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Scholarly articles of 12-20 pages, or 4,000 to 6,000 words, in 12-point Times New Roman, in accordance with the system of referencing available on our website, should be submitted electronically by 30 April 2016 to **ruminasethi@gmail.com** along with a 50-word biographical note. Articles must be original and hitherto unpublished.

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A Bi-annual Interdisciplinary Journal

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RITU MENON, Three Ply Yarn: A Feminist Biographical Practice

NEELAM MANSINGH CHOWDHRY, Old Texts, New Bodies: Pitfalls in Cultural Translation from Text to Performance

BED PRASAD GIRI, Exile, Assimilation and Dystopian Politics in Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction

SIMI MALHOTRA, Appropriation of Past-Philosophy in Postmodern Thought: A Reading around Deleuze

SUBASHISH BHATTACHARJEE, The Multiplicity of Events: Rainer Maria Rilke and Assemblages of Event, Philosophy and Aesthetics

INDRANI DAS GUPTA, (Re)Writing the Body and Negotiating Patriarchy in the film *Chak De! India*

RADHIKA PRASAD, Ideology and the Novelistic Narrative: Peasant Revolt in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and Mulk Raj Anand's *The Sword and the Sickle*

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BOOK REVIEWS

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Sakoon N. Singh on Amitav Ghosh's *Flood of Fire*.

Murari Prasad on Mohammad A. Quayum's *Rabindranath Tagore: The Ruined Nest and Other Stories*.

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Editor's Note

Readers of Ambai's "The Squirrel" will remember the words spoken by the disdainful librarian to the woman researcher – "This is rubbish, madam, just rubbish" – as he tosses the unwanted burden of women's books from atop a dusty shelf:

They had fallen with a thud. Volumes of *Penmadhi Bodhini* and *Jaganmohini*. Following them had come others. The sight of them tearing through the roof, sides splitting open – even this grew familiar. For someone who does not believe in miracles, here was an overdose. As my finger touched the spine of a mended, nineteenth-century book, a tremor rose from the sole of my foot, like an orgasm. Anna Sattianandhan on her deathbed, asking her husband to pray, and, on the third floor, only the squirrel and me to grieve. The woman who first set out on horseback to spread Christianity broke through the meshed windows of this very third floor. A Bengali girl writing to her father, pleading that he should not sell his only house to meet her marriage expenses, set fire to herself, and the killing flame chased through this room, like a snake. The flame spread through the third floor, its shape visible to the squirrel and me. The Telugu cataloguer wasn't there that day.

After a series of official requests and refusals exchanged between the librarian and the government officials, now buried in a file, it is ruled that these crumbling books be destroyed owing to expenses incurred on glue that is needed for repair work. It is the intractable

squirrel that regularly undoes the binding by consuming the glue. Bundles of string add to the expenses. Since the story is open-ended, we assume that the squirrel surrenders and the books eventually trashed.

Ambai's short story is a narrative of deterritorialization; it is about the literature of the minority. Another narrative of deterritorialization has been advanced by Deleuze and Guattari while referring to Kafka's writing within mainstream German literature: "In 'great' literatures, the *question of the individual* tends to be connected to other, no less individual questions, and the social milieu serves as environment and background. . . . Minor literature is completely different: because it exists in a narrow space, every individual matter is immediately plugged into the political." For the two philosophers, deterritorialization can thus animate, simultaneously, a reterritorialization of meaning since minor literature, written from a minoritarian position, does have the ability to co-exist with or even displace mainstream language literatures. Owing to its more aggressively political nature it can shake up great or established canons and formal paradigms of writing through its novelty and inventiveness. Kafka, a Czech Jew, belonging to the minority, was able to instigate a revolutionary impulse into a major literary tradition by overruling the impossibility of writing that could have happened all too easily. Such artistic acts, in the words of Alain Badiou, "consist in conceiving the work of art itself as the almost instantaneous combustion of the force of its own beginnings."

But can an archive of disenfranchised women writers sitting on a run-down shelf of books in a south-Indian library attempt reterritorialization in the manner of Kafka? Does this vexed encounter between the researcher and the keeper of the library admit a space for the reterritorialization of a 'minor' literature at all? Do we dare read Ambai's story from the parameters that Deleuze and Guattari countenance in Kafka, that allow a Jewish writer in Prague to articulate from a "deterritorialized tongue?" Quite the opposite.

The "whole generations throbbing with life" in Ambai's native library that have to yield to government ruling are not of a piece

with Kafka because their marginality makes writing an impossibility. It must be said that for Deleuze and Guattari, there is nothing really “minor” about Kafka’s writing. The perception of that category connoting “minority” in the postcolonial world, as we well know, is really quite different. Here “reterritorialization” cannot be presumed. There is an impasse in our story as the woman researcher is ushered out: “I approach the iron stairs and turn back to look once more at the room. The evening sun and the mercury lamp spread a strange light on the yellowed books that are to be burnt. Like the initial flood of fire that spreads over the pyre.”

This issue of *dialog* is a celebration of minority literatures in a variety of ways, though not necessarily as delineated in the manner of the two philosophers. Our lead paper by Ritu Menon sets the example. Though a biographer’s need to single out someone’s extraordinary life does not connote marginalization overtly, Menon’s account of Nayantara Sahgal might well be an exploration of “a life less ordinary” when visualized against the powerful political circles of the times, within which she was severely victimized. Despite belonging to the ‘first’ family of Indian national politics, Sahgal was something of a recluse. Menon speaks of her experience of writing Sahgal’s biography, which was difficult since there are several considerations before making the choice: how much of the private or the intimate can be exposed; should the subject of the biography be allowed to read the final draft if she is living; what is the responsibility of the biographer to a subject not living; what role does the biographer’s intuition play? Menon writes: “My idea was to attempt a biography that would intertwine three major strands in Nayantara’s life – linking literature with politics; literature with feminism; and the personal with the political – in such a way that this writer’s life, a woman writer’s life and work, might open up an area of enquiry, via biography, into contemporary India; an enquiry that would combine the historical, the literary, the personal and the political.”

Menon’s life of Nayantara is followed by Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry’s analysis of the sub-genre of translation, conspired out of existence by the demands of “source” and “target” languages. Chowdhry argues that often the obsession with accuracy results in

a “synthetic” translation that is completely unsuitable for a “passionate theatrical performance.” With *Yerma* and *Naga-Mandala* as her examples – both translated first from the source language into English and thereafter into Punjabi, the target language – the complexity of the process of translation and subsequent staging is well evoked so that neither the actor nor the story is compromised. In the theatre company Chowdhry runs, she experiments with translation in her plays to exhibit a fine syncretism between local cultural motifs, such as songs sung by Punjabi women on *lohri*, and the structural framework, and even the context, of the original.

Bed Prasad Giri and Subashish Bhattacharjee wrote and revised their papers while doing volunteer work among the devastated people of Nepal in the wake of the series of massive earthquakes, yet succeeded in meeting their deadlines. Giri writes of Bharati Mukherjee’s exilic sensibility, differentiating all the time between the immigrant and the expatriate. He explores the ways in which Mukherjee’s writing has turned from depicting the “low grade ashcan realism” of immigrant writing to the “cloak of mystery and world-weariness” of expatriation. He examines *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Jasmine*, two quite different novels, to illustrate the conflict between metropolitan freedom and dystopian alienation. Bhattacharjee’s paper links continental philosophy with poetry, in the process theorizing the concept of “event”/ “evental readings.” Through a study of the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, he problematizes the constant postponement of the event in Western philosophy: the event is unpredictable and cannot be posited, yet Rilke’s poetry, while playing with this liminal situation, seeks “assemblages” that are not “structured artificiality” as much as they are indicative of the “spontaneity of event.” Simi Malhotra, in keeping with our theme, chooses to read Deleuze’s works, claiming contemporary noises about the “death of philosophy” as premature and indefensible. Though she takes up mainstream continental philosophy, her conclusions can be productive for third world cultural studies where there appears to be no room for subjectivities when seen through the prism of postmodernism.

We have two contributions by Indrani Das Gupta and Radhika Prasad. Das Gupta's spirited essay based on the popular Bollywood film, *Chak De! India* sets the marginalization of the game of hockey side by side with that of women in sport. She focuses specific attention on the construction of the female body in nationalist discourse – maternal and comfortable. The manner in which the hockey team in the film is disciplined through a punishing regimen of practice sessions and physical training is explored in tandem with the way in which patriarchal power and hegemonic masculinity were exercised during the ideological formation of India's nationalist thought. Prasad addresses peasant revolt in the crucial decade before India's independence. She sees both socialism and Gandhianism as the political philosophies of the time, enshrined in the works of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, two representative novelists of the 1930s. In doing so, Prasad brings the struggle against imperialism face to face with the forces of capitalism, while at the same time exposing the nuanced nature of the 1930s novel that was equally effectively playing a spiritualist/nationalist card through the employment of Gandhi.

The interview with Catherine Belsey is undoubtedly our showstopper. She speaks candidly on the subject of pleasure, her introduction of critical practice in the universities she has worked and taught, and her break with staid orthodoxies of criticism. In her recent book, *A Future for Criticism*, Belsey interrogates, quite unconventionally, how present-day literary theory is driven towards piety and judgement than towards pleasure and recreation. I agree with her that pleasure has been sacrificed almost completely in our reading of fiction in the classroom since we began to learn "appreciation." What are the motives of reading after all? I daresay Catherine Belsey would not disagree that the neglect of pleasure in our reading itself approximates to some sort of marginalization of our full enjoyment of literature: for an academic, it has become commonplace to read a novel holding a pencil while taking notes on the back page. Where has pleasure gone?

A Future for Criticism, on which part of the interview is based, was a joy to read because it raises questions relating to the loss of enjoyment and delight ever since academics learnt the art of

regarding pleasure as a “frivolous” accompaniment to reading. In the many analyses of tragedy from Aristotle to Roger Scruton, Belsey urges readers to look forward to simply viewing tragedies instead of privileging one’s feelings after the event. Not many, in my view, can resist saying “No” when she raises the issue in all its simplicity: “Do people genuinely see *Antigone* to feel purged, or *Othello* to master the emotion it excited? Does *Hamlet* really entice us as a rehearsal for death, or *Miss Julie* with a promise of redemption?” Is there a need to “institutionalize our preferences” in the manner of F. R. Leavis or Harold Bloom or is it equally correct to want to read a “*text of plaisir*,” as Roland Barthes did with *S/Z*? Catherine Belsey in conversation speaks on behalf of the latter, rejecting the moral high ground in favour of “having a good time” with our study of literature, something that has long been given up.

We are fortunate to have poetry contributions from Teji Grover and Anamika in this issue. Both are acclaimed poets. We have here Teji’s Hindi poems in translation. What brings an equal measure of fine detail and passion to Teji’s poems is her additional skill of being a painter. She uses natural colours and takes inspiration from the river Narmada, near which she resides. Anamika, on her part, has sent us a collection that is poignant in the extreme ordinariness of the subjects she chooses to write about. Old age, old clothes, unborn daughters, and vines and creepers cloak the mysteries of life and death, earth and mothers, terrorism and piracy. Sunaina Jain, who completes the poetry section with two of her poems, plans to publish her first book of poetry shortly. Finally, four book reviews ranging from Dalit literature to the life of Rashid Jahan who challenged Muslim orthodoxy, complete the issue. The antagonisms and interactions, tonalities and subversions that the papers in this issue explore will, I hope, provoke readers to concur with Deleuze and Guattari, albeit from our own perspective that “only the minor is great and revolutionary.”

RUMINA SETHI

RITU MENON

Three Ply Yarn: A Feminist Biographical Practice

What is it about the lives of other people that is so endlessly fascinating for many of us? Why do autobiographies and biographies hold such a charge, a promise even, of being able to unlock a hidden chamber, uncover an elusive truth, solve a tantalizing riddle about a person, an event, a momentous time, a historical conundrum? Is it just simple curiosity, a kind of voyeurism that feeds on details or revelations generally unavailable for public consumption? Are biographies merely a “massive, socially sanctioned invasion of the privacy of private life” (Homburger and Charmley 1988: xi) or is there a sense that, in the lives of others, we recognise the glimmerings of something shared, a connection, however tenuous, that reassures us that we are part of a common culture, perhaps even a common or shared history? Can they offer up something of literary or historical value?

Women Unlimited, New Delhi

Biographies are something of an anomaly as they straddle many disciplines – history, literature, politics, sociology, for example – but are neither owned nor acknowledged by any one of them. Nor are they a “discipline” in their own right. They can be said to be a genre, but even so their pedigree is suspect, hovering for the most part between journalism and hagiography. This may be one reason why people who write biographies are generally outside academia. Resistance to them within the academy stems partly from the fact that they cannot be categorised in any satisfactory way, and partly because the purpose of a biography is still elusive: what is it about? Or, to put it differently, why should one valorize an individual life, single it out for special consideration?

As a genre, biographies are a relatively recent development worldwide, roughly about one hundred years old. There have been exceptions, of course – Boswell’s life of Samuel Johnson, Vasari’s lives of the artists – but the modern biography has generally been dated to Lytton Strachey’s influential 1918 publication, *Eminent Victorians*. Sometime in the early twentieth century – partly as a result of the success of *Eminent Victorians* – there was grudging acknowledgement that a biography *could* contribute to the fullness of the record: historical, literary, social, political. By examining the lives and achievements of great men (a consequence, according to Robert Skidelsky, of the Great Man theory of history), biographies sought to throw some light on how and why these great men managed to make an impact on a country or a society’s public or political life, and so illuminate a particular historical period or specific set of political developments. Such accounts tended to focus almost exclusively on the subject’s public persona, elevating her to a larger-than-life stature, with all inconsistencies, contradictions, unflattering traits and actions glossed over or omitted altogether. This made for laudatory and generally uncritical accounts intended to glorify the life and person concerned, and became an important reason why biographies were not taken too seriously. A subject’s private life was not considered important enough to be included, because it was not part of the public record. In literature, for instance, a writer’s work was to be assessed on its own terms, his or her life being

irrelevant to the task at hand. Character flaws, lapses in private or intimate conduct, were studiously ignored – till Lytton Strachey came along and demolished the sanitized claims of what was called the “Victorian biography” tradition. His objective, he said, was to expose “eminent” characters as humbugs or prisoners of false values; for him, “biography” as art and “biography” as truth, were indivisible (qtd. in Skidelsky 1988: 6).

This is not the place to dwell on Strachey’s larger biographical purpose; suffice it to say that the Great Man theory of history has been more or less discarded now – the hour produces the man, not the other way around – and a subject’s personal life, far from being irrelevant, has almost moved centre-stage. What we want to know as readers of biographies now is *how* and *why* their subjects did what they did; what impelled them to take the direction that they took. Indeed, in sharp contrast to the Victorian biography, a modern biography is equally, if not majorly, focussed on the subject’s *life* as it is on her *work*, on that life as it intersects with other lives and on the circumstances in which it is lived.

It is generally true that most biographies are about well-known or important figures, people who led quite extraordinary lives, one way or another. Even today, when we are so much more conscious of the value of the ordinary in any historical, social or political account, most ordinary lives remain invisible. One important reason for this is that there are few primary or original sources that we can consult – letters, press reports, public documents, diaries – and so we must develop other tools and methodologies to write those lives that, in their ordinariness, can expose the workings of say, labour or gender relations; elite and subaltern; and so on. Some beginnings have been made with, for example, biographies of collectives or of social movements, and these are important not only because they shift the emphasis from the individual to the collective, but also because they employ a completely different methodology for their task.

