of unreality and of seduction. He calls them the “synthetic banality manufactured in the closed circuit on control screen” (*The Conspiracy of Art* 182). Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulacrum, the destabilisation of any form of reality caused by new reproduction technologies is evident in the proliferation of our lives with reality shows. These shows are an ultimate expression of simulacrum which is completely devoid of any antecedent ‘real’. These shows in spite of being highly constructed and edited still give the impression of being more real than other programs. Nothing provokes more existential crisis than ones inability to distinguish real from non real or manufactured.

With reality television one needs to understand how the concept of real has been challenged and revitalised in the age of technological reproduction. In the book *Jean Baudrillard: Live Theory*, the author Paul Hegarty upholds that “Reality television, as presence of cameras distorts reality and as in early 2000’s the shows have shown that reality is too dull, so needs spicing up with adventurous tasks. As a result medium prevents the real from ever occurring” (295). It becomes a genre of television in which a storyline is created from people interacting or competing with one another in so called unscripted, unrehearsed situations. Reality TV is actually comprised of highly controlled and pre-determined situations that produce social drama that has been specifically fabricated for the cameras and the television advertisers.

Drama makes for a good show. Even if one interacts normally with people, producers will find a way to highlight the most interesting parts and it might come across on television as being excessively dramatic. Ultimately reality show creators just want to entertain their audience. Whether it is a dance show or the Big Brother house in which racial slurs and catfights are a part of the process to decide winners, much goes into presenting a reality

show as real. The basic recipe remains the same as soaps: Flirtation, betrayal, tears, bitching and scheming. The only difference is that it is presented as reality. Baba Sehgal, who was voted out of the show "Big Boss" is of the opinion that "Most of the reality shows cash in on the emotional drama of the participants and the viewers. The drama-quotient is unrealistic in these shows. It is the work of clever editing that does wonders for the reality shows producers. They always show whatever is dramatic, to retain the audience's interest". (As qtd in an editorial in "The Times of India "How real are Reality Shows?" dated 26 January 2007).

In the reality show big boss the participants establish a space where ordinary behavior is not only recorded but also dramatized. Despite the shows attempts to dramatize the situation it is the banality that is interesting to the public and existence is reduced to the realness eluded by the control and manipulation. The coverage of the series shows that that certain character types and stock characters are built up. The participants attempt to play roles that would stop other participants from voting them off and which would encash them audience support. The realism of such reality shows is a performance An especially good example of this can be found in Manigault-Stallworth, a star of Donald Trump's "The Apprentice." She has been called "the most hated woman on television" because of the behavior and attitude people see her with. But how much of her on-screen persona is real and how much is a creation of the shows editors? Quite a lot of the latter, according to Manigault-Stallworth in an email quoted by MSNBC: "What you see on the show is a gross misrepresentation of who I am. For instance they never show me smiling, it's just not consistent with the negative portrayal of me that they want to present. Last week they portrayed me as lazy and pretending to be hurt to get out of working, when in fact I had a concussion due to my serious injury on the set and spent nearly ... 10 hours in the emergency room. It's all in the editing!" (As qtd. in "Ethics and reality TV" by Elizabeth Larkin.).

Baudrillard rightly calls for such a case where the distinction becomes blurred. He argues that we can no longer distinguish between imitation and reality, we are lost in a world of simulacra created and presented as "real" by the mass media, and we

sometimes prefer the imitations because they seem more real than life. This state of what Baudrillard called “hyperreality” explains why we are swamped by TV reality shows which are anything but reality. The reality of the genre in discussion gravitate us towards Baudrillard that the reality television [gives] “the illusion of a real world, an exterior world, despite the fact that each world is the exact image of the other” (Dust Breeding” in *Jean Baudrillard: The Conspiracy of Art* 181). By using the words “illusion” and “exact image,” Baudrillard points to reality TV programs as mere simulacra of the real world.

Baudrillard claimed that Disneyland was created to disguise the unreality of the rest of USA. We can confer the same in case of reality television as the fabrication provides convenient alibi for the non falsity of the real world. We all are so actively involved in this game in terms of our voting and our enthusiasm that stage comes when reality becomes a screen and the screens become our total reality. A VH1 expose, “Reality TV Secrets Revealed” divulges many of the techniques used by the producers of these shows to get the story they want including recreating actions that were not originally caught on tape, combining audio and video from separate times together, and acting out pre-planned storylines. Though the audience is allowed to observe the cast members of each reality TV show, but can only see a small group of images selected from many hours of footage. Through editing techniques, the producers can exaggerate elements from an individual’s personality to construct a persona that audiences can rapidly identify. Each episode of these shows is culled from as much as 72 hours of footage from multiple cameras. They can make anyone look bad and they can make anyone look good. In short they have the power to dictate our likes and dislikes as well to control us. Arlid Fetveit in his book *Reality TV in the Digital Era: A Paradox in Visual Culture?* to this situation maintains that: “Reality TV comes with a unique promise of contact with reality, but at the same time it promises a secure distance”(130).

Reality television might be praised for democratising but for Baudrillard this high exposure for high ordinary highlights the bankruptcy of democracy where the main stance is too meaningless to be thought as real. With the coming up of such shows we see a

marked shift in ideologies of media from a liberal enterprise emphasizing on personal empowerment and public service and their concern with larger social issues to an aggressive surveillance of an individual subject and engaging not only him but the audience in to this vicious circle. Such programs connote entrapment, restriction and control and the contestants are just like the rats trapped in a laboratory maze. Rules are imposed by production team and tasks are set which further provides the contestants with rewards just as in laboratory animals are trained to undertake tasks to gain food. Besides giving the audience the thrill and excitement of live and un-edited action, reality television allows the audience to be a part of the show. Take for example Indian Idol, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa or Big Boss and many others which allow the audience to choose the winner through a voting system. Although the credibility of these voting systems is debated about forever, the interactivity factor definitely fetches the show a lot of viewership Hasan Suroor of The Hindu reported from London as to how phone-in TV shows are a big scandal in Britain. This included respected channels like BBC, ITV and Channel 4. Winners for phone-in competitions were "fixed". Viewers were encouraged to continue the premium rate phone calls even after the contest had been closed. Hasan says: "There were cases of winners being chosen even before the voting started; votes being rigged; studio guests being persuaded to pose as callers when a technical glitch prevented genuine viewers from calling; and producers resorting to gimmicks to create 'tension'" According to him, the industry insiders feel that "such malpractices are inevitable in a climate of cut-throat competition with TV channels prepared to do anything to pull in viewers and attract advertising. Even the BBC, which doesn't depend on commercial advertising, has been accused of chasing ratings to justify its licence fee". (As qtd. in "Phone in TV shows are scandal.")

Actually, the term "Reality TV" is a misnomer. All these shows involve a lot of inputs that modify reality beyond recognition. Rehearsals, artificial props and simulated situations rob the shows of reality. It has been admitted that participants have to do rigorous late-night rehearsals. They are even told what jokes to crack and what and how to speak in front of the camera, thus robbing the proceedings of spontaneity and hence reality. Then, there are attempts to spice up the proceedings through faux controversies.

Take the instance of UK's infamous Big Brother. Jade Goody's racist remarks against Shilpa Shetty were clearly prompted by commercial interests. The two made up after the desired publicity was achieved. So, while Big Brother's TRP's shot up, Shilpa Shetty's flagging career perked up too. Big Brother's Indian avatar Big Boss also tried the controversy route to fame. It could be the excessive emotional drama played by Amit Roy in season one or the so called romance between Rahul Mahajan and Payal Rastogi in season 2. What is ultimately wanted is TRP's; it can be by adding the sob quotient or the emotional quotient.

In the essay "Dust Breeding" in the book *Conspiracy of Art*, Baudrillard airs his views about the reality shows. He is of the view that the purpose of reality shows is just to earn commercial value. For him our reality has become experimental. The ongoing experimentation on human beings who voluntarily remain captive in the houses of programs like big boss, MTV roadies is "a condensed version of human zoo" (*The Conspiracy of Art*, 181). But unlike animals we are not forced to stay rather choose it as our fate in hunt scouting for 15 minutes of fame. Baudrillard opines that "The reality shows act as a metaphor of the modern being enclosed in a personal loft that is no longer his/her mental/physical universe but a tactile and digital universe, the universe of... , of digital humans caught in the labyrinth of networks, of people becoming their own white mice". (*The Conspiracy of Art* 193). Real time vision only adds to the unreality of things. We are heading towards total deception. But this deception enthalls us and this uncertainty and rupture has a large role to play in sustaining the insatiable demand for these spectacles. With the excessive participation in all the unreal events, Baudrillard is of the view that "we are in a stage of "un coma depasse" (*The Conspiracy of Art*199).