By its very nature, a biography is simultaneously about the past as well as the present. It is written in retrospect, from where we

are placed now, in time as well as in space, about a life or lives, that recede by many decades into a time and place quite forgotten. This entails telescoping back into the past, inhabiting it temporarily, recreating a context in which our subject's life was lived, and exploring what Skidelsky calls "a much richer set of connections" than those afforded by a simple division of "life" and "work" (15). To speak of biography as *continuity* then, is not only to recognise this simultaneity, but also and equally, to know that it must engage with *discontinuity*, that "discontinuity" which is an intrinsic, almost inextricable, part of every life, and therefore part of its telling. This is also why there can never be a definitive biography, merely one version of it; an attempt, either well and sincerely made, or not, because each biography carries the impress of the time and the context in which it is written, the cultural baggage of that time, and the consequent interpretation of the life being written about. It is a product of what John Dunne calls "the intellectual present" (qtd. in Skidelsky 15).

There are other contentious, or at least difficult, issues that a biographer must address. The separation of private and public in a subject's life, the convention that the "personal" should not find mention in a biography, is no longer as assiduously observed as it used to be, but there is still a reluctance about revealing intimate details – or rather, a lack of clarity on how much to reveal, and in which context. While the Great Man theory and the Victorian tradition eschewed the personal and private as being extraneous to the biographer's task and objective, it is now generally acknowledged that such detail – for example Carlyle's impotence, Tolstoy's domestic abuse, Günter Grass's stint with the Waffen SS – may indeed have a bearing on the subject's public life and image. There are still other concerns that preoccupy a responsible biographer. If your subject is no longer alive, should family members be taken into consideration? If she is alive, should your manuscript be vetted by her? If it is and she wants it modified in some way, bits changed or elided, should you acquiesce? How does one select how much of the private is to be shared? How does one decide what is relevant to the life that one is recounting and how much is just of incidental

interest? Do these details reveal essential clues to the subject's character or development? And so on.

As a feminist biographer, the question of whether or not to write about the personal was not, should I or shouldn't I – of course, I would – but of how much space this would occupy in the story, and what I should emphasise. How critical was the personal to my subject's political and literary life, to the choices she made, to the trajectory of her work and her development?

Then there is the question of the authorized biography. What responsibility or limitations does this place on the biographer? If it is not authorized, what is the biographer's relationship to the subject and the archive? Is your subject still living? If yes, what is a biographer's role and responsibility in that case? These questions become important when we discuss the archive: the material, the sources – human and other – and the access that are available to us.

Writing a Life

Let me turn now to the subject of my biography, Nayantara Sahgal, and to a discussion of all the above as they panned out in the course of my research and writing. A few words though, about my choice of subject first.

Nayantara Sahgal belongs to one of India's most distinguished political families, the Nehrus, and has been one of the most eminent Indian writers in English today. She has been a journalist, political commentator, essayist, biographer and novelist, and perhaps the only woman writer in English to have consistently reflected the political life of India in her fiction. From her first novel, *A Time to be Happy* (1958), to her most recent work, *Lesser Breeds* (2003), she has followed the evolution of democracy and politics in the country, from its promise of equality and freedom from want to its present crisis of credibility. Her outspoken criticism of her cousin, Indira Gandhi, during the 1975 Emergency earned her the extreme displeasure of India's most powerful woman at the time, and virtually consigned her to political oblivion. Yet she remained

undeterred in her writing, refusing to be censored or silenced by those in power.

It seemed to me that Nayantara Sahgal was uniquely placed as the subject of a literary and political biography: an accomplished writer with a large body of published work; a journalist and political commentator; a member of the First Family of Indian politics; and an articulate spokesperson for women's identity and liberation. My idea was to attempt a biography that would intertwine three major strands in Nayantara's life – linking literature with politics; literature with feminism; and the personal with the political – in such a way that this writer's life, a woman writer's life and work, might open up an area of enquiry, via biography, into contemporary India; an enquiry that would combine the historical, the literary, the personal and the political. I believed that just as it is impossible to separate a writer's life from her text, it would be remiss to read Nayantara without reference to the political life of the country.

Then there was the archive. A biography without an archive of original documents poses a particular challenge, but so (unexpectedly) does one that is rich and extensive! In my case, because my biography was authorized, and received Nayantara Sahgal's full co-operation, I had unconditional access to all her personal material without reservation. This consisted not only of her literary documents, correspondence, reviews and interviews, newspaper articles, essays, and so on, but also all her letters to friends and family – a huge collection of photographs, assorted memorabilia, confidential papers. It was an extensive and varied archive, almost an embarrassment of riches. In addition, there was the formidable Nehru/Pandit archive, which even if I were to focus only on the personal, was vast.

An archive is important both as evidence, as the scaffolding on which the subject's life is constructed, as well as imaginative resource, because a biographer is, first of all, a storyteller. Cynthia Ozick says, "A good biography is itself a kind of novel" (qtd. in Homberger and Charmley xiii), and biographies are, in the end, narratives that are spun around lives, often in much the same way as they are in fiction. Every biographer fashions the archive

according to what her subject requires, but she also uses it selectively, depending on what she chooses to emphasize in her account. The nature of the archive itself may change depending on the kind of biography one is writing – historical, literary, political, social, psychological, and so on – and on what one's objective is. As a feminist biographer, every single resource that could be made available was important for me. So was reading between the lines in what was eventually written by my subject, or had been left unsaid. All this would help me connect the dots.

But what else, beyond the formal records? Beyond what we might know or intuit, and what letters, diaries, newspaper reports, interviews, and so on, tell us? After all, one is constructing – or reconstructing – a life, and to some extent bringing to the task what one biographer calls “one's own essential but dangerous imagination” (Glendinning 1988; 53). Without this, and without intuition, the portrait one paints is likely to be lifeless.

Turning a Life Around

Carolyn Heilbrun identifies four ways to write a woman's life: “[T]he woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer may write the woman's life in what is called a biography; or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously, and without recognising or naming the process” (1988: 11).

Nayantara Sahgal wrote her life in at least two of these four ways, but for me, as her biographer, the challenge was to uncover or explore what she herself had left unsaid or said tangentially; to counterpoint her life with her personal/political compulsions and to treat her writing – fiction, non-fiction, letters, political columns, essays and articles – as the medium through which this personal-political equation was forged. She herself had provided the clue in one of the first interviews that I did with her. She said:

You see, politics, or political events, have formed the background of my novels and politics is essentially about power, but power is also the equation between

men and women, or between men and men, the equation in all situations, whether domestic or political. . . . The two things, of course, are interlinked, and politics is as much a part of our domestic environment and family environment as it is of the country, and gender relations, too. (2008)

The challenge was enormous, compounded by the fact that my subject was a prolific writer. By the time she was thirty-five, she had already published her autobiography in two volumes, and had ventured into every genre of writing: fiction, non-fiction, political commentary, essays and letters. Moreover, I had to contend with two potentially overwhelming facts: that Nayantara is a member of one of the country's most high-profile political families, almost relentlessly in the public eye and the public domain; and that she herself has recorded or written about practically everything of significance in her life.

Very early in the process, I decided that I would not follow the general convention of writing her life by beginning with her childhood and progressing chronologically through education, adolescence and adulthood. I took seriously Strachey's advice to emphasize the "significance of a personal history" rather than simply present a "vulgar succession of events"; that as biographers, our quest is to create an "atmosphere," not merely a factual record (qtd. in Hill 2014: 21). I decided therefore, to abandon the linear mode to focus instead on the critical events in Nayantara's life that would (hopefully) provide an insight into the choices she made, and on why and how she wrote the way she did. This entailed looping in and out of her childhood and adolescence, travelling back and forth in my narrative in order to see how her relationships evolved and, at the same time, situating her in the social and political context of the country, in order to fully appreciate how the literary and the political merged and reinforced each other in her writing.

One immediate consequence of this strategy was to realize that I would then need to prioritize the "discontinuous" over the "continuous" in my telling: to dwell, in a sense, on the breaks in my subject's life so as to highlight the personal and political reasons that propelled her life, her relationships and her writing. Flowing from this decision was a second one: to use her writing, particularly

her novels, as the axis around which her life would unfold. That is, the writing or the literary would form the spine of the story, interlocking with the personal and the political. This, in turn, would naturally influence how the biography was structured. It was a gamble, but as I began writing, I found an uncanny dovetailing between the decisive breaks, the critical events in Nayantara's personal life and those in the political life of the country. The one somehow seemed to be mapped on the other, in ways that I hope to elaborate.

Nayantara's early life was lived on either side of a historic divide: India's freedom movement that encompassed her childhood and adolescence, followed by Independence and the Partition of India in 1947. The tight fit between Nayantara's family and the pre-Independence politics represented both her personal experience of this momentous struggle, *as well as her political legacy, and her literary resource*. And so, "To write a sort of a political novel wouldn't have come naturally to me," she said to me in an interview:

The thing is, whether I wrote fiction or non-fiction, my connection with politics was my emotional mainspring, not an event happening out there. I have been profoundly affected by it, one's laughter and tears, everything, was connected with it, and there was no getting away from the emotional element in politics. (Menon: 2008)

In the years leading up to India's Independence, the threat of imminent arrest and imprisonment resulted in Nayantara and her sisters being sent abroad for continuing their education. On her return from Wellesley College in the U.S. in 1947, Nayantara encountered an India that was free, but also a home without her father who had passed away in jail in 1944; a mother who had been appointed the country's first ambassador to the Soviet Union; and an uncle who was now Prime Minister. The political climate she encountered was one of equal parts – exhilaration at newly gained independence, and deep sorrow at the division of the country.

Within one year of the pre- and post-Independence divide in the country's life, Nayantara would experience a significant

discontinuity in her own personal life following her marriage. At the age of twenty-one she married Gautam Sahgal, a young man whose family had been displaced from West Punjab as a result of Partition. Gautam Sahgal came from generations of professionals, government servants and army officers, and he himself was part of what we would now call the corporate world, a world far removed from the one that Nayanantara had grown up in. With her marriage, she left her known world of “Gandhi caps and handspun cloth for that of European suits and ties; . . . a world where saying, ‘So-and-so was in jail with me’ was like saying, ‘We were up at Oxford together’” (Menon 2014: 9). Their relocation from Allahabad to Bombay, where they now lived, marked a complete change for her. It was Nayanantara’s first experience of what other people called normal life. “I had no idea,” she said, “that people could go to the office from nine to five, come back, go to the Club; . . . the routine, the whole ambience was foreign to me” (qtd. in Menon 11). Her own life, as she had known it, had been marked by arrivals and departures of another kind – to and from prison.

An unfamiliar domesticity, together with the unaccustomed idleness of the upper middle classes, now encircled Nayanantara. The urge to do something beyond the domestic, to partake actively in some way in the life of the country, made itself felt as early as two years after her marriage. In 1951 she wrote to her uncle, Jawaharlal Nehru, confiding in him her difficulties, her frustrations at being just wife and mother, and seeking his advice. Should she join the Congress? Engage in social work? Or, given her circumstances, just write? Nehru replied immediately and sympathetically, encouraging her to do something worthwhile outside the home. “One cannot ignore the domestic sphere,” he said, “but a wider activity gives more meaning to life” (Nehru 1951). He refrained from telling her what to do, only remarking that there were several ways of doing something socially useful. Should she decide to write, he advised, her writing should have some purpose. “In the final analysis,” he wrote, “one writes from one’s experience of life. The richer the experience, the better the writing” (1951).

Prison and Chocolate Cake, the first volume of Nayantara's "autobiography," became that work written from experience, her attempt at capturing the "special magic" of growing up during India's struggle for freedom, as part of a family whose men and women had committed their lives to it (Sahgal 2007: 6). "I knew history would record the struggle," she acknowledges, but her purpose was altogether different (Sahgal: 6). She wanted to present the "texture of a time, the froth and bubble of a mood or a moment" (Sahgal: 6), the everyday reality of that struggle and what it meant as she experienced it, to offer a ringside view of history in the making. Speaking to me about her writing she recounts:

There was no such thing as an Indian point of view. We were always being interpreted by others . . . as people under occupation, one of the main ways you were suppressed is that you were not allowed to express yourself politically . . . even the fiction and non-fiction written at the time was through the lens of the Raj. It became a way for me to have my say about what really happened. A political way of writing was for me a very fundamental thing because one had been denied freedom of speech. There was very real censorship then . . . a degrading and humiliating experience to have one's mouth shut. . . . To write politically was the only way for me to proceed. (Menon 2008)

Nayantara's foray into writing, then, was not so much an exercise in self-expression or a young woman's dabbling in the realm of the literary. Rather, it was the medium she chose in order to fulfil a clear purpose: communicating an idea of India in an idiom inflected with an Indian accent, presenting a perspective that was a counter to the prevailing and received wisdom; presenting, moreover, an account of an alternative politics.

Equally, and importantly for the purpose of my biography, the beginning of Nayantara's writing life coincided with her growing dissatisfaction with her life as a corporate wife. Marriage and a confining domesticity became the tipping point for her, throwing into sharp relief the yawning gulf between a life of political commitment and one governed (more or less) by social and business engagements. This became the first, critical moment of rupture, of sudden and radical discontinuity with her emotional, personal and political moorings. In each one of her novels that followed *Prison*,

dysfunctional marriage recurs like a leitmotif; marriage never works and all her women protagonists are oppressed by it until they finally break free.

A creeping but steadily advancing unhappiness with her marriage meant that Nayantara turned more and more to her writing for succour. It became her refuge. "I write the way some women go into the kitchen and cook," she said (Menon 2008). "If I wrote something I liked or was working satisfactorily on a book, I felt I'd eaten and slept. It was nourishment" (Menon 2008). For her subject matter she turned to the material she knew best – her country. Her main character, she has always maintained, is India – neither as physical territory defined by geography, history or religion, nor as civilizational entity, but as an ideal, a glittering aspiration. And here too, she found disruption and discontinuity, an equally steadily advancing betrayal of the founding principles of that ideal, a tarnishing of values, an inexcusable compromising of principles.

Thus, the first four novels of the nine she wrote – *A Time to be Happy*, *This Time of Morning*, *Storm in Chandigarh* and *The Day in Shadow* – proceed on parallel tracks; a personal track which is thinly veiled autobiography mirroring Nayantara's own experiences and what she was going through at the time of writing; and a political track, following current developments in the country. All her fictional characters and situations reflect real-life events and personalities in India's post-Independence arena; all are recognizable, all identifiable.

The first four decades of Nayantara's life, 1927-67, formed a distinct phase, with 1967 being the watershed. It was also a watershed year in the life of the nation, as we shall see. After seventeen years of trying to make her marriage work, Nayantara and Gautam Sahgal were divorced by mutual consent on 1 March 1967. The divorce entailed a change of life as well as place for her; she relocated to Delhi, which would become her base for the next fourteen years, the city in which her engagement with political developments in the country would find its fullest public articulation through her newspaper columns. Constrained to earn a living

because of a draconian divorce settlement, Nayantara took to journalism to supplement her income, writing a fortnightly column for the *Sunday Standard*. She became India's first woman political columnist. It was also the year in which her mother, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, contested the Lok Sabha elections from Phulpur in U.P., her old constituency, and won. Her victory exacerbated the evident chill between her and Indira Gandhi, and it now encompassed Nayantara as well, who was unsparing in her critical assessment of her cousin, in her columns. After the 1967 elections, Nayantara said that for the first time she began to see herself as an "observer" of the Indian scene rather than identifying completely with it (Menon 2008). Indira Gandhi's consolidation of control over the Congress Party between 1965 and 1967 enabled her to embark on recasting it in her own mould, in right earnest. The consequences of this for Indian politics and democracy have been well documented, and I do not intend to belabour the point here. My interest lay in exploring the reasons for the personal and political differences between Nayantara and Indira, both of whom were legatees of the Nehruvian ideology – one in principle and the other, apparently, in practice. In Nayantara's view, her cousin's politics represented an inexcusable betrayal of every political principle that Nehru had held dear, and so had to be opposed tooth and nail. For her part, Indira understood the compulsions of *realpolitik*, believed moreover that she was carrying forward Nehru's socialism, albeit inflected by her own interpretation of it, and under drastically altered circumstances. The Indira-engineered Congress split in 1969, and her imposition of the Emergency of 1975 simply vindicated Nayantara's apprehensions regarding Mrs. Gandhi's fascist tendencies.