Reality shows are a form of voyeurism and pornography not only referring to the publicising of our private sphere but also at the excessive materialisation of this whole project. In times when media became incapable of giving account of the world events, they invested in the sweet bitter pill of everyday life. They trespass our private sphere scripting, dramatising and melodramatising it. And we all are enamoured by this condition as it is an ideal state of

inertia in which we have nothing to say, nothing to do. Simply cipher and not decipher. This involvement takes place in the form of public voting. But for Baudrillard this freedom to choose is not there to make things visible to the outside eye but:

...to make them transparent to themselves by infusing the masses with control while erasing all traces of operation. The audience is whence involved in a vast negative counter transference with itself and once again this is the dizzying attraction of this type of a spectacle. (*The Conspiracy of Art* 182).

All this makes us reach apppoint of impossible exchange as these shows exhibit “right and desire to be nothing and seen as nothing” (*The Conspiracy of Art* 182). The dilemma involved in such shows according to Baudrillard is right to be seen and at the same time not to be seen. We have right to see the dramatised version of the manufactured reality and equally do we have the right not to see the treachery and ruse these shows are playing on us. The reason as to why these programs are so popular and believed in (as is evident from the turn out of the voters and the participants) is answered by Anita Beressi in her book *Reality T.V* is of the opinion that:

The simulation of privacy, over a period of time feels authentic and indeed for the thousands this is their lived reality for the duration of the program. As a symbolic realm it is away from reality and much closer to being a metaphor for television itself- intimate, immediate in every day yet highly produced and packaged from mass consumption (21).

Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies* talking about consumption says that: “... everything in everyday life is dependent on representation which the bourgeois has and makes us have of relations between man and the world” (140). And it is the ethics pervaded by the same consumer society that their norms become a natural order. And sometimes one wonders if there is anything

true or false about the ideologies being circulated by the capitalists. They are neither completely true nor false. They are a sign function which is beyond the binaries of usefulness or uselessness or good or bad. This is the reality of the present when:

Spectators then become 'exoterics of the screen, living their revolution as an exoticism of images, themselves exogenous, tourists spectators of a virtual history. From the movement studio becomes the strategic centre and screen only site of appearance, everyone wants to be on it at all costs, or gather in the street in the glare of the cameras, and these indeed film each other. The street becomes an extension of the studio, that is, of the non site of the event, of the virtual site of the event. The street itself becomes a virtual space. Site of definitive confusion of masses and medium, of real time confusion of act and sign (*The Illusion of the End* 56).

This confusion and paradox is highlighted as the Reality shows take pride in their confessional nature, but the confession room in the house of big boss, roadies speak for the same hollowness of language which is unable to communicate. It simply speaks. Language is also unreal and "... becomes nothing more than a medium, a visibility operator" (*The Conspiracy of Art* 184), losing its ironic or symbolic dimension. Baudrillard bringing in the case for the havoc created in present day's scenario at the level of communication and language puts forth: "Communication is to language what reproduction is to sexuality". But he says "the poetic ecstasy of our language corresponds to the libertine phase of sexuality without reproduction" (*Cool Memories* 2, 88).

The name The Reality Television is highly ironic. Even though the camera captures action as it occurs and no scripts are used, the individuals know they are being filmed. Sometimes they even talk directly to the cameras. Calvert in his book *Voyeur nation: Media, privacy, and peering in modern culture* suggest that such shows reflect changing cultural norms. He says that: "Far from fearing the prying presence of the lens, a new generation

longs to live its life out in full view for all to see....Although the generations that came of age in the 1970s and 1980s grew up on watching television, the youth of today now crave growing up in television “ (32). The “blurring of reality” impacts not only the cast members, but those consuming and watching the shows resulting in a quest on the part of audience members for reality in an increasingly mediated world in which fact and fiction, acting and being are hard to distinguish. Reality television becomes one of the sites of fascination, where meaning is supposed to implode with greater flourish; you bestow beauty on that void and give meaning to what should not have any.” (*Cool Memories* 35). He says that these implosions occur in terms of spectatorly and carnal visuals of reality shows which flesh out of what are ultimately our metaphysical leanings.

The soaring TRP's and viewership of such programs vouch for the chosen servitude of the audience which so enthusiastically and religiously consume these programs. According to reports, 'Big Boss Season 2' has had nearly 40 lakh viewers watching the show, with a TRP (Television Rating Points) of 1.4 between 10:00 p m and 11:00 p m. For instance, Zee SA Re Ga Ma Pa Li'l Champs got over with close to 50 lakh voters deciding on crowning Sanchita Bhattacharya from Kolkata. Baudrillard derides this fervour on the part of the viewers thus: “In such a height of extreme visibility, the producers succeed in making the loss of all symbolic space, a form of disenchantment with life an object of contemplation, amazement and desire” (*Jean Baudrillard, The Conspiracy of Art* 184). For him this self alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of highest order. He takes this case as a point where:

Experimentalism takes place of reality and the imaginary. We are included in the protocols of science and verification and we are in process of dissecting- vissecting under the scalpel of camera the relational and social dimensions outside all language and any symbolic content” (*The Conspiracy of Art* 184).

Baudrillard in his book *Cool Memories II* wonders how

the “mime artists do their act of keeping stock still, eyes closed, for hours on end with crowd milling all around” (22). Similarly do we remain indifferent to the shrieking and dying corpses of reality all around and exhibit the calmness and complacency of the mime artists. Reality television whence becomes an aphrodisiac. We are so captivated by the aesthetics of it though it renders us useless still we take pleasure in it.

The reality shows based on adventure like “Fear Factor” et al are examples of the circumstance when all our imagination regarding sense of adventure is swept away leaving only a protocol of eating creepy insects and snakes, jumping an airplane etc. Baudrillard to this immense abysmal situation says that “When sex is no more than sex processing, it becomes transfinite and exponential. It does not reach its goal. However which it would do is to exhaust sex and to reach the end of its use” (*The Conspiracy of Art* 185- 186). In the article published in international journal of Baudrillard studies “Baudrillard and The Joe Schmo Show”, the writer Michael Rennett comments that: “Reality shows are only side effects, if the level of reality decreases from day to day it’s only because the medium itself has passed into life” (*Art and Artefact*, 20). Reality television is a euphemism. Although audience members may believe they are seeing what happens “when people stop being polite and start being real,” nothing could be further from the truth. Reality shows violate the public trust. Baudrillard names the post modern reality as an “anamorphosis” (*Cool Memories II* 30). It is distorted image which has started to appear normal in case of reality shows when viewed from the same lens and angle of seduction and incapability. The participants (in form of the celebrities or the viewers) have “mental and cultural profile of clones” (*The Conspiracy of Art* 192). The movements, words and actors already meet and all the conditions are prefabricated resulting in programmed presence. Baudrillard calls the masses in his book *Vital Illusion Ubu* (allusion to Alfred Jarry’s notorious invention around whom he wrote several plays. Ubu is depicted as monstrously obese. He wreaks havoc everywhere he goes.) He is of the view that we all are Ubu still blissfully ignorant of our destructiveness. And this state is more terrifying than any tragedy. He maintains: “Action or exaction? Voting, petitions, solidarity, information, human rights: all these things are gently exorted from

you in form of personal or promotional blackmail” (*Cool Memories II* 6). No doubt all of us think that we live with our will and desire but secretly these thoughts and desires come to us from elsewhere. In lieu we have entered a phase where:

It is not the man who drinks the tea but the tea that drinks man.

It isn't you who smoke the pipe but the pipe which smokes you.

It is the book which reads me.

It is the TV which watches me.

It is the object that thinks me.

It is the lens which focuses on us.

It is the effect which causes us.

It is language which speaks us.” (*The Impossible Exchange* 89).

Indifferent to every truth, reality becomes sort of a sphinx, enigmatic in its hyperconfirmity, simulating itself as virtuality or reality show. Reality becomes a hyperreality- paroxysm or parody all at once.” (*Vital Illusion* 77).