It seemed to me that if I wanted to write about this phase of Nayantara's life and work, I would have to rewind to her early childhood and growing up years in order to understand the cousins' falling apart; that commenting on the "political" relationship between them was not possible – or rather, not quite comprehensible – without exploring the personal one. This stretched into discussing a complicated web of relationships between and among the Nehrus, at the centre of which was, clearly Nehru – surrogate father to

Nayantara and real father to Indira. All were drawn into Nehru's net – his wife and his daughter; his wife and his sister; his sister and his niece; his daughter and his son-in-law; his sister and his daughter – and the play of personal and political in this family drama would become the subject not only of Nayantara's political writing, but also of her fiction. I do not have the space to elaborate on this fascinating aspect here, but can say in passing that while Indira was clearly Nehru's political heir, Nayantara became his literary one. His advice to her in 1951 had been prescient.

Nayantara's divorce and move to Delhi in 1967 was the second significant divide, or critical event, in her life, and it marked a more-or-less clear "leave-taking" of the implicitly autobiographical elements in her novels. After *The Day in Shadow*, the last novel in which developments in her personal life and marriage find an echo in the lives of her women characters, she left "herself" out of the picture. She withdrew from the text. The end of her marriage left her free to roam beyond the domestic, to locate her female protagonists squarely and firmly in the public and political domains. Where earlier their predicament had its genesis in discord within the home and marriage, they now grappled with the breakdown of values, compromises of convenience and the moral turpitude of public life. In at least two of the post-1967 novels, *A Situation in New Delhi* and *Rich Like Us*, the tussle between principles and unbridled power takes place between women and the system they are up against, with the women symbolizing, naively perhaps, the incorruptible.

A Life in the Round

Everything Nayantara wrote was informed by her perspective on what constitutes a political imagination; but as a writer in India – an India newly independent, heir to a multiplicity of traditions and historical and cultural forces – she experienced as well the compulsions of what she calls a "schizophrenic imagination." The schizophrenic imagination, Nayantara claimed, is rooted in a particular subsoil but doesn't belong to any particular context, has no single home. What it has is multiple traditions that it can never disown,

which usually means that an individual with such an imagination ends up being a misfit. Speaking for herself, she says that in all the years she was growing up, she and her sisters were told that “history was ourselves and we were making it,” a concept so far from what she was taught in school that she soon put school history in the same category as Kipling’s *Gunga Din*, “a rousing, frolicking white man’s fable that had nothing to do with the reality and dignity of India” (“Schizophrenic”).

It was this sense of India’s history as being simultaneously ancient and contemporary, continuous yet unsettled, that informed her fiction. Added to this was the fact that she was both a novelist and a political journalist, a combination not amenable to promoting either sanity or peace of mind. As a journalist she was obliged to keep in touch with the world of facts and data; as a novelist she needed to lose touch with ‘it’ in order to create a fictional world. Fiction was her abiding love; journalism was her conscience, a troublesome thing. How was she to avoid being ambushed by both? A quote from Sartre enabled her to reconcile the contradiction: “For a long time I took my pen for a sword; I now know we’re powerless. No matter, I write” (“Schizophrenic”). And so, although she has said that she cannot see how any writer can avoid being “political” in the sense of reflecting the anxieties of his or her society, its hopes and fears, she would never see fiction as a form of political intervention. For that she had journalism.

And yet she was certainly among those writers, like Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer, who wrote their country from an experience of colonialism. To write one’s country without affectation, without being patronizing, writing with what Nayantara calls “a certain tenderness” is perhaps a woman’s way of writing it (Menon 2008). Essential, too, as ingredients in this endeavour, are the ideas of non-violence, secularism, freedom, personal and political, and democracy; not merely as political goals for a country that had cast off the colonial yoke, but for creating a society in which women and the disadvantaged would find their rightful place.

A feminist project, then. A writing life in which the personal, the political and the literary were so intertwined as to be like a

three-ply yarn. And a self-conscious implication of herself in the political life of the country, as being a woman's rightful place.

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Old Texts, New Bodies: Pitfalls in Cultural Translation from Text to Performance

The language of a translation can – in fact must – let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*. (Benjamin 1969: 79)

Most directors and actors working on translations and adaptations have to deal with the challenges of processing and invigorating the encounter between a text and a performance in a new locale, in an entirely new context and by using a different language. Considered in this way, translation emerges as a creative act in and of itself, and not just an intermediary, interpretive activity.

By defining translation as a process of mechanical-lexical-conversion from one language to another, and by ignoring the cultural specificities of the translated text and the target audience, one not

only confines the creative potential of language but also restricts the possibilities that theatrical practice is capable of achieving. Drawing on my own experience of working in the field of Punjabi theatre for almost three decades, I assert that while translating a play from English into Punjabi (or any other regional language), the goal of a director is never a straight transfer of the content and form from one culture into another. Walter Benjamin lends credence to this claim by stating that “any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information” (1969: 75).

Primarily, this paper sets out with two motives. It aims to define translation as a more constructive activity than a mechanical substitution of words – a creative act that involves the employment of cultural nuances to produce an enhanced theatrical experience. Further, it attempts to thwart the myths that surround the contemporary views about translation – the supremacy of linguistic knowledge for a meaningful translation, the necessity of strict uniformity between the translated text and the ensuing performance, and the need for “political correctness” of the translated text. I support my argument with my personal experience of directing two translated plays in Punjabi: *Yerma* (1934), a Spanish play by Federico García Lorca and *Naga-Mandala* (1988), a Kannada play by Girish Karnad.¹

As I begin to explicate the validity of the above arguments, I am reminded of a play that was translated from French into Punjabi by a Punjabi professor of French literature. As the professor was familiar with both the “source” and the “target” languages, it was anticipated that the translation of the play would be a certain success. It is pertinent to state here that mere familiarity with the languages involved is not a measure of a successful and creative translation since linguistic knowledge alone is inconsequential in invigorating the experience of a theatrical performance. The professor lacked the passion for theatre and its various elements and was oblivious to the motifs concealed in the text. He had failed to read the suggestions made by the silences and pauses or even to decipher the shades of moods hidden beneath the words. His main failing

was his preoccupation with the accurateness of the transfer of the exact same story or content of the text into the translated work. This rendered his translation as simply too synthetic and hence unsuitable for a passionate theatrical performance.

The misconception about the obligation for accurateness leads one to believe that translation is necessarily driven by authenticity or ethical considerations. But theorists like Benjamin have famously argued that translation is an improvement of the source language and should be judged through different frames beyond the question of faithfulness of its transition. Hence, it is an error to assume that the translator is transferring the visual, aural, tactile resonance of the original text by drawing absolute parallels with the source text.

Artists all over the world are involved in attempting a crossing-over that is eclectic and hybrid – a voluntary mixing of genres, styles and traditions whose sources cannot be distinguished easily. These artists seek universal elements across cultures and synthesize them to find points of connection and disjunction. The works of Amal Allana, B. V. Karanth, Ebrahim Alkazi, Eugenio Barba and Ariane Mnouchkine exemplify such crossing-over by frequently drawing upon sources belonging to different cultural and historical backgrounds. Karanth employed the *Yakshagana* tradition from Karnataka in his production of *Macbeth*, Mnouchkine used *Kathakali* – the dance drama form from Kerala – in her plays based on Greek tragedies, and Alkazi drew on *Kabuki* – the classical Japanese dance drama form – for his production of Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug*. In his theatrical presentation of the Indian epic *Mahabharata* (1989), Peter Brook has also borrowed devices from Sanskrit theatre and the martial arts of Kerala, the *Kalaripayattu*. How do we discuss this cultural transfer? How does culture travel, become transformed and take on a fresh identity? These are concerns that are outlined below.

Dynamics of Cultural Transfer through Translation

The transfer of cultures – the translation and adaptation of a play from one culture into another is the outcome of a creative working

of a number of dynamics. For understanding the transformation of a dramatic text that is written and then translated, staged and shared with an audience, it is crucial to reconstruct the trajectory of its successive concretization. It must be declared at the outset that the translated text belongs to both the playwright and the translator. The original text is fundamentally based on the playwright's formulations and choices. It is not an objective reality that creates the text but a complex field of inspiration, storytelling skills, cultural framework, theatrical technique and the playwright's perception of reality.

For a translator who undertakes such an adaptation, the creative and cultural inclinations as well as his or her ideological position are of primary importance. The translator re-assembles the plot in accordance with the logic of the situation and develops the characters through a time and space that is relevant to and compatible with the ideological concerns, creative affiliations and visual sensibilities of the director. The text can be realized more effectively by positioning the local, vernacular and regional reality in which the play is being staged while engaging with the nuances of the language into which it is being translated. This is not to suggest that the play will not resonate with the echoes of the source material, but to insist that it will also possess the texture and resonance of the target language is to fall into the trap of a sort of realism that would be considered theatrically obsolete. In other words, translation involves a confrontation and communication of situations and characters not only separated by the boundaries of their language but also through geography, through time and specificities of their cultural configurations. While directing *Yerma* in 1992, I was not interested in placing it in a Spanish village as it is in the source version. My intention, instead, was to explore the musical motifs, the expressive movements and the community life. It was imperative to neutralize the cultural specificity through adaptation. I focused on locating the central leitmotif of the play, which is sterility contrasted with fecundity. Surjit Patar, who translated *Naga-Mandala* from Karnad's English version into Punjabi, illustrates this "locating":

I got my cue by composing the song for the washerwomen's scene. While washing clothes on a river bank they spew out this ditty: *Beria nu bere lag gaya, tenu khuj na laga mutiyara* [Berries are sprouting on the trees, but your tree is bare]. The image of a barren tree, that could not bear fruit, gave me the tone and texture of how I should translate the play. (Personal Conversation, 29 April 2008)

I must reiterate that though the play is originally written in Spanish, Patar's Punjabi version is based on an English translation, making the entire act of translation complex. The target language (Punjabi) and the source language (Spanish) are twice removed, making a connection through an intermediary language (English). In this manner, our theatre company used language as part of the translation process but not as something that stood between the actor and the story.

The adoption of the local cultural motifs and creating their consistency with the context of the translation is one of the stimulating but difficult aspects of a translated adaptation. For this reason, says Surjit Patar, translating the songs for both *Yerma* and *Naga-Mandala* was the most challenging part of the adaptation. While directing this version of *Naga-Mandala*, I wanted to give the fictional characters – the chorus of flames – a song for their entry scene. As a child, I had been a witness to the songs sung by women on *Lohri* (a festival to mark the transition from winter to summer, by lighting a fire). By using the original words of the traditional *Lohri* songs as a source, I reworked by reassembling them which enabled me to resituate their location, context and thereby their meaning.

Patar was initially hesitant to translate *Naga-Mandala* into Punjabi from its English transcript. He expressed his initial reluctance in translating the play, his disconnect with the snake imagery and the problems of transporting a folk tale from Karnataka to a Punjabi village:

Not being familiar with the language of theatre, I was completely startled by the snake imagery in the text. Having been nurtured on the tradition of "realistic drama," I presumed that the snake was a physical requirement for staging the play. I kept on grappling with the issue of how to show a snake on the stage until it struck me that this was an area which the director had to resolve. The other area

that confused me was that I was not familiar with the language of theatre that this play was written in. How can flames be made human? How does an intangible element like a story become a character? In most writings that existed in Punjab, at least in contemporary playwriting, folk tales with layered and dense imagery had not made their appearance. (Personal Conversation, 29 April 2008)

While directing this play, I realized that the structure was new. I observed that Karnad takes his cue from the past in order to perceive the present. The main core of the story revolves around an unhappy bride who fills her loneliness by conjuring fantasies, dreams and illusions to give meaning to her life. These stories then acquire a life of their own and start functioning independently of her. This was also a new form of writing where a chorus of flames speaks more eloquently than humans and a snake takes a human form. It derives its narrative from a folk tale, and employs tools that are non-realistic, using traditional folk conventions like the hand-held curtain and the dance and the music. Karnad explores the scope of creativity by presenting a complex world where fictional characters and real characters intermingle and the lines between the visible and the invisible get blurred.

The task of directing this play posed many new questions: how to resolve the indefinite tension between the real and otherworldly characters? How does one create the transformation of the husband into a snake? How is one to underscore the philosophical and conceptual tenor that is inherent in the story? What sort of acting protocol should be used in the absence of any distinct vocabulary for the play? How to resolve the contradictions of a play that is set in reality but at the same time eschews reality? The catalyst for the representation of abstract characters proved to be the word *Chhaleda* (meaning illusionist in Punjabi).² *Chhaleda* served as a starting point and helped me in interpreting the images of the play. It also gave me the wherewithal, the method to unwrap the various layers of the sub-text. Thus, the proclivities of the directorial style, the interpretations of the text, the creative impulses and the concept employed, create shifts in the language as well as in the meaning, tone and texture of the translated text. Through these shifts, the translated text recreates its own location

and history of performance and creates a performative text or a trans-location.

The “performative” text then reaches the audience through the body of the actors who carry within them the history of their own specific cultural instincts that facilitate in the enunciation of the text. Many theorists rightly proclaim that the role of the actors extends much beyond an oratorical repetition of the written scripts. Patrice Pavis’s views become significant here as he says:

The text is only one of the elements of performance and, here, of translating activity, or, put in another way, the text is much more than a series of words: grafted on to it are ideological, ethnological and cultural dimensions. Culture is so omnipresent that we no longer know where to start investigating it. We are limited here to unmasking it in a series of concretizations, which vary according to the Social Context of the observer, and is complete only when a given audience finally appropriates the source text. The set of gestural moments and variations in the language-body have been used to show how the translation involves the transfer of a culture, which is inscribed as much in words as in gestures. We would have to broach the question of the actor shaping and finally interpreting the text and body; he can salvage the most ridiculous translation, but can also wreck the most sublime! (1992: 149)

To provide the directors and actors with the raw material to work upon, a judicious translator derives images from the text and uses them to enhance the creative potential of the performance. A talented director contributes by transforming these images, intuitions and ideas into instruments for the actors. The actors employ all these “instruments,” regardless of the location of the text and decode them for the target audience through their performance. At this point, these modified images, transported through the performance of the actors, affect emotions and create a connection with the audience. Through this process, a performance text is being created by the actors through gestural and rhythmic improvisation, and simultaneously the translation of the text is also affected as they choose their own intuitive construction of the characters. These considerations are the most obvious manifestation of inter-cultural penetration of texts that is enabled through the bodies of the actors who create their own text through their understanding of the character. There is no neat or ordered formulation for this process.

For the above reasons, no text can be dreamed by different translators in the same manner. It will always be imagined by different translators in different ways at different points of time. To assign a single, corresponding interpretation to a text is to impose a limit on that text. Every work is written here and now, and with each re-reading fresh meaning will emerge.

The Question of Political Correctness

While performing the function of transforming the entire being of a text into a totally new experience for the audience, the question of political correctness, of “orientalism” and “occidentalism” always creeps in to haunt the artists engaged in such transfer. Having directed a series of Western plays in Punjabi, I would like to state that I have felt no compulsions towards political correctness while transforming and translating plays from one culture into another, or from other regional languages into Punjabi. The real concerns involve illuminating a story and trying to avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping.

Yet, since the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), the practice of “borrowing” in translation has been subjected to extreme criticism and has been accused of cultural imperialism. Critics incessantly question the right of a translator to interpret another culture; they are generally inclined to believe either in latent racism or outright cultural ignorance instead of being interested in the creative impulse behind such cultural transfer.

Peter Brook’s production of the *Mahabharata* is one of the most celebrated examples of this debate about “borrowing” through translation and adaptation. By staging the *Mahabharata* on an international canvas with an international cast, Brook familiarized the international audience with a mythical India that is epic in scale and has existed for thousands of years, having been transmitted orally through the ages by bards and storytellers. Even though it is an imaginary India, it is one which is linked to both the past and the present. Still, Brook’s work has drawn the ire of many cultural theorists and academicians who have accused him of appropriating

India's cultural property. The question of "borrowing an epic" as well as the convention of staging from another culture was certainly debatable for the cultural enthusiasts. Thus, it is not hard to discern that foreigners who employ Indian texts are often accused of being orientalist, inasmuch as Indians who translate and adapt foreign texts are blamed for disloyalty to their heritage. One needs to probe the origin of this anxiety of cultural appropriation.

Culture is not a scarce resource. In a country with an extensive history and diversity of traditions, there is adequate material for anyone to experiment with. A variety of interpretations of the same text should be welcomed and not resisted. The multiple productions and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays being undertaken globally only support the existence of multiple variations of the *Mahabharata*. In addition, in the absence of clear characteristics distinguishing Western from Indian, the possibility of demarcation of boundaries between the two becomes unwarranted. One is bound to question: is metropolitan life with all its international brands and fast food chains also a "foreign" experience, even if it has been integrated into the Indian lifestyle? If so, then do plays that are considered "authentically Indian" have to be chained to material that is pre-modern and avoid the multicultural experience altogether? One might ask why theatre should bow to such compulsions and phobias.

To counter the above apprehensions, it is important to understand what cultural space actually means. The works of, say, Greek and Sanskrit classicists, and Shakespeare, carry within them the echoes of humanity. With each work that is translated from one culture into another, the historical and social reality goes through a process of search and sifting. Such work, therefore, speaks in a universal tone and cannot belong to a particular nation. Richard Schechner, in an interview with Patrice Pavis, asserts a similar view:

There were lots of national exchanges, but I felt that the real exchange of importance to artists was not that among nations, which really suggests official exchanges and artificial kinds of boundaries, but the exchange among cultures, something which could be done by individuals or by non-official groupings, and it doesn't obey national boundaries. As we know, especially in the post-colonial world, national boundaries and cultural boundaries differ. (qtd. in Pavis 1996: 42)

Anuradha Kapur in her adaptations of Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* and Bertolt Brecht's *The Job*, and Maya Krishna Rao in her production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, have borrowed imagery from the social discordance that surrounds metropolitan life. Kapur's juxtaposition of popular music outside an Indian temple or the projecting of live-film testimonies of the *Godhra* riots in a production of *Antigone* becomes part of the post-modern process of social fragmentation. This collage of images has given immense power and intensity to her productions which choose their forms and intentions without pretending to understand the normative cultural rules from which these forms have originated. This leads to a creative interpretation of cultural tones within new configurations of creativity. In translation, an artist uses a familiar language to communicate an unfamiliar culture (in terms of sensations, philosophies, relationships and metaphors) which, besides creating a broader perceptual mutation, also makes us relook at the possibilities of our own language.

Translation has always been an important activity in Indian theatre, a result, no doubt, of the linguistic diversity of a sub-continent which has, nevertheless, strong common religious and cultural roots that connect each region with another despite linguistic differences. But, by the end of the nineteenth century, the texts for performance in urban India included plays that were translated from European plays through the English language, and indigenized in the regional language in which they were performed. Simultaneously, there were translations of Sanskrit plays into modern Indian languages that were performed both in the original as well as their translated versions by a host of modern Indian directors. We are familiar with the plays of Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, William Shakespeare, Bertolt Brecht, Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad, and the great classics from Sanskrit and Greek only because of translations. A successful translation is never literal but it creates a new text keeping in mind the cultural context and their regional aspirations towards the narrative.

Critics of cultural transference seem oblivious of the creative process of an artist that is not founded on sociological or anthropological accuracy. Not every cultural exchange can be

prescribed by a political agenda or determined by market forces or media culture. There are artists in the world who seek each other out at personal and creative levels without any expectations of recognition, not even of their respective national cultures. In this manner, translation emerges as a process that always ends up recounting a very personal story although it may cast a broad net into other cultures to discuss the subjects being represented in new ways. In other words, a text becomes dead when it does not travel, change and evolve. A playwright is a poet, a metaphysician, a historian, who reminds us that theatre can dismantle and re-vision monolithic representations of history. Theatre is about narratives, about telling a story, about transforming the written words into characters, sounds, pauses and movements. Translation can never be assessed in purely linguistic terms; it should be examined as a means through which cultures collide with each other, a mode through which race and the entire question of identity presents itself. It must be viewed as an act of creation, a way of finding resonance not simply between words but also between the hidden cultural codes that are carried across the narrative. The encounter between a text and its performance is strengthened by various creative agents, and thus the meaning of the text and the pleasure that a theatre audience seeks in a performance is extended.

In translation, we may conclude, ideas get reborn, and the images that have been interpreted in numerous ways earlier, get fresh power. By rendering novel perspectives to historical texts, translating helps in retrieving lost histories, preserving the past, and understanding the present. In this entire process, the original and the accurate may get lost, but the unique perspectives and new dimensions enhance the creative value of the work.

Notes

- ¹ The play, originally written in Kannada, was translated by Karnad himself in the year 1990.
- ² *Chhaleda* is a person who can attain any form or shape; a *Chhaleda*, for example, could transform a woman into an *apsara* or a man into a snake – the word *Chall* can also mean a trickster, an illusionist or a magician. The word

Chhaleda may be equated with a mirage; in my childhood, I used to see a pool of water or a field of flowers but actually found nothing. This is a *Chhaleda* (because actually, there was no water, or flowers). Such were the impulses I had experienced as a child and been rebuked by the elders for fantasizing about. Day-dreaming or weaving magical thoughts were actions that did not find acceptability in pragmatic societies. Still, these stories formed a part of my archival memory and my inherited folklore.

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Exile, Assimilation and Dystopian Politics in Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction

Bharati Mukherjee's early work from the 1970s up until the early 1980s bore witness to an expatriate or, broadly speaking, exilic sensibility. By the author's own admission, her writing since then has gone through a radical conversion, marking a transition from "the aloofness of expatriation" to "the exuberance of immigration" (1985: xv). As a matter of fact, her subject matter – the "inner life" of non-traditional immigrants living in North America – has remained the same;¹ what has really changed is the way in which these immigrants have come to be seen as "pioneers" and "conquerors" of the new land rather than as marginal figures stranded on the outer shores of a faraway homeland (Mukherjee 1991: 27). Mukherjee has sought to spell out the terms of this transition in a number of essays while defending her pro-immigration stance from potential critics.

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The "Introduction" that prefaces *Darkness* (1985), a short story collection, is perhaps the first such document to outline her new "pro-immigration, let-it-go" position on postcolonial displacement (Mukherjee 1999: 77). It introduces a number of themes that would become prominent in her later writing, some of which include: rejection of exile and expatriation as an unsatisfactory mode-of-being in the diaspora; celebration of immigration, particularly the desire to relocate oneself within the host society via cultural assimilation; critique of multiculturalism; and, finally, an attempt to remake the idea of America as a country that accepts postcolonial immigrants as full participants in its civic and cultural life, and an America which no longer abides by its pre-civil rights era, racially exclusivist variety of Eurocentric nativism. Mukherjee has articulated these ideas in an autobiographical context of living in India, Canada and the United States. Her discussion of expatriation often references her ten-year stay in Canada, where she experienced widespread racial abuse (Mukherjee 1981: 39-40). By contrast, she has celebrated the American-style assimilation after her return from Canada to the United States.

The "Introduction" to *Darkness* suggests that expatriation, like immigration, is a sensibility, a deeply felt way of comprehending the world, as well as a lived experience. While lived experience is hard to contest, it is the expatriate/exilic sensibility that Mukherjee criticizes when formulating her pro-assimilation stance. It turns out that until the author returned from Canada to the United States, she considered herself an expatriate. In her early fiction, "immigrants" were lost souls, put upon and pathetic. Expatriates, on the other hand, knew all too well who and what they were, and what foul fate had befallen them" (Mukherjee 1985: xiii). This statement that attributes a level of self-awareness and self-control to the expatriate not available to the immigrant is consistent with Mukherjee's self-representation in *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (co-authored with her husband Clark Blaise), in which she compares herself to V. S. Naipaul:

In myself I detect a pale and immature reflection of Naipaul; it is he who has written most movingly about the pain and absurdity of art and exile, of "Third

World art" and exiles among the colonizers; the tolerant incomprehension of hosts; the absolute impossibility of ever having a home, a *desh*. I am content that my absolute stability is the portable world of my imagination. (1995: 299)

This statement suggests the author's self-understanding as an exilic writer, as someone whose aesthetic inheritance includes not only literary traditions from both the metropolitan and postcolonial worlds, but also her recognition that a chronic condition of homelessness is part of a displaced person's unavoidable legacy. Recuperation of postcolonial identity as a bulwark against the depredations of exile is, therefore, not really an option for her (Blaise and Mukherjee 1995: 297-9).

From Unhousement to Rehousement

Despite her early identification with Naipaul's exilic vision, Mukherjee's essays since the 1980s draw a firm line between immigrant writing on the one hand and exilic/expatriate writing on the other. Most of these later essays are motivated by her desire to defend the aesthetics of assimilation vis-à-vis that of expatriation, which she has rejected as "enfeebling" (Mukherjee 1988: 28). "In literary terms," she says, "being an immigrant is very *déclassé*. There is a low-grade ashcan realism implied in the very material. [On the other hand,] the exiles . . . come wrapped in a cloak of mystery and world-weariness" and adopt a stance of privileged detachment (1988: 28). Another essay defines expatriation as "an act of sustained self-removal from one's native culture, balanced by conscious resistance to total inclusion in the host society" (1999: 71). The exile is someone who has struck a "bargain" with the host society, asking that the "host culture permit him or her to retain an alien core that will not be compromised or surrendered" (1999: 72). In return for such "tolerance and noninterference" by the host culture, the exilic writer refrains from exposing "the fundamental flaws" of the host society "with anything like the zeal [he] bring[s] to the dissection of [his] own people" (1999: 71-2). Despite the attractions of an exilic sensibility, Mukherjee distances herself from a long list of exilic writers and seeks to place herself in the midst of the immigrant tradition. She says: "The book I dream of updating is

no longer [E. M. Forster's] *A Passage to India* – it's [Henry Roth's] *Call It Sleep*" (1985: xv).

Immigration, for Mukherjee, entails a deeply felt engagement with the culture and politics of the host country. Using the categories once proposed by Blaise, she describes their difference by using the metaphors of "unhousement" and "rehousement" (Hancock 1987: 32). To begin, immigrants seek to lay down new roots in order to lay claim to the new country. In the dialect of American football, they are willing to go through "the full nine yards of transformation" (Mukherjee 1999: 71). Between these alternate approaches to the lived experience of diaspora, Mukherjee finds other important differences, including those of perspective (the exile's cultivated detachment versus the migrant's host-cultural engagement), of class affiliation (the exile's high cultural pretensions versus the immigrant's association with working and middle classes), of identity (cultural retention versus assimilation and transformation) and of ideology (exile as the loss of a country versus migration as the gain of a new one). The author writes emphatically elsewhere, "[O]thers who write stories of migration often talk of arrival at the new place as a loss, the loss of communal memory and the erosion of an original culture. I want to talk of arrival as gain" (1997: n.p.).

Leaving aside her critique of exilism for the moment, Mukherjee's celebration of immigration leads her to celebrate the virtues of assimilation over multiculturalism, a position some critics have found difficult to understand. Mukherjee's espousal of immigration as a project of "rehousement" within the host society has been presented as a rejection, not only of residual cultural identities with their roots in the old country, but also of the policies of multiculturalism within the host country. She bases her judgment on instances of racism that she experienced while living in Canada, for which she holds Canada's multiculturalist policies to be responsible (Mukherjee 1988: 29). She complains that Canada's official multiculturalist policy has been frequently used as an excuse to put the so-called "visible minorities" in their place; it has consequently discouraged non-European immigrants from participating in an inclusive sense of national identity, while encouraging ethnic

separatism and exacerbating group differences (1994: 31-3). The following excerpt from "Beyond Multiculturalism" captures her anxiety about multiculturalism in no uncertain terms:

"Multiculturalism" has come to imply the existence of a central culture, ringed by peripheral cultures. The sinister fallout of official multiculturalism and of professional multiculturalists is the establishment of one culture as the norm and the rest as aberrations. Multiculturalism emphasizes the differences between racial heritages. This emphasis on the differences has too often led to the dehumanization of the different. And dehumanization leads to discrimination. And discrimination can ultimately lead to genocide. (1994: 33)

In this polemical rendering of Canadian multiculturalism, Mukherjee appears to confuse everyday racial intolerance with the bureaucratic goal of promoting racial and cultural diversity. One could, for instance, criticize the multiculturalist policies of Canada (in the United States the term is often invoked in pedagogical debates) for failing to promote a more diverse and tolerant society, but to blame these policies for *causing* racial prejudice and opening up a door toward genocide (a phenomenon that has its own dubious history that predates government-mandated multiculturalism) appears far-fetched. Historically, multiculturalism emerged in Canada and the United States to redress exactly the kind of discrimination that Mukherjee claims it helps to consolidate. To the extent that a citizen's racial, cultural and religious identities have acted as barriers to forging a common national identity, multiculturalism was meant to assemble diverse groups of people into an inclusive national imaginary, underwritten by the motto *e pluribus unum* in the long-established tradition of political and religious pluralism. This does not, however, mean that the multiculturalist states have succeeded in achieving these lofty goals; in fact, there is enough evidence to suggest that official multiculturalist policies have been turned into statist instruments to help manage cultural diversity. In this essay, I argue that Mukherjee's perspective on exile and assimilation is deeply embedded in a dystopian political worldview. In fact, the various distinctions that the author draws between exile and immigration cannot be fully understood without probing deeper into the "political unconscious" of her works. Like Naipaul's, the predominant political

outlook of her early writing is anti-third worldist and dystopian. Yet her later fiction seeks to celebrate metropolitan freedoms while writing back and forth – unevenly – to a variety of political orthodoxies. The following sections will examine her two very different novels *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Jasmine* in order to illuminate this thesis.

Postcolonial Dystopias

Mukherjee's first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971; henceforth *TD*), traces the footsteps of a young Bengali woman returning to India after a seven-year stay in the United States. It deals with a subject that has become a cliché of sorts in the literature of exile: after living away from her family and friends for many years, an expatriate woman returns to her home country only to find that the place she had left behind has changed so drastically that alienation becomes inevitable. In other words, an exile from one's homeland, by virtue of her long separation and intervening change, becomes an exile at home. From the moment Tara Banerjee Cartwright lands in Bombay, the signs of differences between her 'former home' and the India that she perceives upon her return are forcefully paraded before her eyes. The city's Marine Drive no longer looks fashionable but "run down and crowded" (*TD* 22). Poverty and squalor are visible everywhere, and even the relatives she meets before boarding a train to Calcutta appear very old-fashioned in their insistence that Tara travel with a companion, as many Indian women still do, to avoid harassment by men (*TD* 28). Compared to Bombay, the protagonist finds Calcutta even more drastically altered; the most visible part of such change manifesting itself as a Naxalite revolution underway, with daily protests and killings, as the city descends rapidly towards utter political chaos and upper-class decay. Along with the city, Tara finds its inhabitants significantly altered: during a social call, a distant aunt screams over Tara's "American money" and "*mleccha* [white] husband" (*TD* 45); members of the old Bengali gentry are either decrepit or dying; and Tara's high society friends have learned to react to the world around them in cynical ways, unable to come to terms with the violent social change

whose historical context and political rationality appear incomprehensible to them. Tara soon comes to realize her own “foreignness of spirit” amid the piling ruins of a once idealized city (TD 45). Unsurprisingly, the violence on the streets threatens to crush her before she can make an escape back to the United States.