The instances regarding the fudging of the votes are till rampant. But the worst scandal was aired when a reality show on American television ‘Joe Millionaire’ turned out to be dupery. Television advertising and newspaper articles insisted that the show was real, unrehearsed and unscripted. Only the Internet hinted at the truth, suggesting that Joe was not who he claimed to be and that the women on the show were actresses. When it was revealed that the show was actually a hoax and that Joe was not a millionaire but a construction worker, the public trust was violated to a degree that demanded Congressional investigation. Hasan Suroor in an editorial in *The Hindu*, dated 30 January 2007, lambasting the

incredibility of Big Brother reported that all participants get a fee and Shilpa Shetty was reported to have got anything between £200,000 and £300,000. There was no special prize for the winner but the editorial said Shilpa Shetty pocketed an additional £100,000.

Baudrillard problematizes the cultural role television and film play in our society, especially its ability to naturalize a fictional account as being realistic. He refers to this mode of signification as “hyperreality,” suggesting that in the process of representing the “real,” media artefacts actually create a simulation of what is real. He writes that:

Information devours its own content. It devours its communication and the social.... Rather than creating communication, it exhausts itself in the act of staging communication.... Behind this exacerbated mise-en-scène of communication, the mass media, the pressure of information pursues an irresistible destruction of the social. Thus information dissolves meaning and dissolves the social in a sort of nebulous state dedicated not to a surplus of innovation, but, on the contrary, to total entropy. Thus the media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite, of the implosion of the social in the masses.... This implosion should be analyzed according to McLuhan’s formula; the medium is the message, the consequences of which have yet to be exhausted (*Simulacra and Simulations* 80-81).

Reality shows are another spiral in the simulacrum of popular culture. This consensus to the popular culture of the neo real is the devastating virus of our modern times against which we are producing fewer and fewer antibodies. So such a stage, Baudrillard has rightly titled one of his books as “The End of Illusion”. This telereality and the reality of all the sophisticated technologies initiate us into deception, into opposite of illusion into total disillusionment. Wherefore Baudrillard’s isolated court to describe the present condition suits perfectly the genre of reality

television as well. As it just like all reality and realism around becomes:

Anathematic illimited.

Transfatal express.

Viral incorporated.

International epidemics.

Allergic apothecotic agency. (*Cool Memories II* 88)

Baudrillard comments on our fixation to all the pseudo events and happenings around the world by saying that “what you discover you can never invent it again” this is how we found reality which remains to be invented. In truth, the real world among all other worlds is unimaginable. Unthinkable except as a dangerous superstition”. (*Cool Memories II* 166). In this passion of the artifice, for illusion, we are undoing the beautiful constellation of meaning and of reality. Reality TV is a lazy genre that substitutes manufactured personalities for real stories and takes jobs away from talented writers and directors who could probably turn out much better entertainment. And the spectators in pursuit of the real on these unreal shows posit a stage of immanent reversal, a reversal direction of direction and meaning, in which things turn into their opposite.

Works Cited

Anderson, Perry. *The Origins of Postmodern*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Barthes, Roland. Trans. Annette Lavers. *Mythologies*. London : Vintage, 2000.

Baudrillard, Jean. Trans. Paul Foss and Paul Patton. *Simulations* New York: Semiotext[e], 1983.

—, Trans. Chris Turner. *Cool Memories II* Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

- , Trans. Chris Turner. *Impossible Exchange*. London: Verso, 2001.
- , *The Consumer Society*. London: Sage. 1998.
- , *The Vital Illusion*. Ed. Julia Witwer. New York :Columbia University Press, 1994.
- , Ed. Lotringer, Sylvere. *Jean Baudrillard, The Conspiracy of Art*. New York: Semiotex[e], 2005.
- Bignell, Jonathan. *Introduction to Television Studies* .London: Routledge, 2004.
- Devitt, Michael. *Realism and Truth* . Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Gane, Milke. *Baudrillard and Culture*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Papineanu, David. *Reality and Representation*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998.
- Srivastava, Priyanka. “How Real are Reality shows?” *The Times of India* 26 Jan. 2007.
- Surror, Hasan. “Phone in TV Shows are Scandal.” *The Hindu* 15 May. 2008.

——*——

For Some Partition; For Others a Feast

An Analysis of the Representation of Violence in Manto's "Thanda Gosht"

Deepthi Laroia

Wandering through the alleys between the numerous racks of the library on a dull afternoon, in the hope to read something interesting during the vacation, I happened to lay my hands on a book that read: stories of Saadat Hasan Manto, translated into English by Khalid Hasan. 'Manto' – the name sounded interesting. As I opened the book to ruffle through the "Introduction", my eyes caught something rather amusing, notorious, call ye whatever. Saadat Hasan Manto, a year before he died, had written his own epitaph, wherein, with élan, he wrote:

Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto. With him lie buried
all the arts and mysteries of short story writing.
Under tons of earth he lies, wondering if he is a
greater short story writer than God.¹

Intrigued and awestruck, I wondered who this 'Manto' was. Manto was perhaps born to rebel – in all forms and at every stage. Whether it was defying his authoritative father to become a writer instead of pursuing his family profession, or writing stories that very often offended the existing conventions of sobriety and appropriateness, Manto had his own inimitable style. He was a man who neither minced his words, nor wore any ideological blinkers. He merely went on to portray life "as it is, not as it was, or will be or ought to be."²

Nor was he interested in the stereotypical and inane facets of life. It was 'the unusual' that amused him and repeatedly became the theme of his writings. Manto himself claims the same when he wrote in *Dastavez* :

When a woman in my neighbourhood gets beaten
by her husband every day and then cleans his shoes,
she gets no sympathy whatsoever from me. But I
feel a strange kind of empathy, for a woman in my

neighbourhood who fights with her husband, threatens to commit suicide and then goes away to see a film, keeping her husband on tenterhooks for two hours.³

Hence, one finds in Manto, a writer who was conventional, neither in themes, nor their treatment. Instead, Manto wrote what he believed in and as he saw it, in all its bare, even ugly forms. And in doing so, he bore no compunctions. Despite being castigated as a reactionary and a pervert, he continued presenting his reality, “however obscene or unsayable it may be, in the most straightforward manner”⁴. Without subterfuge or exaggeration he convincingly etched for his reader a dynamic world of the so-called nobodies and no-where men and women, as they thrived in their diverse spatial boundaries. If anyone dare raise objections, he was ready with his equally provocative defences. Such was his unflinching faith in his work, that once while defending his stories on charges of having played rashly with the sanctity and decorum of a civil society, Manto retorted without any qualms:

Why should I take off the ‘choli’ of society, it is naked as it is, of course I am not interested in covering it up either, because that is the job of tailors, not of writers.⁵

This honest yet humane treatment of the experiences of life has become the hallmark of Manto’s stories. Today, he is one of the most read and revered short story writers in the realm of Urdu literature. Critics and academicians too, enamoured by his unique talent and sensitivity, continue to study the works of this master craftsman. And the one area that especially draws insurmountable attention is his writings on the Partition of the subcontinent. Numerous attempts have been made to analyse the quality, richness and force of the manner in which Manto has captured the terror, violence and hollowness of the catastrophe.

It is this hard-hitting and realistic capturing of the tragedy that is of interest to me too. Not because I wish to describe the synthetic appeal of such a treatment, but because such delineations become potential grounds for newer perspectives and possibilities

to emerge, which otherwise remain untouched in the traditional narratives on the tragedy. In other words, most existing/conventional writings on Partition are so cautious and correct in their representations, that various subtleties and nuances of the event go unnoticed. However, an honest attempt like Manto's defies such boundaries and the reader gets an opportunity to view alternate realities and thereby the alternate politics behind the representation of the trauma. This is precisely what the focus of my paper too is going to be. Through a comprehensive reading of one of Manto's most talked about stories on Partition, namely "Cold Meat" ("*Thanda Gosht*"), I shall attempt to foreground certain perspectives about Partition violence that have for long been either unconsciously ignored or shoved purposely into dark corners.

Of his numerous short stories on Partition, one of the first to see public eye was "*Thanda Gosht*". Banned on charges of obscenity and an excessively un-aesthetic depiction of sex, the story presents a hair-raising account of the mayhem let loose during Partition. Right from delineating the frenzy that engulfed the men and women of the times, to an absolute robbery of humanity, here the reader catches an immaculate glimpse of some hard-hitting, horrifying, yet real faces of the calamity. Pithy and with a very terse narrative, the story is spread over a span of about half a night and traces the relationship of a couple – Ishar Singh and his young and beautiful wife Kalwant Kaur. With the man not aroused despite a very passionate and intensely violent foreplay, Kalwant Kaur suspects him to be romantically entangled elsewhere. Insecurity grips her hard. With a terribly hurt ego, she loses her peace of mind and starts unleashing violence; both in her words and actions. Her wrath crosses all limits as she attacks her husband with a 'kirpan', causing him a serious wound which begins to bleed profusely. Still dissatisfied and burning with jealousy, she is desperate to know the whereabouts of the concerned "another woman"⁶. Her verbal exhortations however, lead to a still more bitter reality and out erupts yet another tale of horror.