Initially, Tara’s return to India occurs in a context defined, in part, by an intense longing for home, a sentiment common to exiles. Accordingly, the narrator suggests that the protagonist’s return to India is meant as an act of self-recovery. “For years Tara had dreamt of returning to India,” recounts the narrator (TD 30). “She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta” (TD 30). Clearly, her act of return to her roots in search of belonging and identity is motivated by a heavy dose of nostalgia. While in New York, Tara had cherished her Indianness in such small acts of eating a “curried hamburger” and “burn[ing] incense sent from home” (TD 34). These gestures reinforce Tara’s status as a postcolonial exile eager to bring an end to her estrangement through a triumphant moment of homecoming, only to discover eventually that her ties with India were not as strong as she had imagined them to be, while her entanglement with the Western world had become too intimate – and self-forming – to be reversed for good. Her “foreignness of spirit” was, therefore, to stay with her no matter how she felt about India at the moment of her homecoming (TD 45).

Tara’s nostalgic return to India is further amplified when the novel looks wistfully at her family’s privileged past in order to contextualize her present circumstances. Her great grandfather was a *zamindar*, who had no way of foreseeing in his nation’s future “the shadows of suicide and exile, of Bengali soil sectioned and ceded, of workers rising against their bosses” (TD 8); her grandmother had married a barrister and moved from her village to Calcutta; whereas her redoubtable father, Bengal Tiger Banerjee (hence the novel’s title *The Tiger’s Daughter*), whose strong personality provides a reassuring bulwark against a maniacally self-destructing city, had become an industrialist (TD, part 1, chapters

2-4). This narrative retrospection into Tara's family history has the effect of invoking a pastoral view of West Bengal, a province that had nourished her family before she went abroad for higher studies. Politically speaking, the novel upholds a hierarchal, idyllic and agrarian social order as an alternative to the late 1960s' reality of a Calcutta in the throes of revolutionary violence and upper-class decay.

An important aspect of the novel's exilic sensibility is its use of a dystopian plot to critique the hazards faced by a postcolonial exile upon her return to her homeland. Apart from the possible "interpellation" of the protagonist's consciousness by a colonial pedagogical machine (like Naipaul's protagonists, Tara, too, is aware of the alienating effects of colonial education), such a bleak representation of Calcutta could have been the result of a sense of radical disjunction between an allegedly "backward" society that fails to measure up to the exile's idealized view of the homeland cherished from afar. Most intriguingly, the novel represents Tara's return to Calcutta as a journey into a sort of "heart of darkness" cast unmistakably in the image of the mythical underworld. Intimations of such a journey begin to emerge very early in the novel; indeed, the first chapter describes the city as a living, breathing figure of cannibalistic abomination that draws its unsuspecting visitors into its interior with no possibility of exit. The presiding spirit of the place is Calcutta itself, personified as an all-consuming monstrosity:

There is, of course, no escape from Calcutta. Even an angel concedes that when pressed. Family after family moves from the provinces to its brutish center, and the center quivers a little, absorbs the bodies, digests them, and waits. (*TD* 4)

The underworld motif introduced in the first chapter is reinforced throughout the novel by means of plot, characterization and imagery. Tara provides an early example in her night-time encounter with two shabby figures – both of them non-Bengalis – in the Calcutta-bound train she boards from Bombay. The two men appear as if they are there to guide Tara's entry into a modern-day Hades; one of them, described as "a spider, impassive, and calculating" (*TD* 27), is the right-wing merchant-turned-politician P. K.

Tuntunwala, who will later describe Calcutta in characteristic Babu English as “a veritable hell” (TD 92). The other person, “a fidgety older man with coarse hair,” tries to impress Tara with a concocted story of having met Bertrand Russell in London, but his real intention, Tara suspects, is to seduce her during the journey (TD 25). “Both men, Tara decided, could effortlessly ruin her journey to Calcutta”; indeed, they “desecrated her shrine of nostalgia,” leading her to doubt if she had made the right decision by returning to India (TD 25, 31). This early encounter with two suspect fellow-riders prepares the reader to react with contempt when it is ambiguously suggested that Tuntunwala has raped/seduced Tara some weeks later; a fact that also serves as an allegory of Bengal’s surrender to a new dispensation of non-Bengali capitalists that this shabby industrialist from Rajasthan has come to represent.

Other instances in which the underworld motif plays itself out include Tara’s meeting with Joyonto, the owner of a commercially ruined tea estate, “whose country had let him down” (TD 48). An ageing prophet and the soothsayer of an Indian apocalypse, he comes across as a strangely meditative figure, someone who recites mangled lines from Western literary sources, including T. S. Eliot’s “Burnt Offerings” (“Dear Madam, you I shored against my ruins” [TD 246]) and Euripides’s *The Bacchae* (“Truth is a head on a stake” [TD 51]). Intent on playing Virgil to a young Dante, he also leads Tara on an outing to one of Calcutta’s funeral *ghats*, where a *tantric* living among the dead starts to follow her menacingly. Apart from providing a cynical exposé of Calcutta’s many horrors, the episode brings Tara face to face with a death-like figure. As the *tantric* attempts to get hold of Tara’s palm to read her fate, Tara, in an apparent parody of the cave scene from Forster’s *A Passage to India*, misreads his gesture as a sexually motivated attack, and runs to take refuge in her car (TD 101). Later, Joyonto will lead Tara to the Tollygunge refugee camp, where a horde of destitute people follows them – a scene reminiscent, once again, of Virgil leading the young poet Dante through purgatory.²

Postcolonial writing from the diaspora is often described as political in intent. In *Culture and Imperialism*, while speaking about

the political significance of migrancy and exile. Saïd writes: "[I]t is no exaggeration to say that liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies whose incarnation today is the migrant" (1994: 332). Others, including Salman Rushdie, have used the metaphors of "writing back to the [imperial] centre" to describe the variegated politics of postcolonial diasporic writing (1981: 8). While these perspectives probably account for the political imaginary embedded in a number of postcolonial literary works, I suggest that Mukherjee's political critique is closer to the spirit of "writing back and forth," in that it is directed not only against the political legacy of an erstwhile empire, but also against a variegated range of targets within the postcolonial and Western metropolitan formations. The targets of her political critique, as far as *The Tiger's Daughter* is concerned, include the persistence of a colonial mentality among postcolonial ruling elites, the ascendancy of a pan-Indian trading class in the wake of the decline of the feudal order, the mindlessly destructive character of Naxalite violence and the failure of Western liberalism to provide a meaningful political framework in postcolonial India in general (and late 1960s West Bengal in particular). In addition, the novel shows some sympathy toward Bengali nationalism under pressure from pan-Indian capitalist forces, while it criticizes the failure of political leadership on the part of Calcutta's ruling classes. In other words, no major political force or tendency, domestic or international, is outside the purview of Mukherjee's critical gaze.

Historically, *The Tiger's Daughter* chronicles a crucial moment in the history of postcolonial India around the time the Naxalite revolution shook most of West Bengal (1967-72). The novel's account of this Maoist-influenced peasant rebellion is highly critical, narrated as it is from the viewpoint of Calcutta's upper-class city dwellers, who perceive the movement as a grievous threat to their continued hold on power. These people experience the movement as an unending series of public protests, blockades, *hartals*, factory closings, kidnappings, murders, parading of "class enemies" or

otherwise, a widespread breakdown in law and order. There is also a more generalized concern of "Calcutta's going to the dogs" (TD 55), and of Bengali society as a whole losing its aura of high culture and civility while abandoning its pursuit of scholarship, literature and the arts, for which it has been traditionally celebrated.

If the author is critical of the violence unleashed by the rebels, she is equally critical of the ruling classes whose "communal autobiography" the novel seeks to chronicle.³ Tara's old friends are criticized for their class prejudice, not to mention their "tremendous capacity for surfaces" (TD 53). But it is a newly ascendant group of non-Bengali Rajasthani traders, the Marwaris, personalized in the figure of Tuntunwala, who come up for the book's most scathing criticism. Unlike traditional Bengali landowners, the Marwaris are represented as a coarse, self-seeking and ruthlessly competitive tribe of businessmen who have no regard for anything but their own interests. The author's nativist resentment of a successful migrant group from another part of India, increasingly dominant in Calcutta's trade and commerce, clearly reflects the waning influence of Bengal's traditional elites, hemmed in between enterprising outsiders on the one hand, and assertive peasants-turned-rebels on the other, as can be ascertained from the following passage:

What were [Pronob and other Bengali factory owners] to do? Tara wondered. Should they leave for Bombay and let the rich Marwaris fight it out with the *goondahs*? The Marwaris were less vulnerable They could stand up to the communists. But what of the poor Bengalis, the descendants of Hari Lal Benerjee who had inherited, not earned, their wealth, their frailties, their conscience? Bombay, she knew, had no answer. (TD 56)

As a further sign that the Marwaris have triumphed in the city's intra-class rivalry, the same Bengali elites who resent Marwari control of Calcutta's business houses elect Tuntunwala as their candidate to represent their interests in the state government in the hope that, once elected, he will help restore law and order. The narrator, however, sees nothing but evil designs in this man: "He could create whatever situation, whatever catastrophe he needed" (TD 97).

That Calcutta's fate is involved intimately in the upheavals of the larger world is another important aspect of the novel's political message. For instance, in place of the Mao of the Cultural Revolution worshipped by the rebels, the conservatives have their Nixon (*TD* 160); as for Tara, she is torn between loyalty to her left-liberal American husband and an instinctive identification with her conservative Bengali upbringing and class privilege. Her husband, a would-be academic whose work meaningfully investigates the subject of "politics and literature," accuses Tara of not doing enough to "take a stand against injustice, against unemployment, hunger and bribery" (*TD* 63, 157). Through a carefully interpolated exchange of letters between the husband and wife, the novel comments on the play of misrecognitions that can result when individuals generalize from their specific political locations to make sense of political events from another place and time. The historically decontextualized and mobile nature of modern political vocabulary (left versus right and conservative versus liberal versus radical) ensures that "Tara knew she could never tell David [her husband] that the misery of her city was too immense and blurred to be listed and assailed one by one" (*TD* 157). On the other hand, a sceptical reader has some ground to suspect that the narrator's claim to superior local knowledge based on an organic link to Calcutta serves as an excuse to defend the existing structures of privilege from any questioning from outside. In any case, while witnessing Calcutta's chaotic political upheaval, Tara comes to realize that, oftentimes, political passions travel from one national arena to another with uncertain consequences. For example, Washington McDowell, an African-American exchange student from Los Angeles, goes to Calcutta only to end up expressing solidarity with his host family's class enemies (*TD* 198-9). Later, another young American woman, Antonia Whitehead, alights in Darjeeling to preach her own version of the 1960s-era progressivism and free love as a cure for India's social problems by declaring: "I'm here because India needs help. The third world has to be roused to help itself" (*TD* 198). Mukherjee's ironic treatment of these ad-hoc interventions from outside, which appear quite farcical in the face of an apocalyptic class war gripping West Bengal, also

conveys her scepticism about the failure of political grand narratives of both the left and the right to solve India's intractable social problems. The right solution to these problems is never spelt out, although the reader gets the impression that it lies in the direction of a social compromise, in which the actions of landed aristocracy and the Marwari businessmen are motivated by social conscience rather than private greed, while radical class warriors recognize that in India "[t]here aren't any landlord classes you could simply execute or exile. We are all involved in each other's fate" (TD 156). However, the narrator's liberal voice of reason, if that is what it is, appears so feeble that it is drowned out by the noise of an old society falling apart; hence the appropriateness of the apocalyptic sentiment resulting from the novel's dystopian textuality.

Metropolitan Freedoms

Unlike the exilic sensibility of a post-colonial dystopia captured in *The Tiger's Daughter*, Mukherjee's third novel, *Jasmine* (1989; henceforth *J*) is an assimilationist text that records the story of a rural Punjabi woman who flees India by becoming an illegal immigrant and reinvents herself successfully as a middle-class American. It experiments with a new kind of narrative, one that not only refuses to lament the condition of postcolonial displacement as exile, but also, remarkably, represents postcolonial migration from various third-world locales to North America as "emancipation."

In the novel, the author's newly acquired assimilationist stance finds expression in its many discursive and thematic maneuvers, one of which is a subtle shift in the meaning of exile itself as a term that now stands for the migrant's escape *from* postcolonial homeland, while there is no corresponding sense of his or her being exiled *into* a foreign territory. This shift in the meaning of exile is highly suggestive since it may be argued that the novel represents postcolonial migration to North America in the spirit of exodus rather than Babylonian captivity. Accordingly, *Jasmine*, the novel's eponymous protagonist, renders her old homeland symptomatically as a place haunted by resurgent feudalism, partition wars and religious fundamentalism of the type that swept through the Indian

state of Punjab in the 1980s. It is a world where political violence is endemic and where fundamentalist groups, such as the Khalsa Lions, freely use terror in order to enforce the boundaries of an arbitrarily defined “pure” Khalistani culture vis-à-vis racial and cultural contamination by Hindus. It is, indeed, remarkable that Jasmine flees India on a forged passport, joining a clandestine diaspora of illegal immigrants heading at first to Europe and subsequently to the United States, after a Lions militant assassinates her husband for having refused to countenance the group’s theological-political dictates (*J* 85). Jasmine’s exile from India is thus cast in terms of a subaltern diaspora spurred in her case by ethno-religious militancy, which, in the wake of that all-purpose signifier called September Eleven, has become the ground zero of oppositional politics in our times. Mukherjee’s text records its early manifestation in the Indian subcontinent. This bleak portrayal of a postcolonial social order, struggling but still failing to emerge from the realm of an ethno-feudal tutelage into Enlightenment-style maturity, constitutes the background of Jasmine’s diasporic peregrinations.

Jasmine’s alienation from her homeland explains why she refuses to show any nostalgia for returning to India once she gains a foothold in the United States. Instead, she insists on having made a radical break from her past in an effort to “rebirth [herself] in the images of [her] dreams,” a suggestive metaphor in the novel’s assimilationist creed (*J* 25). In Jasmine’s case, each of her “rebirths” acquires a distinct name to reflect an important moment of transformation in her life. Before marriage, she is called Jyoti; after marriage, her husband likes to call her Jasmine. Soon after Jyoti-Jasmine arrives in Florida, she goes through yet another nominal metamorphosis by becoming Jazzy – a change encouraged in part by those who want to turn her into an American woman. This process of Jasmine’s consecutive renaming (later names include Jase and Jane) is symptomatic of the many different themes that the novel seeks to foreground, including the idea that postcolonial subjectivity in diaspora is resilient and self-inventive and that such subjectivity is consistent with the putative “fluidity” of the American

character (Mukherjee 1996: 3). Less charitably, however, while Jasmine's renaming by her well-wishers may indicate the malleability of diasporic identity, historically such practices have been the hallmark of those colonial and patriarchal habits of mind that thrive by taming whatever is exotic and different into something familiar by collapsing the "other" into the "same."

The idea of immigrant subjectivity as fluid, self-inventive and able to free itself of its cultural baggage at will is especially apposite for the assimilationist stance cultivated by *Jasmine*. Mukherjee has often criticized Indian immigrants in the West for becoming too attached to their previous homeland and, concurrently, to a stable notion of identity that the old country presumably represents (Moyer 1990: 8). Arguably, such attachment to a fixed notion of identity traps the immigrants inside their imagined pasts, rendering them unable to adapt to their present circumstances. Jasmine, however, rejects such mindset in favor of a will to "bond [oneself] to a new community" even though such bonding does not come free of cost (Mukherjee 1985: ix). As one of her memorable statements suggests, "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams" (J 25). What stands out in this statement is not merely the gruesome violence that Jasmine endures during her flight from Punjab to a neo-imperial metropolis (she is raped by the captain of a ship that transports illegal immigrants), but also the confidence with which her successful American "rebirth" is anticipated on the strength of a mythology of rugged individualism and American self-making. This view of triumphant diasporic self-fashioning as a consequence of personal striving overplays the role of individual agency vis-à-vis the social structures that mark Jasmine as a member of the subaltern diaspora, someone who is prematurely widowed, under-educated, undocumented, raped, racialized and female, with various degrees of handicap attached to each marker of her composite identity. In suggesting that in post-civil rights America these realities do not matter as long as the migrant makes the right personal and professional moves and embraces the happy psychological outlook that the country presumably offers, the novel

valorizes the ideology of social amnesia as a requisite element in immigrant self-making.