Ishar Singh narrates to his wife how he becomes a part of the mob attacks, storming into unknown houses to amass all their booty. Such episodes of mob attacks against the alleged 'enemy' community were fairly common during Partition and there is nothing

extraordinary in this description. However, the point worth analysing here is that though ultimately one does get the inkling that the houses being attacked are those of Muslims (the alleged enemy), Manto's description does not apparently highlight the idea that religion or anger against the 'other' is of any significant concern to this young man. In fact, Manto's original story in Urdu does not even mention words like 'enemy' or 'Muslim'. The idea that Ishar Singh is attacking his enemy/Muslim houses is merely implied. It is only in the translated versions that the translators have added these references of their own accord. While Asaduddin's translation introduces the word 'enemy', Khalid Hasan's version, in addition to 'enemy', goes on to state explicitly that the Sikh joined the groups looting 'Muslim' houses and shops. And in such a case, one only wonders why Manto chose not to use these rather crucial words.

One reason could obviously be Manto's unique style; whereby instead of stating the backgrounds and facts overtly, he builds his contexts with the help of oblique yet picturesque descriptions of the stage where the events take place. Most of his stories open in '*medias res*' and the reader is required to unravel the intricacies and nuances as the narrative unfolds. In the current case too, it is the vivid detailing of the episode, without any direct references of Partition, which throws the reader right into the heart of the riots of 1947. However, yet another possibility behind such a skip could be that Manto, based on his understanding of the event, wanted to take away from religion, all the extra attention that it normally draws in such a schema. In turn his endeavour could well have been to use the episode as a mere vehicle to comment upon the human consciousness at large; to communicate ideas/perceptions that stretch way beyond the dominant discourses defining the mayhem of Partition. Maybe his intention was to project that what happens in the case delineated here is something that could happen elsewhere and at other times too. Stating the context would only have narrowed down the scope of his comprehensions to a singular event, or at the most, to just the ones of a similar kind. Furthermore, it is also possible that Manto might not even have avoided these references consciously and what I have proposed thus far is simply a figment of my over-reading of the episode. These are some suppositions that have called my attention at this point and the effort in the forthcoming sections of this paper would be to analyse how

valid these claims are.

Interestingly, while narrating his rampages to his wife, Ishar Singh makes no obvious reference to attacking the enemy or safeguarding his religious group/community. On the contrary, if one tries to read between the lines, one gets an impression that it is simply the euphoria of getting easy money and jewellery that is driving the man. Mohammad Asaduddin too, while commenting upon the story, states that:

Ishar Singh's abysmal lust for wealth and bloodshed motivated him to become a member of the frenzied mob that went on a killing spree.⁷

In such a light then, Ishar Singh appears no more than any regular man trying to satiate his hunger for riches, while temptations are ripe and opportunities readily available. The attacks are in all probability against the 'other' community. But the 'other' may not be the one who propels the outrage. Instead it seems as if there is something intrinsic within the character of the protagonist itself that sponsors the deed. Such a perspective gathers even more weight in what follows.

Ishar Singh describes how in one such looting spree he hits upon a house. (Once again, the idea that the Sikh attacks a Muslim household is not mentioned explicitly. It is merely the reader's judgement and sensibility that suggest the same.) There, he slaughters six of the seven occupants. While he is about to extend the same treatment to the seventh member, a young attractive girl, he stops erratically. Seeing her, his more elemental lust rises to the fore. He decides to rape her before the final kill. He carries her to the side of a canal. But the classic turn of tables occurs when he realizes that he has been copulating with a corpse. As this reality dawns upon him, he is rendered impotent with the shock. And with him, the reader too is left stupefied at the sheer repugnance of the episode.

It is this nerve wrenching ending that often holds the attention of his audience. Critics too have dedicated numerous pages to illustrate the ingenuity, power and accomplishment of such a

representation. However, what interests me at this stage once again, is analysing the ulterior motives behind this act of gross violence. Like the previous discussion regarding Ishar Singh's lust for wealth prompting his attacks, yet again, what I wish to analyse is what stimulates this assault. Is Ishar Singh's act out of mere vengeance against the other community? Is it the enemy's honour that he is raping? Or is there something more to it? Could it not be possible that Partition here simply becomes a facade or an excuse for Ishar Singh to satisfy his deeper hungers and desires? That he merely uses the excuse of Partition to appease his latent lusts.

I understand that all the claims that I have thus far made are contentious and contrary to most of the existing commentaries to describe the acts of violence that accompanied Partition. Dominant commentaries on Partition violence principally blame self-defence or retaliation or collective unconscious hatred against the 'other' to be the instigation behind such animosities. And if one observes carefully, in each of these cases, the blame rests on the hated enemy and his despicable deeds. However, the impression I gather upon reading the story is that during a period of crisis, like Partition, when all norms of a usually decorum laden society are flouted, in some cases, people like Ishar Singh get an opportunity (a so called 'permit') to satiate those basic instincts they cannot otherwise appease easily. Their attacks upon the enemy then are nothing short of well-conceived, consciously considered acts. This is my hypothesis and in the ensuing pages of this paper, my endeavour would be to analyse and substantiate these very claims in the light of "*Thanda Gosht*".

If one attempts to read between the lines of "*Thanda Gosht*", one would understand that though the delineation of violence inflicted against the enemy, especially his woman, is a stock figure in Partition literature, Manto's treatment of this violence is distinctive in that it is layered with possibilities that can challenge and transcend the dominant ideologies of Partition discourse. Unlike numerous other representations, in Manto's story what seem to stand foregrounded are the elemental tendencies in man and the need to fulfil desires at all possible costs – be it in normal circumstances through socially sanctioned forms or in adverse circumstances through force and trick. Whatever be the stakes,

man is seen to stretch himself to all possible extents to gratify his basic hungers. This assumption would not even appear far-fetched if read in the light of what Manto himself would state. While discussing his themes, he often pronounced how the “hungers of human life”⁸ formed the subject matter of his literature; an idea that Harish Narang too elaborates in his analysis of Manto’s philosophy. Narang writes:

The first one is for food and the second for the proximity and possession of the opposite sex. All human activities, Manto observed, could be reduced to these two kinds of hunger and two types of relationships, spawned by these hungers, namely, one between food and the human stomach and two, between man and woman.⁹

Thus, one can arguably state that Manto’s stories embody an explicit representation of the hungers of human life. And “*Thanda Gosht*” too fits into this mould well. Let me through a reading of this story comprehensively discuss the reason behind the above mentioned proposition. If one observes carefully, one finds that Ishar Singh’s description of his sexual encounters with his wife, Kalwant Kaur is no different from the one used to describe the rape of the young Muslim girl, his alleged enemy’s daughter. In fact, both the episodes are etched out rather similarly. Even the linguistic devices used are practically the same. Under such circumstances then, debates revolving around religious mobilization and collective unconscious violence against the ‘other’ stand starkly questioned. What acquires ground instead is the sexual, almost animalistic urge within man, which awaits gratification. In the light of psychoanalytic perspectives as well, Ishar Singh’s desire is what Freud would describe the ‘id’, which operates on nothing except the pleasure principle. All it cares for is maximum appeasement, even if it is at the cost of defying all social or moral sanctions, the ‘superego’, and finally resorting to violence.

Furthermore, in “*Thanda Gosht*” too, this violence, which “lies at the core of the story”¹⁰, assumes almost symbolic proportions. Very strategically, Manto introduces a very obnoxious face of the same in every represented relationship in the story.

And if the undercurrents of these representations are observed carefully, the reader is forced to see beyond mere religious animosity as the driving force behind deeds of outrage. As I state this, I do not wish to imply that the nature of the violence that I am striving to highlight here is the only kind that defined the period. My only contention is that this rage of the times too had multiple dimensions, some of which have for long been conveniently evaded or brushed aside, for the sheer dangers that they portend. However, in spaces like Manto's stories, these much ignored possibilities gain ground.