The “right moves” include Jasmine’s decision to get an education (she takes a few outreach courses at a university to improve her language skills) even as she works as a caregiver to a child of two professional New Yorkers. More importantly, it is her decision to stay away from the Indian ethnic “ghetto” that emerges as a crucial milestone in the process of her Americanization. As it happens, the ethnic ghetto, a term long associated with Jewish and African-American minority enclaves, is an important object of critique in Mukherjee’s fiction. The ghetto as a minority space, tentatively perched on the edge of the mainstream social landscape, represents for the author everything that is wrong with multiculturalism *and* expatriation: fixation with the old homeland, ethnocentrism, cultural inwardness, lack of social mobility and so forth. In the novel, the Vadheras exhibit the pathologies of this cloistered ethnic space. Devinder Vadhera was a college professor back in India, but now, unknown to his wife and parents, he traffics in the sale of women’s hair. In his apartment of “artificially maintained Indianness,” his parents complain perpetually about life in the new country, especially about the dishonor of not having their daughter-in-law to serve them all day (*J* 124). The Vadheras are filled with nostalgia for the way of life they left behind, which they try to relieve by watching Bollywood films on video every night. “Professorji,” in particular, feels: “His real life was in an unlivable land across oceans. He was a ghost, hanging on” (*J* 136). Accordingly, each character strives to keep “a certain kind of Punjab alive, even if that Punjab no longer existed. They let nothing go, lest everything be lost” (*J* 143). It is not surprising that Jasmine soon leaves the Vadheras to work in the suburbs, where, she believes, the *real* America exists.

Just like her angry dismissal of Canadian multiculturalism, the author’s portrayal of the new immigrant ghetto is open to criticism. The Vadheras, who are not obliged to help Jasmine out of any special obligation, take her in when she needs their support, give her food and shelter and help her procure a Green Card. These acts of kindness toward a person with no binding personal ties signal an

important function that the ethnic ghetto plays in the life of new immigrants: it welcomes them into a community of people who share similar life histories and provides a sanctuary where the newcomer can find critical support in the hour of need. Psychologically, the ghetto serves as a sheltered space that helps an immigrant fend off alienation born out of radical uprooting and host-national exclusion. The larger society will welcome those immigrants who have the ability to "pass" via acculturation into the cultural mainstream, but the ethnic ghetto as a way station before the diasporic subject ventures out to try her/his luck in the host-national society, cannot be conceived of as a singularly oppressive or backward-looking space. *Jasmine*, however, fails to recognize how, in the American social imaginary, the ethnic ghetto has always fulfilled an ideological function as the "other" of a fully assimilated society. Its less-than-gentrified and precarious sociality is, therefore, misrepresented by the author as a function of the immigrant's will to ethnocentrism and cultural nativist residue from another place and time.

And yet the trope of assimilation in Mukherjee's novels is highly unstable and rife with antinomies. On the one hand, it is complicated by the processes of "mongrelization"⁴; on the other hand, it is marked by the surreptitious retention of old-world cultural roots and persistence of ethnic differences. Unlike assimilation, a perspective that expects that the migrant will dissolve her/his prior identities into a putatively "universal" ethno-normative totality, mongrelization underscores what the Latin Americanist scholar Mary Louise Pratt has called "transculturation," a process of give-and-take between various cultural fragments to the point that each loses its distinct character (1992: 15). The resulting social totality is neither one nor the other, but a mixture of both. It is this cross-cultural dynamic that is instantiated at many points in the novel.

One does not have to wait long to see this dialectic of transculturation in action. While working as a caregiver for the Taylors, a middle-class white family in New York, for example, Jasmine brings a degree of "gravity" to their lives borne out of her having lived through a crisis-filled history. In Iowa, she is looked upon as an exotic icon, an oriental *femme fatale*, who brings

proverbial colour and spice to the American heartland, a place changing rapidly in demographic terms. At the same time, Jasmine is willing to be transformed by white America in ways a less venturesome immigrant would find hard to accept or accomplish. Consider how a village-educated girl from Punjab, who is married at fourteen and widowed at sixteen, is able to acquire the necessary social acumen and cultural capital to enter into a sophisticated relationship with Taylor Hayes, a Columbia University professor, and later, Bud Ripplemeyer, an Iowa banker. Soon she is cast in the stock image of an all-American woman, who is not only sure of herself but is also stereotypically self-centered, who in the end finds herself "greedy with wants and reckless with hope" (J 214), as she starts to live her American dream by going West, or by lighting out to the frontier territory, to use a Huck Finn analogy.

Ralph Crane has called *Jasmine* a "female bildungsroman" (1993: 121). Another critic has pointed out the author's "consummated romance with the American language," its landscape and people (Raban 1988:1). The romance plot, reinforced by the novel's intertextual dialogue with Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, certainly gives credence to the mythology of assimilation as a fusion of disparate bodies, languages and cultures into a composite national totality. The actual result of such a fusion, as far as postcolonial immigrants are concerned, is, however, neither the dissolution of prior identities nor a foreclosure of difference, but an occasion for the production of hybridity.

A pronounced example of such hybridity is provided by two relatively minor instances in the novel: one having to do with the urban and secular world that Jasmine briefly inhabits after her first marriage, and the other concerning the private world of Du Thien, the son Jasmine adopts with Bud Ripplemeyer. An educated man who strives to become a man of distinction, Jasmine's first husband Prakash, trains his young wife to the ways of the modern world, encourages her to read English books and tells her things like: "Hasnapur is feudal. It was up to the women to resist, because men were usually too greedy or too stupid to recognize their own best interests" (J 70). However, this relatively enlightened world

inhabited by Jasmine and Prakash soon becomes the target of Khalsa militants, who are upset by the couple's "corrupt, Western ways" (J 75); indeed, the corruption they fear is precisely that of cross-cultural "pollution" brought about by English books, Western clothes, Hindi movies and the tradition-busting attitudes that go with such technologies of modernity (J 66). Thus their fostering of a hybrid culture in small-town India becomes a target for religious militants seeking to restore Khalistan ("the land of the pure") by killing or exiling those who present a threat to them. Later Du Thien will assert a similar cultural mixing in the American context when the narrator tells us that "[Du Thien] has lived through five or six languages, five or six countries, two or three centuries of history" ultimately becoming a "hyphenated American" (J 190, 198).

If *Jasmine's* assimilationist ideal is challenged by transculturation and cultural hybridity at the level of narrative practice, it is also made somewhat aporetic by another ideal that the novel's plot ostensibly flees from: multiculturalism and the persistence of residual identities. It is indeed the case that, despite the author's tough talk about how the new immigrants "have all shed past lives and languages" and gone through the "nine yards of transformation," multiculturalism remains a useful frame to understand many events that take place in the novel (Mukherjee 1988: 29). Most notably, the type of "American" family the text briefly constructs – a Midwestern white Protestant banker with German roots for a husband, a widowed Hindu immigrant from India for a wife and a Vietnamese refugee of Buddhist background for an adopted son – is nothing but triumphantly multicultural in its resonance. Although the family thus constituted is short-lived, the confluence of diverse cultures, religions and national origins in the making of this new American family is nothing short of iconic in terms of American multiculturalism a decade prior to the turn of the twenty-first century. Read in this way, Mukherjee's polemical opposition between assimilation and multiculturalism begins to lose its rhetorical force as a legitimate way of comprehending the choice facing postcolonial immigrants in America. In any case, multiculturalism of the kind that does not insist on ethnic separatism but celebrates cross-cultural mixing remains an important presence in the novel.

Finally, although Jasmine claims to have left her residual selves behind through a sheer act of will, the past keeps returning, sometimes in grotesque forms. A telling instance of this return of the repressed occurs when Sukhinder, the militant who killed Prakash, shows up in New York in the guise of a street vendor. Is this “other” man now reborn in New York in the image of his American dream, or is he pursuing Jasmine so as to undermine her radical break from her past? This question remains unanswered. Once in America, Jasmine finds that even as she attempts to become American via assimilation, what matters to those around her is her racial and cultural difference, coded in such familiar stereotypes as Oriental exoticism and sexual allure. Transculturation is precisely the outcome of such disjunctive encounters, even as the narrator insists upon narrativizing Jasmine’s American journey in the once fashionable language of host-national assimilation.

Notes

The term “non-traditional immigrants” refers to those who migrated to the United States from non-European, mostly postcolonial countries in the wake of post-civil rights era legislation allowing for non-European emigration. For Mukherjee’s claim about wanting to represent the “inner-life” of non-traditional immigrants, see Mukherjee 1991: 26.

In an interview with Moyers, Mukherjee sheds some light on her uses of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* when she says that the protagonist in *Jasmine* reverses the itinerary of Conrad’s journey by mapping her passage to the “heart of light.” Instead of proclaiming “the horror, the horror,” the protagonist says “the wonder, the wonder,” implying that the territory of horrors is the one she has already left behind.

The phrase is from Mukherjee’s *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, “a communal autobiography of the women of my age and my vanishing class who had stayed on in the riot pocketed hometown and made their survivalists’ peace with [the] Marxist revolution” (301). Written a few years apart, *Days and Nights in Calcutta* and *The Tiger’s Daughter* are very similar in content.

The term “mongrelization” is mentioned in a number of essays that Mukherjee published in the 1990s, including “American Dreamer”.

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Appropriation of Past-Philosophy in Postmodern Thought: A Reading around Deleuze

One can say that none of the postulates that together comprise the conglomerate that is generally known as 'Literary Theory' can be seen as autonomous from or independent of philosophical presumptions that precede them. Accordingly, this paper proposes to look at postmodernism, and show how, rather than marking an absolute break from philosophies of the past, many of its premises resonate with a legacy of thoughts from the past, cries about the 'death of philosophy' in the postmodern era notwithstanding. Performing a postmortem of this legacy of the dead within postmodernist thought, this paper intends to bring to the fore some of these resonances – from Antiquity as well as from the Enlightenment.

Postmodernism makes pronouncements of death of several discourses of truth, which constituted the modern and pre-modern western reality, of which philosophy is one. In his 1984 article, Derrida lists out the end of several such discourses:

[T]he end of history, the end of class struggle, the end of philosophy, the end of God, the end of religion, the end of Christianity and morals [...], the end of the subject, the end of man, the end of the West, the end of Oedipus, the end of the earth, *Apocalypse Now*, I tell you, in the cataclysm, the fire, the flood, the fundamental earthquake, the napalm descending from the sky by helicopter, [...] and also the end of literature, the end of painting, art as a thing of the past, the end of psychoanalysis, the end of the university, the end of phallogocentrism and phallogocentrism, and I don't know what else. (qtd. in Pefanis 1991: 56)

Notwithstanding Derrida's quote, this paper will go on to argue that far from philosophy being dead, it very much constitutes what may be loosely termed as postmodern thought. No wonder, Derrida makes a case for philosophizing ever more, when he says the following in his 1986 interview with Jeff Bennington:

I never said a word against philosophy. I insisted on the contrary that philosophy was not dead and that the closure of philosophy was not the death of philosophy. [...] And even if you deconstruct philosophy or if you want to think of the limits of philosophy, of the special kind of limits of philosophy, you have not only to philosophise in a general and a historical way but to be trained in the history of philosophy and to go on learning and teaching philosophy. That's why I am true to philosophy. (qtd. in Sim 1992: 140)

Derrida's contradictory stance can be understood better if one were to turn to his 1971 article where he talks of two different kinds of death – that of Plato and Hegel on the one hand, and Nietzsche and Bataille on the other. He does so by taking recourse to the example of a heliotrope flower and says:

[In] the death of philosophy [...] the genitive is double. It is sometimes the death of philosophy, death of a genre belonging to philosophy which is thought and summarized within it, recognizing and fulfilling itself within philosophy; and sometimes the death of a philosophy which does not see itself die, and is no longer to be refound within philosophy. . . . [T]hese two deaths repeat and simulate one another in the heliotrope. The heliotrope of Plato or of Hegel on the one hand, the heliotrope of Nietzsche and Bataille on the other, to use metonymic abbreviations here. (1972: 271)

Kevin Hart describes Derrida's critique of philosophy very aptly when he says, "According to this critique, there is not a fall *from* full presence but, as it were, a fall *within* presence," whereby he means that for Derrida, as for postmodern thought, the death of philosophy does not mark the end of philosophy but a further re-engagement with philosophy (1998: 427).

Before proceeding further, let me examine postmodernism's engagement with the very institution of philosophy. Deleuze says, in a 1968 article, that there is no 'true beginning' in philosophy, there being, rather, differences and repetitions within philosophy:

Where to begin in philosophy has always – rightly – been regarded as a very delicate problem, for beginning means eliminating all presuppositions. [. . .] We may conclude that there is no true beginning in philosophy or rather that the true philosophical beginning, Difference, is in-itself already Repetition. (1984: 129)

For Deleuze, philosophy is based on a dogmatic Image of normative truth; be it idealism or materialism, both subscribe to this notion of the truth. However, as opposed to this idea of an 'orthodox' philosophy, there is another kind which critiques the pre-philosophical Image of thought, and instead espouses for freeing philosophy from the dogma of the Image. Instead, Deleuze makes a case by stating: "Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*" (1984: 139). Deleuze shows that this 'encounter' is not associated with a unifying force, but works with the forces of 'difference.' Deleuze connects this alternate mode of thought to the fractured self or 'schizophrenia,' but makes it very clear that his objective is not to oppose dogmatic thought with schizophrenic thought, but to show that the apparently fragmented schizophrenic state can also lead to the possibility of thought. He says: "It is not a question of opposing to the dogmatic image of thought another image borrowed, for example, from schizophrenia, but rather of remembering that schizophrenia is not only a human fact but also a possibility for thought" (1984: 147).

Thus philosophy lingers on as a constituent of postmodern thought, albeit itself playing a self-critical role. Gianni Vattimo explains this contradictory relationship between postmodernism and philosophy – that postmodernism announces the death of philosophy and yet constructs itself in relation to it – by using the Heideggerian category of *Verwindung*, or an immanent overcoming, which is different from *Überwindung*, or transcendental overcoming (1988: 164).

To understand this immanent post-mortem appropriation of past-philosophy by postmodern thought, let me turn to Heidegger himself. Heidegger asks in a 1957 work of his: “What has always remained unasked throughout this history of thinking?” “Questioning in this way,” he continues, “we can become aware how something that it is no longer the matter of philosophy to think conceals itself precisely where philosophy has brought its matter to absolute knowledge and to ultimate evidence.” To think this unthought, to think what remains “‘beyond’ absolute knowledge” is, for Heidegger, “the task of thinking,” particularly after “the end of philosophy,” the very task of postmodernist thought, which therefore is contingent upon past philosophy (1969: 50).