Ishar Singh's act of mercilessly slaughtering the six men of a Muslim household is bone-chilling. He is allegedly doing so in the name of attacking members of another community. But one can easily perceive that, as discussed above, it is the desire for 'something more elemental' that actually drives him to his indulgence. This 'something elemental' could very plausibly be money or some wanton ego. It could even be plain thrill, when analysed vis-à-vis the behaviour meted out to the seventh member of the group. The debates complicate still further when parallel to Ishar Singh's acts, the reader gets to see Kalwant Kaur's unleashing of violence. Her attack too is seen springing from her desire to address the callings of her female ego.

In other words, all such representations widen the possibilities that outrageous acts in times like Partition too, could have been executed for varied reasons. Mere religious fanaticism and instigation need not be the only motives. On the other hand, a non-religious variety of violence operating in moments of heightened tension emerges as a forceful and simultaneous possibility. Thereby exposing and debunking the significantly professed paradigms, which claim that rage unleashed in times of communal tension is triggered primarily in the name of religion. Whether these fissures are embedded in the story consciously or not remains a matter of perspective though.

However, in either of the cases, the point worth focusing on is that Manto introduces in the story some rather contentious moments, which when read in the light of the perspectives that I have proposed, offer a base for a definitive parallel debate. While making love, Manto has described Ishar Singh and Kalwant Kaur

to be profusely violent, almost animalistic. Though obscene to middle class sensibility, this act still falls within the contours of accepted sensibilities. After all, the both are a couple! Perhaps it is for this very reason that the reader is encouraged to attach to this aggressive love-making, connotations of fun, arousal and excitement.

But there is something else too, which holds my attention at this juncture. As per my comprehension, the narration of Ishar Singh's attack of the Muslim girl's body is not much different from the one that is used to describe his sexual encounters with his wife. Howsoever hard one tries to justify the former as a product of religious bigotry, where the endeavour was to rape the other community's prestige; there emerges an alternate lurking as well. Interestingly, the writer deftly makes use of the same metaphor of playing a game of cards to depict both Ishar Singh's rape of the young girl as well as his love making with his wife. The use of the same phrases of "shuffle" and "trump"¹¹, which earlier defined his sexual communion with his wife, when used for describing his shots with the Muslim girl, lends similar readings of thrill and play to the latter. And it is this similarity of the basic delineation of the two episodes that brings about a skilful manipulation of emotions and perspectives. Intriguing complications emerge and the reader is forced to ponder whether through such a representation, Manto was trying to present the erotic getting violent or violence acquiring the shape of eroticism. Going by the dominant ideological parameters, it should be the latter. It should be a sense of anger against the other community, which then acquires macabre forms like rape. In numerous theses, the explanation for rape of a woman of the other community is even described as the woman's body becoming a contested site for the most brutal contest, where she in turn becomes the trophy of victory and blotches on the collective honour. Likewise, she is seen to become the greatest threat to man's stereotype of masculinity – the biggest chink in his armour. In this manner, when controlled by man in his domain, the woman transgresses all codes of colour, race, religion and caste and "it is in the laboratory of her body that the real mixing of blood is accomplished."¹² Violation of a woman of the other community then becomes what Sudhir Kakar states as planting seeds into the enemy's womb.¹³

Yet, in the current case, an entirely different possibility emerges, parallel to the dominant discourse. When Ishar Singh first casts his eyes upon the beautiful Muslim girl, one gets an obvious impression that the immediate desire that is aroused in him is lust and not a desire to hurt the 'other', his enemy. This idea becomes even more obvious when the writer tactfully introduces a description of the girl's beauty, further hinting towards a clear sexual arousal. In fact, while narrating the entire incident to his wife, twice one gets to hear the idea that Ishar Singh is smitten by the girl's beauty. Hence, it would not be unjustified at all to assume that what tempted Ishar Singh towards the act was perhaps the concept of the woman (she being tempting), and not that she was a Muslim girl. 'She', for Ishar Singh, was simply a beauty leading to an adrenalin shoot. This idea would gather further grounds when analysed in light of the following soliloquy that Ishar Singh voices when he spots the young girl:

Ishar Saiyan, you enjoy Kalwant Kaur everyday...
why not try this new dish today? ¹⁴

Once again, the connotations of the word 'dish' command deliberation. As per my understanding the use of such a word only corroborates the idea of some feast in action; a party where succulent dishes are whetting hungers and awaiting consumption. Furthermore, if one reads the original version of the story, these implications sound still more conceivable. In the Urdu edition, when Ishar Singh casts his eyes upon the lovely lass, the reader hears him voice:

Ishar Singh, Kalwant Kaur ke to har roz maze loot
ta hai. Aaj ye mewa bhi chakh dekh.¹⁵

To me, such a description seems rather contrary to the seriousness that should have accompanied an act of upholding the honour of one's own religion or community. This juxtaposition of the serious with the fun could alternatively suggest a movement towards my central hypothesis whereby religion is merely used as a garb, or a pretext to address the otherwise basic desires in man.

Hence, from all the above stated discussions, the argument.

that I wish to propose is that Ishar Singh is not serving any higher goal of community-hood. Instead, he has been exposed to the brilliant opportunity of tasting an exotic dish - a luxury for a very ordinary, perhaps lower middle class fellow, whose fate otherwise is 'daal-bhat' and not 'mewa'. I do not mean to imply that religion has no significance in the life of this Sikh. However, religion at times takes a back seat and becomes a concern only after the other desires are met. Such an idea is found lurking in some of Manto's comments too. He is reported to have stated in 'Kasauti' (*Dastavez*):

It is only when man is tired of bread, woman and power that he thinks of God whose nature is much more mysterious and difficult to grasp than any of these. ¹⁶

And undoubtedly, the very regular Ishar Singh, who has perhaps just started making a life of his own, could not have gotten weary of all these temptations so very early in life! Especially not in times when otherwise too, all conventions were being flouted, and there was an open seduction for even the repressed desires to come to the fore.

In fact, Manto, though obliquely, even makes his Ishar Singh utter these very thoughts. A little later in the story, within a space of about ten lines, one hears the Sikh announce twice, "Man is a strange mother-fucking creature"¹⁷. Of course, this comment could be an outburst sparked off by remorse and shock, indicating a final reclaim to humanity. However, at this juncture too, if one reflects a little deeply, what stands fortified is the animal in man, his violent act, its motivations and manifestations and not really the aftermaths or repercussions of this bestiality. Thus, once again, the possibility of a prima erotic taking the shape of violence during times such as Partition does appear a viable supposition. I say this because though in the current case, the victim happens to be a Muslim, the more significant question is whether Ishar Singh's behaviour would have been any different had the woman been a Sikh. The idea might sound obnoxious. However, it is not absolutely implausible either. Though an uncommon sight, an exhaustive reading of Partition literature (including historical, sociological, ethnographic and at times

even literary narratives etc.), definitely includes such episodes. Besides, such experiences are not even stated explicitly. But they feature nonetheless. In fact, one of Manto's equally controversial story itself, *Open It!* ("*Khol Do*"), deals with this very brutality. In "*Khol Do*", the reader catches a morbid glimpse of Muslim rescue workers mercilessly rape Sakina, a girl of their very community. And such representations only go on to substantiate the grounds of my argument that Manto's narrative transcends the existing/ conventional boundaries used to define Partition violence. From comfortably fixing the focus on communal tendencies, in "*Thanda Gosht*" the debate can also be steered towards a deliberation of the more elemental and basal urges in man, where the woman's body becomes a site for possession irrespective of her religious affiliations. 'She' instead, becomes nothing but a lump of flesh, '*gosht*', for the man whose carnal instincts await satiation.

To sum up, on the basis of my readings of the story, the significant thesis that stands buttressed is that inventive attempts that have dared to sketch Partition head-on often become breeding grounds for alternate perspectives about the psyche of the perpetrators of Partition violence. Though dominant discourses would prefer to stand aloof from such possibilities whereby vested interests trigger acts of assault, these cannot be altogether dismissed. One is forced to sit up and take notice of how on such occasions, when the time is ripe, temptations plentiful and the barriers of civilization let down, the primeval urges in man take precedence. And how then man's succumbing to these paramount instincts in such moments, when vigil is missing, assume grossly violent proportions. Where religion however is in this schema of things, one is only left wondering! Perhaps religion too is exploited and used as a façade to appease man's basic hungers; an idea that Manto too would not have shied away from. What else is one to gather from Manto's sharp enunciation, where he announces that "the only secular space is the urinal"^{18!}

References and Works Cited

- 1 Saadat Hasan Manto, quoted in Khalid Hasan, introduction, *Kingdom's End and Other Stories*, ed. and trans. Khalid Hasan (New Delhi: Penguin, 1989) 10.