That postmodern thought is dependent for its very existence on ancient Western philosophy is evident from Deleuze’s 1969 article, where he takes recourse to Nietzsche and claims that the task of future anterior thought is “to reverse Platonism” (1990a: 253). He locates this reversal to have begun with Kant, been carried through with Hegel and characteristic of Nietzsche. For Deleuze:

What does it mean “to reverse Platonism”? This is how Nietzsche defined the task of his philosophy or, more generally, the task of the philosophy of the future. The formula seems to mean the abolition of the world of essences *and* of the world of appearances. Such a project, however, would not be peculiar to Nietzsche. The dual denunciation of essences and appearances dates back to Hegel or, better yet, to Kant. [...] “to reverse Platonism” must mean to bring this motivation out into the light of the day, to “track it down” – the way Plato tracks down the Sophist. (1990a: 253)

Making a case for differentiating between the original and its simulation – a mainstay formulation of postmodernism – Deleuze

says: “[T]he Platonic dialectic is neither dialectic of contradiction nor of contrariety, but a dialectic of rivalry (*amphisbetesis*), a dialectic of rivals and suitors” (1990a: 254). He further adds:

The distinction wavers between two sorts of images. *Copies* are secondary possessors. They are well-founded pretenders, guaranteed by resemblance; *simulacra* are like false pretenders, built upon a dissimilarity, implying an essential perversion or a deviation. It is in this sense that Plato divides in two the domain of image-idols: on one hand, there are *copies-icons*, on the other there are *simulacra-phantasms* [Plato, *Sophist*]. We are now in a better position to define the totality of the Platonic motivation: it has to do with selecting among the pretenders, distinguishing between good or bad copies or, rather, copies (always well-founded) and simulacra (always engulfed in dissimilarity). It is a question of assuring the triumph of the copies over simulacra, keeping them completely submerged, preventing them from climbing to the surface, and “insinuating themselves” everywhere. (1990a: 256-7)

For Deleuze, the distinction between copies and simulacra becomes the basis of later Western philosophy as well. However, according to him, Western philosophy chiefly represses the simulacrum because it represents chaos, and disrupts philosophy’s search for the Same, but as he points out, the chaos of the simulacrum may actually be read as an instance of productive affirmation:

This unformed chaos . . . is not just any chaos: it is the power of affirmation, the power to affirm all the heterogeneous series – it “complicates” within itself all the series. . . . These are the characteristics of the simulacrum, when it breaks its chains and rises to the surface: it then affirms its phantasmatic power, that is, its repressed power. . . . The affective change associated with the phantasm is explained by the internal resonance whose bearers are the simulacra. (1990a: 260-1)

Thus, there can be two approaches in Western philosophy regarding similitude and difference: one, which is a Platonic legacy, locates similitude in disparity and relies on the ‘copy’; the other, which is postmodern, locates disparity in similitude and relies on the ‘simulacrum.’ The postmodern task is to reverse Platonism, making the phantasm of the simulacra rise in its place.

Deleuze shows how postmodern thought constructs itself by immanently subverting some of the premises of past-philosophy, what he calls “the most innocent of all destructions, the destruction of Platonism,” and it is in this manner, to begin with, that ancient

Western philosophy becomes a constitutive point of departure for postmodern thought, albeit being, in this case, more of a counterpoint to be 'reversed' (1990a: 266).

As stated earlier, for Deleuze this 'reversal' takes place through postulations by the likes of Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche, one succeeding the other that marks a further strengthening of the case of a genealogy of postmodern thought in philosophy that precedes it. One can note how while Kant's first two critiques – *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) – do not explain the relationship between the two functions of theoretical and practical reason, he addresses this in *Critique of Judgement* (1790), where he shows that it is in the work of art that the original unity of theoretical and practical reason is achieved, through which the identity of nature and reason is secured and truth and freedom established. Kant's argument is that subjectivity and objectivity can be unified through the primal unity of nature and reason and nature and freedom in the work of art. Thus, Kant reconciles the binaries of nature and reason, objectivity and subjectivity – which so plague classical Western philosophy, and whose undoing marks postmodern thought – in a complex reflexive relationship in the work of art, foregrounding the simulated discourse rather than 'reality,' as the prime site of formation of thought – a rather postmodernist assertion again. Needless to say, the most relevant idea for postmodernism that Kant presents, in relation to this radical perception of aesthetic potential, is that of the 'Sublime.' As Deleuze says in an article:

What is in question in the *Critique of Judgement* is how certain phenomena which will define the Beautiful, give to the inner sense of time an autonomous supplementary dimension; to the imagination, a power [*pouvoir*] of free reflection; and to the understanding, an infinite conceptual capacity [*puissance*]. The various faculties enter into a spontaneous accord that is no longer determined by any one of them. . . . The Sublime goes even further in this direction: it brings the various faculties into play in such a manner that they struggle against each other like wrestlers, with one faculty pushing another to its maximum or limit. (1998: 34)

The fact that Lyotard makes this Kantian category of the Sublime as one of the very defining features of postmodernism, does not need reiteration here. Similarly, Hegel stands at the crucial juncture of modern philosophy and postmodern thought, in that, from within the metaphysics of presence, he foregrounds the questions of difference and the other, as manifest in his negational method of the dialectic. Though Kant was the first to recognize the need for mediating opposites, it is Hegel who defines the task of philosophy to be the establishment of 'the union of union and nonunion' or the securing of the identity of identity and difference. Hegel presents this speculative principle of the interrelation of identity and difference in his *The Science of Logic* (1812-16), where he shows that both identity and difference contain their own *other* within themselves and are joined in a complex reflexive structure of identity-in-difference. In this dialectical definition, Hegel neither collapses difference in identity nor dissolves identity in difference. Instead, he shows how the two can maintain a dual structure, for which he turns the focus to representation. The importance of representation to Hegelian thought is clear in his famous statement: "[T]he owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk," which shows how art can take off in the most confused times and address its contradictions (1952: 13).

Similarly, Nietzsche shows in his 1874 essay, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (the second of the *Untimely Meditations*), that 'overcoming,' or *Überwindung*, is a typically modern category, and therefore cannot provide for a way out of modernity, implying the need, therefore, for *Verwindung*. In *Human All Too Human* (1878), Nietzsche further shows that modernity can be dissolved only through a radicalization of its own innate tendencies, that is, through an immanent politics. In *The Joyful Wisdom* (1882), Nietzsche first mentions the 'death of God,' and through a reversal of its nihilistic implications in what he would later call 'the will to power,' one can see his movement away from modern philosophy to the beginnings of postmodern thought. Thus, Nietzsche's philosophy shows how a game of 'will to power' tries to establish 'truth' where there is actually only lies. For Nietzsche,

the answer to this 'nihilism,' or the rejection of the real fragmentary reality for mythical unities, is in rejecting this nihilism and proclaiming in its place an affirmative 'joyful wisdom,' a marker again, in its emphasis on the Dionysian, of the postmodern turn to thought.

However, given that the role of the above mentioned troika in contributing to postmodern thought is well-known, I will desist from discussing it in any greater detail, and instead explore how postmodern thought actually builds itself, not just by 'reversing' ancient philosophical postulations through their writings, but *on* some ancient philosophical positions, especially those of Epicurus and Lucretius. Showing how Lucretius, in critiquing pre-Epicurean philosophers like Heraclitus, Empedocles and Anaxagoras for their belief in the Being, focuses on pluralism and privileges diversity, Deleuze writes in a 1969 article:

With Epicurus and Lucretius the real noble acts of philosophical pluralism begin. . . . Lucretius reproached Epicurus' predecessors for having believed in Being, the One and the Whole. . . . Epicurus' predecessors identified the principle with the One or the Whole. But what is the one if not a particular perishable and corruptible object which we consider arbitrarily in isolation from every other object? And what forms a whole if not a particular finite combination, filled with holes, which we arbitrarily believe to join all the elements of the sum? . . . For the diversity of the diverse, [pre-Epicurean] philosophers have substituted the identical or the contradictory, and often both at once. However, the Nature of things is coordination *and* disjunction. Neither identity nor contradiction, it is a matter of resemblances and differences, compositions and decompositions, "everything is formed out of connections, densities, shocks, encounters, concurrences, and motions." (1990b: 633-4)

While it is easy to connect the Epicurean philosophy of practicing pleasure and suppressing pain to the Dionysian elements of postmodern thought, Deleuze points out that it is a little more complex. Deleuze explains how Epicurus' theory of perception happens through the interaction between 'emissions' from the depths and 'simulacra' from the surfaces of objects. Thus perception of objects is a function of distortions and simulations:

It is at this point that we note the intervention of a brilliant, though difficult, Epicurean theory. Bodies or atomic compounds never cease to emit particularly subtle, fluid, and tenuous elements. These second-degree compounds are of two

sorts: either they emanate from the depth of bodies, or they detach themselves from the surface of things (skins, tunics, or wrappings, envelopes or barks – what Lucretius calls *simulacra* and Epicurus calls idols). Insofar as they affect the *animus* and the *anima*, they account for sensible qualities. Sounds, smells, tastes, and temperatures refer especially to the emissions from the depths, whereas visual determinations, forms, and colors refer to the *simulacra* of the surface. But the situation is even more complicated than this, since each sense seems to combine information of the depth with information of the surface. . . . Noises from the depth, for example, become voices when they find in certain perforated surfaces (the mouth) the conditions of their articulation. Conversely, the *simulacra* of the surface are able to provide colors and forms only if there is light, which is emitted from the depths. In any case, emissions and *simulacra* are obviously understood, not as atomic compounds, but as qualities apprehended at a distance on and in the object. . . . This is why the object is perceived as it must be perceived, relative to the state of *simulacra* and emissions, the distance they have to cross over, the obstacles they encounter, the distortions to which they submit, or the explosions of which they are the center. (1990a: 273-4)

Deleuze also shows how for Epicurus and Lucretius, there is a third category, apart from emissions from the depth and simulations from the surface, that contributes to perception – that of ‘phantasms.’ The images formed out of these are less constant than those formed out of the other two categories, because phantasmic images do not have real objects to fall back upon for their confirmation. Deleuze demonstrates that *simulacra* of this third type can be of three species, pertaining to fantasies of gods, dreams and pleasures:

There is yet a third species, distinct from the emanations issued from the depth and from the simulations detached from the surface of things. These are phantasms, which enjoy a high degree of independence with respect to objects and an extreme mobility, or an extreme inconstancy in the images which they form (since they are not renewed by the constant supplies emitted by the object). It seems that here the image stands for the object itself. There are three main varieties of this new species of *simulacra*: theological, oneiric, and erotic. (1990a: 275)

This is how Deleuze connects the ancient formulations of Epicurus and Lucretius to concerns in the postmodern world. The important characteristics of postmodern philosophy – that it relies on heterogeneity and pluralism rather than a reliance of the One and the Whole; that it privileges in knowledge the Dionysian principle of pleasure rather than the Apollonian principle of pain; that it shows a

precession of the simulacra, or that simulation precedes the perception of real objects – are all very much there in the theories of Epicurus and Lucretius.

However, there is one more feature to post modernity – more ethical than epistemological or ontological – that of ‘freedom.’ As is well known, postmodernism is characterized by a foregrounding of enablement through ‘freedom’ in the demolition of erstwhile rigid unities. For Deleuze, the most important rationale of philosophy is that it provides for the image of the free human being, one who is free from all normative myths that cause unhappiness, and this is where the naturalist philosophy of Lucretius also plays an important role. The purpose of Naturalism is to dispense with all tyrannical myths – the archaeological myth of God, the teleological myth of Destiny, the ontological myth of Being – and free individuals from servility to the ‘false philosophy’ that relies on the myths of presences. As Deleuze puts it:

To the question “what is the use of philosophy?” the answer must be: what other object would have an interest in holding forth the image of a free man, and in denouncing all the forces which need myth and troubled spirit in order to establish their power? Nature is not opposed to customs, for there are natural customs. Nature is not opposed to convention: that the law depends upon conventions does not exclude the existence of natural law, that is, a natural function of law which measures the illegitimacy of desires against the disturbance of spirit which accompanies them. Nature is not opposed to invention, inventions being discoveries of Nature itself. But Nature is opposed to myth. Describing the history of humanity, Lucretius offers us a sort of law of compensation: man’s unhappiness comes not from his customs, conventions, inventions, or industry, but from the side of myth which is mixed with them, and from the false infinite which it introduces into his feelings and his works. . . . To distinguish in men what amounts to myth and what amounts to Nature, and in Nature itself, to distinguish what is truly infinite from what is not – such is the practical and speculative object of Naturalism. The first philosopher is a naturalist: he speaks about nature, rather than speaking about the gods. . . . Active gods are the myth of religion, as destiny is the myth of a false physics, and Being, the One and the Whole are the myth of a false philosophy totally impregnated by theology. (1990a: 278-9)

For Deleuze, the demystification of tyrannical presences and the consequent prospect of a multiplicitous freedom that awaits humanity is one of the primary contributions of the Naturalism of

Lucretius to later philosophy. He traces a direct lineage of the same to Nietzsche, where pluralism and sensualism replace the negative philosophy of pain and austerity with a joyous affirmative one that critiques all mystifications:

Never has the enterprise of "demystification" been carried further. The myth is always the expression of the false infinite and of the disturbance of spirit. One of the most profound constants of Naturalism is to denounce everything that is sadness, everything that is the cause of sadness, and everything that needs sadness to exercise its power. From Lucretius to Nietzsche, the same end is pursued and attained. Naturalism makes of thought and sensibility an affirmation. It directs its attack against the prestige of the negative; it deprives the negative of all its power; it refuses to the spirit of the negative the right to speak in the name of philosophy. The spirit of the negative made an appearance out of the sensible; and linked the intelligible to the One or the Whole. But this Whole, this One, was but a nothingness of thought, just as the appearance was a nothingness of sensation. . . . Lucretius established for a long time to come the implications of naturalism: the positivity of Nature; Naturalism as the philosophy of affirmation; pluralism linked with multiple affirmation; sensualism connected with the joy of the diverse; and the practical critique of all mystifications. (1990a: 279)

Needless to say, these are the very ethical premises on which postmodern thought and practice are based, and thus, one can see how the presumptions of postmodernism – epistemological, ontological, as well as ethical – are very much constructed in relation to thoughts prior to it, a post-mortem immanent appropriation, as it were, of the 'dead' legacy of postulations from a past philosophy, to look for resonances and underpinnings of prior philosophical proclamations in contemporary literary and cultural theory.

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The Multiplicity of Events: Rainer Maria Rilke and Assemblages of Event, Philosophy and Aesthetics

I hadn't any right to exist. I had appeared by chance, I existed like a stone, a plant, a microbe. My life grew in a haphazard way and in all directions. Sometimes it sent me vague signals; at other times I could feel nothing but an inconsequential buzzing. (Sartre 2000: 124)

While continental philosophers have generally privileged the illustration of poetry to establish conceptual theses, post-Heideggerian philosophical thought, especially that of Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida, has manifested the post-evental, expressive concept of the multiplicity of poetry – a poetic ontology that idealizes becoming instead of a pure or absolute being.¹ The sudden lapse of a universal mode of continental literary thought at the onset of the

twentieth century and the inclusion of such liminal concepts as "committed literature" (Sartre), "anti-literature" (Blanchot), "literature and evil" (Bataille) or "minor literature" (Deleuze and Guattari) has been effected through contemporary revisitations of philosophy and every other mode of social, cultural and natural existence, thus validating at a prior stage the possibility of a confluence and re-imagining of poetry as a constituent of literature, as an event or a multitude of events. Evental readings of isolated areas of literature sans assistive paradigms from other theoretical and philosophical domains produce a greater lacuna than that which is present, enabling the absent mechanisms to operate with much subjective liberty. 'Poetry' and 'event', the two *created* ontological presentations, whether conducive to the process of creation/creativity or situated in clear opposition to it, are also possibly the most cross-productive theoretical sections that consistently endorse the other as the posited (and at times negated) imbroglia. The poetics of the multiplicity of event and the event of poetry are paradoxical occurrences, not allowing for the isolation of a specific source or definite roles of influence for either. The immense spectre of event itself outgrew the dimensions of incidental narratives that the term signified at the point of its current theoretical inception. By extension, the present interaction between the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke and the theoretical framework of event derived from Deleuze and Guattari, and Badiou, does not defend either, but intends to showcase a convergence of the two seemingly contradictory notions by presenting a historicist diagram of the operating values within the two distinct concepts, almost a perpetual immovable articulation, and, in the process, restricting the lacuna from operating in contextual readings of literature. The intersectional reading of Rilke's poetry as event and *vice versa* is to create crenellations for access into the closed articulations of the mutual spaces of a philosophical-ontological enquiry (event/eventalism) and another that is more inclined towards the logics of expression (poetry). The Austro-Hungarian poet, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), who wrote in German towards the end of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century, presents some of the most

ambitious instances of multiplicities, almost mathematical combinations that consummated the event of poesis as a monolith, and used these multiplicities of events to further destabilize isolated events themselves as ambient creators. The proliferation of the evental in Rilke's poetry is intensively Deleuzian in its creation and presentation of 'assemblages,' or bodies of desiring mechanisms that shift and reconfigure to adapt to present desires, paradoxically through Rilke's eventality of poetic production as well as the genetic or automatic eventing of his poetry as inclusive, indecisive and always concurrent, and a deconstruction of the paradigms is necessary to inversely establish the idea of multiplicity within the confluence of poetic production and self-generation.² The operative analogy is the Theseus' paradox: Rilke replaces the incidental and by extension, the evental, thus evading the identifier to be associated with the literary manifest quite like the physicality of the human body is diminished, thus obliterating the evental origins of its birth.³ The creation is destruction assemblage which is evidenced in Rilke's poetry therefore denotes his actualization of the possible through an endorsement of the non-real, an event which is past and future within his poetics.