- 2 Saadat Hasan Manto, letter to Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, 1983, quoted in *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla (Shimla: IAS, 1997) 193.
- 3 Saadat Hasan Manto quoted in Harish Narang, "Lord Shiva or the Prince of Pornographers: Ideology, Aesthetics and Architectonics of Manto," *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla (Shimla: IAS, 1997) 73.
- 4 Ashok Vohra, "Manto's Philosophy: An Explication," *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla (Shimla: IAS, 1997) 137.
- 5 Saadat Hasan Manto quoted in Gopi Chand Narang, "Manto Reconsidered," *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla (Shimla: IAS, 1997) 6.
- 6 Saadat Hasan Manto, "Cold Meat," *For Freedom's Sake: Selected Stories and Sketches*, ed. and trans. Mohammad Asaduddin (Oxford: OUP, 2001) 138.
- 7 Mohammad Asaduddin, introduction, *For Freedom's Sake: Selected Stories and Sketches*, ed. and trans. M. Asaduddin (Oxford: OUP, 2001) xxxi.
- 8 Harish Narang, "Lord Shiva or the Prince of Pornographers: Ideology, Aesthetics and Architectonics of Manto," *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla (Shimla: IAS, 1997) 72.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 10 Mohammad Asaduddin, introduction, *For Freedom's Sake: Selected Stories and Sketches*, ed. and trans. M. Asaduddin (Oxford: OUP, 2001) xxxi.
- 11 Saadat Hasan Manto, "Cold Meat," *For Freedom's Sake: Selected Stories and Sketches*, ed. and trans. Mohammad Asaduddin (Oxford: OUP, 2001) 138, 140.

- 12 Shashi Joshi, "The World of Saadat Hasan Manto," *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla (Shimla: IAS, 1997) 145.
- 13 Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence* (New Delhi: Viking-Pengiuin, 1995) 181.
- 14 Saadat Hasan Manto, "Cold Meat," *For Freedom's Sake: Selected Stories and Sketches*, ed. and trans. Mohammad Asaduddin (Oxford: OUP, 2001) 140.
- 15 Saadat Hasan Manto, "Thanda Gosht," *Manto Ke Numainda Afsane*, ed. Athar Pervez (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1976) 151.
- 16 Saadat Hasan Manto quoted in Ashok Vohra, "Manto's Philosophy: An Explication," *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla (Shimla: IAS, 1997) 134.
- 17 Saadat Hasan Manto, "Cold Meat," *For Freedom's Sake: Selected Stories and Sketches*, ed. and trans. Mohammad Asaduddin (Oxford: OUP, 2001) 139.
- 18 Saadat Hasan Manto quoted in Nirupama Dutt, "Manto: Messiah or Madman," *Spectrum: The Tribune* 12 June 2005: 5.

—————*—————

Theory of the Impossibility of Knowledge

A Study of *The Calcutta Chromosome*

Smita Jha.

Amitav Ghosh has come to occupy a distinctive place in the history of contemporary Indian writing in English. He is a writer, perhaps, different from other contemporary Indian novelists in English because his novels are basically research oriented. There is indeed some degree of research work in Sulman Rushdie and Vikram Seth too, but the kind of in-depth study that we find in Amitav Ghosh is missing from the writings of these two novelists. Ghosh is a social anthropologist by training, and in each one of his novels he works on a kind of theme that is multi-faceted and thought-provoking. In his first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, which came out in 1986, he undertakes a study of political ideologies, including the ideology of Marxism. He examines the political situation of the Indian sub-continent, and thus of the world itself, in terms of **reason** (*Sat*), **passion** (*Raj*), and **darkness** (*Tamas*).

The fundamental theme of this novel is a vindication of the primacy of reason over other criteria, and, whether it is capitalism or socialism, it is reason alone that takes us to truth. In his second novel entitled *The Shadow Line*, the focus of attention is on the protagonist's families in both Calcutta and Dhaka as well as on the connection of these two families with the family of an Englishman in Britain. It deals with the Bangladesh war that took place in 1971, and while it points to the creation of an independent nation named Bangladesh, a sovereign country, it does also suggest the absurdity of East Bengal as part of Pakistan because of its long geophysical distance from West Punjab. This novel seeks to draw our attention to the painful fact that while physical boundaries may separate one country from another, yet the essential bonds of humanity can perhaps not be disrupted or destroyed. The central emphasis in this novel is on humanism or on humanistic values.

In his novel, *The Glass Palace*, which was published in 2000, Amitav Ghosh writes as one of the post-colonial writers, and through this book he expresses a growing awareness of the

aspirations and frustrations of the erstwhile colonized people as they try to find their own place and position in the world. This novel is set chiefly in Burma (now Myanmar) and India, and it brings out the delicate conditions of these regions, as they were perceptible before and during the momentous years of the Second World War and the struggle for India's independence. This book has to be viewed chiefly as an exercise in Post-colonialism.

In his novel, *The Hungry Tide*, which came out in 2005, Amitav Ghosh tells us about the Sunderbans, an area situated on the very mouth of the Bay of Bengal, an area which is damaged beyond recognition from time to time by the tides coming from the sea. This novel brings out the severity of the refugee problem, the distress of the people who have settled there, and at the same time it does also bring out the desirability of ecological balance in the present-day environmental situation in order to escape the backlash of Nature. In a way, it stands out as a post-modernist novel, since it highlights the heroic stature of one poor and deprived and marginalized, but tough and determined, man named Fokir. All these novels are based on personal and persistent investigation and research, besides being topical, and, that is why, they are so very impressive and highly acceptable.

Amitav Ghosh is a widely-traveled man, and it is both appropriate and significant that he has written three travelogues, namely, *In an Antique Land* (1994), *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* (1996), and *Countdown*(1999), following the underground explosion of atomic bombs by India in 1998. These three books, written so far, give us an idea of the way his mind has been functioning and of the profundity of his research work that he makes use of in his fictional writings.

I

The Calcutta Chromosome was published in 1996. It has been described by so many critics and scholars as a kind of thriller, in fact, a science-thriller, a kind of thriller that may be traced back to the scientific fiction written by H.G. Wells. It has also been looked upon as a mystery- thriller for the reason that there is a good deal of supernaturalism in the second half of the book. Apart from being a mystery -thriller, this novel does also throw light on several

theories, which, despite being in vogue, are rather repugnant to the minds trained in the rigorous methodology of science. It is through a major character named L. Murugan that Amitav Ghosh brings to light the theory of the impossibility of knowing anything or everything. Whatever we know or assume to know is the knowledge that has been attained through the use of the pre-existing and accepted sets of knowledge, a huge body of knowledge that is built upon previous studies and researches. This kind of knowledge is, by its very nature, related to particular sets of assumptions. Murugan is of the view that if our comprehension of knowledge enjoins upon us only to make changes in it, then it implies that we cannot know any thing in full till we are in a position to make any changes in it. In such a situation, whatever we know is merely the knowledge we have acquired from the past. This is so because our existing knowledge emanates from our knowledge coming from the past, and not really belonging to the present. At the same time it is also true that if to know any thing is to change it, then it necessarily follows, almost axiomatically, that one of the ways to change any thing is to know it.

From some fairly simple considerations and arguments about what a Theory of Knowledge cannot accomplish, one can proceed to the argument and exposition of the basic elements in Friesian epistemology, such as the distinction between mediate and immediate knowledge, and between intuitive and non-intuitive immediate knowledge. When we concern ourselves with philosophy as science, it is natural for us to take the example of the exact sciences as a model, though we know, or at least we should know from Kant, that we cannot blindly transfer to philosophy a method that is appropriate to the mathematical sciences. Pre-Kantian metaphysics made precisely this mistake of trying to imitate in philosophy the usual dogmatic method of mathematics. Kant proved definitively the lacunae of this undertaking. But the relation of the two sciences, philosophy and mathematics, has changed in a curious way, since Kant's time. During the last century modern mathematics has developed in what is called *axiomatic*, a method that corresponds exactly to the one Kant demanded for philosophy. This is the *regressive* method, the importance of which does not lie in extending our knowledge, adding new truths to the fund of those already known, elaborating their consequences, but rather in

examining the known truths with regard to their presumptions. It serves as a means of investigating the conditions of the solvability of a problem before we attack the problem itself; it assures us whether or not the problem is solvable at all, and what presuppositions are already implicit in the setting of the problem. It determines what presuppositions are necessary and sufficient for a definite solution of a problem.

I wish to apply this method to the problem of the "theory of knowledge," also called the problem of knowledge. This problem is that of the objective validity of our knowledge. It is the task of a "theory of knowledge" to test the truth or objective validity of our knowledge. I maintain that a solution of this problem is *impossible*, and I express my views on this in the present manner. In order to solve this problem, we should have to have a criterion by the application of which we could decide whether or not cognition is true. I would call it briefly the "validity criterion." This criterion would itself either be or not be a cognition. If it be a cognition, it would fall within the area of what is problematic, the validity of which is first to be solved with the aid of our criterion. Accordingly, it cannot itself be cognition. But if the criterion would not be cognition, nevertheless, in order to be applicable, it would have to be known, i.e., we should have to know that it is a criterion of the truth. However, in order to gain knowledge of this criterion, we would have to make a relevant application of it. In either case, therefore, we encounter a contradiction. A "validity criterion" is consequently impossible, and, as such, there can perhaps be no "theory of knowledge."

Someone might claim that *obviousness* is the criterion in question. In order for this criterion to be applicable, it would have to be known to us as such, i.e., we should have to *know* that the obvious cognitions are the true ones. But we could only know this if it were *obvious* that the obvious cognitions are true. However, in order to deduce the truth of this assumption from its obviousness, we should have to *presuppose* that obviousness is a criterion of truth. It is, therefore, impossible to achieve the knowledge in question. Let us take the case of pragmatism. If the usefulness of a notion is to be the sought-after criterion of truth, we would have to *know*, in order to be able to apply this criterion, that usefulness is the criterion

of truth. We should, therefore, have to know that it is *useful* to think that useful thinking is true thinking, and that, thus, we would have to presuppose that the usefulness of thinking is a criterion of its truth. So here too, we meet the same contradiction; and it is perhaps the same or of similar kind in every other case.

What really is the *presumption* that we make in setting the problem of a "theory of knowledge" and that involves the contradiction we have observed? It is important, first of all, to realize that such a presumption is implicit in the problem itself, and that the alleged absence of presumptions, proudly proclaimed by the "theory of knowledge," is simply a chimera. If one asks whether one possesses objectively valid cognitions at all, one thereby presupposes that the objectivity of cognition is questionable at first, and that one can assure oneself of this objectivity only indirectly, that is, through the process of the "theory of knowledge." What can be said about this presumption which is indispensable to the "theory of knowledge"?

We should now begin drawing up a clearer and more articulate picture of the meaning and content of this presumption. It seems at first to be nothing more than an application of the logical principle of sufficient reason, according to which every assertion needs verification. And indeed, the "theory of knowledge" stands or falls with the presumption of the necessity of verifying cognition, for the task of this discipline is none other than to verify our cognition. Although this very presumption seems to aim at the elimination of all prejudgments, the contradiction it leads to, explained above, makes us aware that some error must lie concealed herein and that consequently the presumption is itself a prejudgment. If cognition needs a verification that is equivalent to saying that it presupposes cognition as its ground, to which it must be traced back if it is to be asserted as truth, and then the contradiction lies in the proposition, here implied, of the *mediacy* of all knowledge. For if cognition was possible only on another ground, we would have to execute an infinite regression in order to reach any true cognition, and thus no verification of cognitions would be possible.

We may rephrase this result in another way. If one asserts the mediacy of all knowledge in the manner just outlined, then one

therewith asserts that cognition is a *judgment*. The word "judgment" is here used in its usual sense to mean the assertion of a thought that is in itself problematic. Every judgment presupposes a notion that is not in itself assertoric, but to which the assertion is only mediately added. However, this presumption that cognition is a judgment does also involve another, that is, that the verification of cognition can only be a *proof*. A proof is the tracing back of one judgment to another that contains the logical ground of the first. But if there is no other verification of judgments except proof, no verification of judgments is possible at all; for all proofs consist only in the tracing back of the judgment to be proved to unproved judgments. Therefore, either there is another means of verifying judgments besides proof, or no verification of them is possible at all.

II

The assumption that the very act of knowing anything changes it implies that when we attempt to know a thing, we tend to modify its existing nature or its form. This means that our desire to identify the truth paves the way for us to change certain aspects of the fact or modify the fact in such a way that we may enable ourselves to know the truth. Human perceptions vary from individual to individual and from time to time, for our ability to know or perceive anything at one point of time is by all means limited. According to Pyrrho's philosophy about knowledge and perception, both our sense perception and our reasoning are unreliable. There is no irrefutable and guaranteed standard by which one can unequivocally ascertain the truth/ falsity status of the judgments made. Any claim of knowledge introduces some element which transcends immediate experience. But then one would have to know something, namely, the special element introduced, which possibly could not be false. Then again, the evidence for this element would have to rest on perception and reasoning which in the first place were found to be unreliable. Whatever we perceive is often conceived in form which our idiosyncrasies can accept and comprehend in accordance with their preconceived notions. This brings to light two phases during which the state of any object undergoes mutilation: the first being when our process of attempting to know a thing which mutilates it in such a way that our senses can perceive it; the second that we can also state reasons for it scientifically. Heisenberg's Principle

of Uncertainty says that it is impossible to ascertain accurately the position and momentum of anything simultaneously, because in our attempt to determine any of them accurately we disturb the other. The very attempt to know an aspect of anything changes its other aspects. This implies that our desire to know anything is also unknowingly an attempt to change it:

Murugan talks about it: "Knowledge is self-contradictory...to know something is to change it, therefore in knowing something, you've already changed it..."According to Murugan, therefore, it is impossible to know anything. (26)

As such, according to Murugan, it is just not possible to have knowledge of anything in totality. In fact, the idea of knowing anything in its completeness is absurd, and absurdity is neither a normative nor a positive phenomenon. tentativeness is the very essence of absurdity. The basic point is that no idea or concept, no theory or theme, has exhausted itself or can ever exhaust itself on one, single human mind.

Using mathematical induction, Murugan puts forth that when we have matter and anti-matter, Christ and anti-Christ, there must also exist something which is counter-science. Here Murugan attempts to give a reason to his theory which appears to be an individual or common man's mind while talking about counter-science, the followers of which don't believe in the possibility of correct and adequate knowledge. In his attempt to explain counter-science Murugan uses the induction theory of mathematics, which in itself is the first theory to be refuted by counter-science; for, when we are not sure about knowing something accurately, we can not be sure about the accuracy of anything we deduce from our pre-existent knowledge which we assume to have, but are not sure of. This, in turn, implies that even the belief that true knowledge is impossible to have is also having some basic assumption, and this makes it clear that even the state of the theory of impossibility of knowledge is under scanner. We can not be sure of it too, but our helplessness even in finding some strong and viable proof of counter

– science in Murugan’s speech dos also lend support to the view that nothing can be known for sure.

Thinking in less abstract terms, the Greek philosopher Pyrrho provides us with the answer that things are indistinguishable, immeasurable and not decidable, and no more this than that, and neither this nor that. Therefore, he concludes, our senses neither tell us truths nor lie. We can know nothing of the inner substance of things, and at best we can only know how things appear to us. We may infer from what he says that our knowledge is not the reality of something, but rather our perception of it through our limited senses, and thereafter only an understanding of our limited perception by our prejudiced self.

The theory of counter – science and impossibility of knowledge leaves Antar mystified. He doesn’t appreciate these philosophies well. Amitav Ghosh lends him support because of the fact that whatever we perceive is guided by our pre- conceived notions. Ghosh says that counter-science is the natural problem but in an entirely different way. It is such a different way of looking at nature that a person accustomed to scientific ideology would find it to be divorced from reality. Through Murugan, Ghosh says: *“...it wouldn’t make any sense to anyone who’s properly trained. Not making sense is what it’s about-conventional sense that is”*. (36)

When Murugan talks about science and counter –science, he himself uses induction principle which in itself doesn’t qualify to be an accepted proof or method of providing things. The first principle of this philosophy would be to stay secretive about not only what they did but also why they did that and should adopt a secretive policy to do their secretive work. The justification that they come out with in regard to their policy of secrecy is that because it is impossible to know a thing, it doesn’t make much sense to lay any claim to knowledge which we actually do not possess.

There are many instances throughout the novel where different characters go on with their lives, being utterly ignorant of the reason behind their own actions and the impact that they make, consciously or unconsciously to the effect that every thing can not

be known. This novel depicts incidents which exhibit that no knowledge can be absolute. Initially, Antar himself hardly understands the reason which has Ava working in her own unique way. He is overawed by the urge for self-improvement, but can find *"no reason that Antar could understand, except that it was what the system did best"*. (45)

Even Ava which actually is Ava/11e system, and is programmed to gather knowledge about everything it needs to, and cannot always make out whether or not she holds Antar's full attention. Ava who is designed to keep a good eye on Antar can also be fooled, as Amitav Ghosh himself puts it: *"So long as he didn't move his head too much and hit the right key in a steady rhythm, Ava couldn't exactly have his full attention"*. (26). This shows that it is easy to hide or mutilate truth and also that limited abilities of the perception of Ava leaves her ignorant of many things. Similarly, we human beings do also have limited abilities of perception and sense, which in turn makes it impossible to know anything wholly and in correct form. Even Dr. Ronald Ross never questions Lutchmann, the serendipity of his walking into Ross's laboratory and the wonderful way by which he gains his trust and guides him.

The brightest boy in the village is expected to know everything when he doesn't; he constructs things in the way he wants to, because he has a reputation to live up to. This, in turn, points to the desire of the common man to get respect and stand by it whether he deserves it or not. We may compare this case to that of Dr. Ronald Ross and his claim on malaria research, and subsequently the fact of his getting recognition for a work to which he actually makes little contribution. Amitav Ghosh very successfully paints a picture in which everyone is ignorant about something or the other. Throughout his life Dr. Ross stays ignorant about people who guide him in his research. All the characters in the novel, who seem to profess knowing something, are those who know the importance of carrying their assumed knowledge further to the next generation. This is so because they want to keep alive their notion of reality, since they apprehend that their supposedly correct knowledge may be disapproved by the coming generations. This idea throws light on the variability of truth and again lends

support to the theory of the impossibility of knowledge. Antar himself notes, "they wanted to record every minute detail of what they had done...instead of having an historian sift through their dirt, looking for meanings, they wanted to do it themselves: they wanted to load their dirt with their own meanings." (23) 'They wanted to give their own interpretation, which could be different from what others generally did. Even noted poet Phulboni notes "Every city has its secrets...but Calcutta...has so many that it is more secretive than any other...that which is hidden has no need of words to give it life." (p.21)

The theory of the impossibility of knowledge avers that truth needs no words to define it or give it life because even if we give words to however much we know, we wouldn't be talking about reality because our very act of knowing something has changed it. That is why, we give words to its history, and not to the state in which it is available at present. *The Calcutta Chromosome* does also have characters who defy accepting things that do not fit in with their fixed ideology. Amitav answers them through Phulboni's speech: "Mistaken are those who imagine that silence is without either spirit or voice." (p.24) ' Even Murugan says that his proof was the lack of proof. "I mean secrecy is what this is about: it figures there wouldn't be any evidence or proof." (34) Throughout the novel the suspense and unrolled curtains only affirm this fact that it is impossible to know anything. Our attempts at acquiring knowledge are actually our attempts to modify it; so, whatever we perceive or conceive is history. In his novel Amitav Ghosh perfectly blends two different ideologies, one of which labels our understanding as true knowledge and the other which defines our limited ability to perceive the complete truth.

In the very opening lines of *Four Quartets* T.S.Eliot comes out with the quizzical statement that 'time past is time present and that time present is time future', but what he drives home to us is not the theory of the impossibility of knowledge, but the image of time as flux, as sheer continuity that stands for mutations or transformations taking place in the span of time and timelessness. The more relevant thesis in this regard comes from the eighteenth—century English poet, William Blake, who, like the philosopher Hegel, maintains that no progression is possible in any field without

contradictions. Perhaps, this is why, he speaks of the marriage of heaven and hell in the long poem bearing the same title. The point is that knowledge is basically a dialectical phenomenon, going by the process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, in the course of time synthesis itself becoming in a way an altogether new thesis. What Blake says lends credence, perhaps a convincing credence, to what is known as the theory of the impossibility of knowledge.

References

1. Ghosh, Amitav, *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery*. New York, Avon Books, 1995.
 - Ibid, p.26
 - Ibid, p.36
 - Ibid, p.45
 - Ibid, p.26
 - Ibid, p.23
 - Ibid, p. 21
 - Ibid, p.24
 - Ibid, p.34
2. Bett, Richard, "Aristocles on Timon on Pyrrho: The Text, Its Logic and its Credibility" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 12 (1994a): 137-181.
3. Bett, Richard, "What did Pyrrho Think about the Nature of the Divine and the God?" *Phronesis* 39 (1994b): 303-337.
4. Bett, Richard, *Pyrrho, his antecedents, and his legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
5. Brunschwig, Jacques, "Introduction: the beginnings of Hellenistic epistemology" in Algra, Barnes, Mansfeld and Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 229-259.

6. Burnyeat, Myles (ed.), *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
7. Burnyeat, Myles and Frede, Michael (eds.), *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).
8. Doomen, Jasper, "The Problems of Scepticism" *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy* 10 (2007): 36-52.
9. Hankinson, R.J., *The Sceptics* (London: Routledge, 1995).
10. Long, A.A., *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (University of California Press, 1986).
11. Long, A.A. and Sedley, David, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
12. Striker, Gisela, "On the difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics" in G. Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 135-149.
13. Striker, Gisela, "Sceptical strategies" in G. Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 92-115.
14. Striker, Gisela, "The Ten Tropes of Aenesidemus" in G. Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 116-134.
15. Kirch, M. 2000. 'Mosquito Bites and Computer Bytes: Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*, 'Notes on Contemporary Literature (Carrollton, A), Sept 2000.
16. Tiwari, Subha, 2003. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study*, Atlantic Publishers.
17. Schumacher, L. 1997. *Review of The Calcutta Chromosome*, *Foundation*, 71(1997)

18. Striker, Gisela, "The Ten Tropes of Aenesidemus" in G. Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 116-134.
19. Svavarsson, Svavar Hrafn, "Pyrrho's dogmatic nature", *The Classical Quarterly* 52 (2002): 248-56.
20. Svavarsson, Svavar Hrafn, "Pyrrho's undecidable nature", *Oxford Studies in ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004): 249-295.
21. Pyrrho entry by Richard Bett in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
22. Pyrrho entry in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
23. Gardner, Helen. *The Composition of "Four Quartets"*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
24. Stephen C. Behrendt (1992). *Reading William Blake*. London: Macmillan Press.

— * —

Our Contributors

Adler, Brian U. Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty at Georgia Southwestern State University, US

Beniwal, Anup: Professor and Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences and Media Studies, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. Specializes in Communication Studies and Indian writings.

Cchabra, Sakoon Kaur: Assistant Professor, DAV Post-Graduate College, Sector-10, Chandigarh. Pursuing her doctoral project on the topic

Chowdhary, Supriya: Working as guest faculty at DAV Post Graduate College, Sector-10, Chandigarh. Pursuing her Ph.D. on Urdu Progressive Poetry of Faiz, Kaifi Azami and Sardar Ali Jafery.

Jha, Smita: Assistant Professor Department of Humanities & Social sciences at IIT, Roorkee.

Laroia, Deepti: Assistant Professor, S.D.College, Sector 32, Chandigarh. Has recently completed her Ph.D. on Partition Cinema from Jawaharlal University, Delhi

Mohan, Ashutosh: Associate Professor, Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, GGS Indraprastha University, Delhi. An activist and a translator, specializes in literary theory and British fiction.

Mukherjee, Tutun: Professor and Chair, Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad, India; and Joint Professor at Women's Studies Centre and Theatre Department at the same university. Her specialization is Literary Criticism & Theory and her research interests are in the areas of Translation, Women's Writing, Theatre and Film Studies

Shah, Shivashish: Research Scholar in the Department of English and Cultural Studies, PU, Chandigarh. Pursuing his Ph.D. on

Sharada, Praveen: Associate Professor, in the University School of Open Learning, PU, Chandigarh. Specializes in linguistics and literary theory.

Sharma, Rajesh Kumar: Associate Professor in the Department of English, Punjabi University Patiala. Edits a literary magazine *Ensemble*, and can be visited at his blog <http://kriticulture.blogspot.com>