Event in Theory

The act of reading is a central constituent in the ontological statement of the evental "being," composed of multiple becomings that are superfluously limited, that is, the event itself gives identity to its present and object consciousness:

[W]hile the notion of event appears to nominate or ontologize that which takes place, thereby providing an identity for forms or manifestations of interaction, it has to be admitted that the event of reading and the event of representing a political or historical moment are both singular even though, arguably, they share aspects in common. (Wolfreys 2004: 71)

It is a point of parallel singularity between reading literature (in any available form) and the contextualization of event. The concept of event has changed immensely following the "postmodern turn," the rise of virtual warfare, and the trauma of 9/11. It is in the interrogation

of the restructuring of linguistic expression that creates currently valid forms of literature that one may surmise the production of an event in the act of reading literature. But for Rilke, devoid of the experience of the Second World War's mushroom cloud, or the terror of a possible third iteration of the war, and also the aforementioned collapse of the World Trade Centre, event was not the convergence of the historical and the contemporary to produce a united meaning but rather a constant deferment.

Deleuze writes on the event's endless disorganization of any presence or present: "The agonizing aspect of the pure event is that it is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something about to happen . . . the living present happens and brings about the event" (1990: 63). While this octavo is reminiscent of a time loop susceptible to the impact of chaos, Deleuze also addresses the presence of the event as "not generalities but *events*, or droplets of an event" (1993: 64). Whereas Deleuze attempts to emphasize the multiplicity of the occurrence, and subsequent recurrence of event, Derrida, while remaining close to this decentering of the hegemonic conceptualization of event, delimits event from all concentrations of purity and viability in terms of historicity or terminal occurrence, thus also creating an originating space for literature in its status of becoming beyond conversational or critical policies and practices: "One can talk endlessly about its (event) possibility without ever coming close to the thing itself in its coming. It may be, then, that the order is other" (1997: 18). Similarly, for Rilke, a reader or a critic may appear close to an interpretation that locates the lacuna in his poetry that the event is poised to render, to import meaning and consolidation as explanation of the formative impetus, but the consummated instance does not occur, constantly stretching the possibilities to produce new meanings and indefinite sources. In Deleuzian terminology, his poetry may be said to resemble the desiring machine, *vis-à-vis* assemblages that reorganize themselves constantly and against predetermined meanings, that is identified not through their being but in their becomings.

The possible ontologies for event obtained thus far compile segments on its historical positing, its unpredictability and un-

nameability, that is, its constant state of becoming through expressive politics, without ever locating the true lacuna that can be codified and structurally arranged. This becoming is characteristic of the flux that literary interpretation of most dynamic literature is subject to. The ambiguity that this essentialization of the event produces is suggestive of the Derridean *khôra*: "it is necessary to go back to a beginning that is older than the beginning" (Derrida 1995: 126).⁴ Indeed, literary reading of the event mandates a revisiting of the faculties of creation before creation, before the event of literature itself takes place. This posits the variable of existing instances of the literary as influentially or ambivalently present in contemporary or yet-to-be acts of the literary, as can be exemplified by the diachronic or multi-chronic presences of the poetic literary excursions of not merely Rainer Maria Rilke but also of Charles Baudelaire, Friedrich Hölderlin and Paul Celan – enabling and disabling the comparative axes at the same expediting moment. Evental literature is necessarily ideological – not politically motivated, but also neither a heterotopic issuance. It investigates into possibilities that are entirely the prerogative of the creative producer. Such enacted correspondences create a presence of literature as a non-totalitarian event, expanding its becoming extra-temporally, necessitating, at this juncture, also an ontological representation of literature and, by extension, poetry. However, each act is also subjective, as is the instance with the poetic production of Rilke, and exists within the said oeuvre, never transgressing into the individual historicity of the emulated event, but allowing multiple singularities to exist and modify sequentially throughout the poetics, or the technique of poetry, and poematics, or that which pertains to the poetic product.

Literature is, both in terms of transcendent and immanent models, a dialectical proposition that enshrines a plurality of hegemonic interactions similar to the event-history dialectic:

Any sustained consideration of literature will have to arrive at the conclusion that, on the one hand, whatever is meant by literature, whenever the notion is employed, an implicit, normative narrative with all the hegemonic effects of a certain institutionalization comes into play; on the other hand, what goes by the name of literature cannot be defined with any confidence. (Wolfreys: 135)

Wolfreys's definition of the notion of literature is amorphous and ambiguous like the event's being/becoming, as well as self-historicizing and projecting like the *khôra*. The corpus of literature is almost wholly indulgent on the inclusion of a prototypical form of fiction, but, "at different periods in its history, this term [literature] could embrace a greater or lesser amount of nonfictional writing" (Attridge 2000: 106), suggesting that the "literature" is empty of specific meaning, "so mobile is its applicability and use according to various historical, cultural, aesthetic and ideological contexts" (Wolfreys 135). As an analogous manoeuvre, the possibilities of Rilke's poetry as an assemblage, a Deleuzian war-machine that traverses the complex web of smooth spaces, are improvised constantly as mobile applications of neutrality that do not rest on the banal output of structured artificiality but rather on the spontaneity of event.

Event in Practice: The Spectres of Rilke

While the theorization has led to abstract allocations of reference to Rilke throughout its framework, it is necessary, in order to coagulate a definition of event through Rilke, to explore the various "events" of poetic creation that led to the production of a poetic being in his oeuvre. Four broad strands of theoretical eventality may be located in Rilke: the event of visuality, the cerebral event, obtaining its license through a transcendent intellectual and mystical discourse, the event of ontology and the associative event of return/s, or a pseudo-Nietzschean historical event. Each of these poetic events, aleatory in a Badiouian manner, are conducive to the formation of multiple structures that intersect instead of remaining contained and compartmentalised as distinct events-as-being. For Rilke, the process of creating a poetic assemblage was far more complex than to conform to the ordinary obeisance of historical positioning, and thus he consistently strived to place the poetic schematic beside his experiential paradigms, the object of his very onto-epistemological reformation of cerebrality. Although not a conscious production process, Rilke's poetic assemblages possessed a clarity of thought in their establishment of evental politics, or

inclusive mechanisms of meaning and contexts, the aforementioned cerebrality with the centeredness of application on textuality, and recurring collapses of conventional aesthete-ethics.

The Event of the Visual in the *Schreiben*: Rilke and the Event in Writing

Among the multiplicities of interactive events that affected the poetry of Rilke, quite contradictorily to its literary modulus, were the visual arts. Although not a completely innovative mode of influence, with German-speaking writers such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Hermann Bahr, Eduard von Keyserling and Rudolf Borchardt already claiming a similar French-induced tradition, Rilke went farther than other German writers in concretizing his vision through an implementation of the plastic and the visual arts. Rilke's familiarity with Auguste Rodin, Paul Cézanne, Edouard Manet, Vincent van Gogh, Jugendstil or the Art Nouveau, Heinrich Vogeler, Otto Modersohn, Arnold Böcklin and Max Klinger met a consummated unison in the poet's multi-volume *New Poems*, published between 1902 and 1908. Here, taken as a cogent and implicit event of its own, the aspect of visual art could be the ontological interrogation of the "visuality" that is readable in Rilke. For instance, in his "Woman's Lament II" (1911) Rilke enables a visual, audible and near tangible experience of poetry that is cinematic in its effect:

So like a door which won't stay closed,
my moaning embraces open in sleep
again and again. Oh nights of woe.

(So wie eine Türe, die nicht zubleibt,
geht im Schlaf mir immer wieder stöhnend
die Umarmung auf. Oh wehe Nächte.) (1975: 66-7)

The situatedness of the poetic subject here is paradoxical, non-normative and anti-canonical, deriving from loci of lesser plausibility but also simultaneously more productive than an abstract literary formulation leading to a more complete, complex and inductive status of poetry that is not enclosed ("die nicht zubleibt"), but rather flows even in the absence of the poet in an openness privileging the

scripted. Rilke was aware of the potent possibilities of poetry over the plastic arts: he possessed communicative language that could give interpretive difference to the written word which could be equally verbose in its rendition of the attempted scene. As Helen Bridge notes:

It may seem paradoxical that inspiration for poetry should come from an emphatically non-literary artistic ideal, but precisely his awareness of the differences between poetry and sculpture or painting enabled Rilke to make his reflections on these arts productive for his own poetic development. (2010: 156)

However, contrary to literary speculation that a visual-arts induced writing would somehow make the poetics collapsible under the possibilities of over-visualization and therefore fallacious under a Platonic decree, for Rilke “[T]he most important result of the encounters with Rodin and Cézanne’s work, however, is a new approach to writing poems, which transfers principles of these artists’ practice to the medium of language” (Bridge 2010: 156). This transference is evident in his lending a “becoming” to the descriptive images such as that which he vents in his poem “Nights” (1924):

Night. Oh you in depths dissolving,
face against my own.

You, my astonished staring’s
greatest milestone. (1975: 90-1)

While the impetus is pointing to an analytic lacuna that is exposed at the core of the situative-ness of poetry in its attempts to imitate, for Rilke the momentum is in finding collaterals that complete the process of induction – the sub-subgenre of *Dinggedichte*: poems about things (whether objects, plants, animals or human beings), but also poems which attempt to create linguistic equivalents (semiotic signifiers, replacements or indicators) by using the material qualities of language such as sound and syntax. The insistence on language despite the fetish for visual presentation is either invocative of Lacan or dismissive of Wittgenstein, but also emphatically posits language

as the event-making constituent even in Rilke's adaptation of an art-inspired poetics. Lacan, in his assertions of there being no 'outside' of language, and invoking a Heideggerian possibility of no exit from language, would endorse Rilke's dependency on language as a means to 'counter' the visual arts, and Wittgenstein's celebrated 'ladder' metaphor, whereby the useful element becomes superfluous following its deployment and must be discarded, which is the status of language that is scripted in Rilke's poetry. However, Rilke instead opts for a formative structure where his language resembles the Deleuzian 'body-without-organs' (BwO), a desiring body without fixed contents as in assemblages but with the propensity to justify language of desire as free of lack, where each linguistic utterance is certification for some yet to be assembled sense or event of truth. In these poetic events of Rilke cause and effect cannot be separated or classed apart, but they exist and simulate changes with each consecutive production of meaning post-reading.⁵

The emergent reason or purpose of the visual assimilation in Rilke's poetry is to bring within the ambit of the poetic event the purposiveness of ontology. Structured and definite beings are Rilke's preferences, as they were also the subjects of art for the larger part before postmodernist incursion into the sphere of the visual arts. Similarly, the fugue of being that could be construed as a phenomenological definition of the thing in itself is most vigorously employed, according to Rilke, when placed alongside its visual representation. Rather than pursuing the transcendental, Rilke is proactively Deleuzian, or anticipatingly so, when he places the indefinite, the liminal within his poetry as visual signatures that confirm and conform to his ideas that the "internal" of the manifest, or the body of the thing, is implied when one opts for a representation of the merely visible. The recurrence of visually laden phrases such as "white elephant", "fierce red lion" and "little blue girl" ("The Carousel") are not merely functional but also add to the rhetoric and the thematic unities of the poem/s which Rilke writes with the influence of the visual. And when these very images are removed from their centrality and their denominators are disorganized, the objective relation of each image to the other increases, it is analogous

to the binary of the subject/object, master/servant, colonizer/colonized wherein the linguistically distinguished individuals are unified by their essential attribution of a semantically unified desire. The visualization effect of Rilke's poetry is a deliberate attempt to locate a phenomenological element that construes the ethics of visualization, a reverse scopophilia where the gaze is replaced by a spectatorial vision⁶ as explained below:

Rather than expressing subjective feelings inspired by the object, as was the case in his earlier poetry . . . the aim is now to create a self-contained object in poetry. This implies an attempt to use language in a way which approximates to a sculptor's use of a plastic medium, or a painter's use of paint on a canvas. In the form of the poem, the objective reality of an object and subjective perspectives on it are interrelated, so that the precise, often emphatically visual, description of the object becomes at once an embodiment of aspects of inner life. (Bridge: 156)

The Event of the Cerebral and the Mystical: Rilke and the Psychologised Event

If the classification of poetry, that is genre-entrenched as *Dinggedichte* in Rilke's creation, is an inclusive event that forms a part of the visual excursion in his poetics then the other contingent aspect that would act as a derivative in this regard would be the manifest absorption of mysticism in his poems. The mystical, being a psychological nomenclature, ensures propinquity with the cerebral: it is quite often a textually obstreperous task to outline the metaphysical contingent from the immanent contexts, that is, the non-metaphysical and constantly present tangents. Therefore the only possible resolution to the imbroglio is to observe the Deleuzian validation of desire as immanent and justified, and a desire which produces further contemplative and associative desires that connect with each other. Rilke's poetic manoeuvre engenders a "Hellenic" ideal that he affects as an event through his assimilation of two further forms: "There is a long tradition in German literature of writing *Gedankenlyrik* ("intellectual poetry") or *Lehrdichtung* ("didactic poetry") . . . which looks back to such classical antecedents as Horace, Ovid and Lucretius" (Bishop 2010: 168).

The intermingling of *Gedankenlyrik* with the instructive faculties of *Lehrdichtung* produced a highly metamorphic and metatheoretical poetry that involved the combination of an optimistic liberation as well as a mystical calling for the de-spaced, “the Open,” which will be discussed in the next section. For an illustration of the collapse of the two segments the following extract from Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* would be a semiotic event rationale:

and those of us that think of happiness
rising, are touched
 by a dismaying sense
 of when a happy thing *falls* (1996: 234) ⁷

As Anthony Phelan states: “What is sketched here . . . also entails and invites pathos; and so it is easy enough to identify the space in which these relations and movements take place as the ground that ‘provides for’ them” (2010: 180). The illustrative grounding present in the spatiality of the oscillation between optimism and pathos is an event that leads one back to Musil’s conceptualization of the “*untergrund*” – a state of unified, multiplicity-supportive but singular Deleuzian space which, again, shall be discussed as part of the ontological eventuality of Rilke’s poetry in the next section (Musil 1981: 1239).

Another issue of the cerebral event in Rilke is in his radical reconceptualization of time. It is visibly evident that the cerebral processing of the event in Rilke’s poetics is overly dependent on philosophy, and so is his, perhaps involuntary, realization of the “spatiality” of time that defers from clock time and almost conforms to a Bergsonian temporally inclusive event that privileges the “living out of human life in ‘signs and figures’” (Phelan 180) leading to a profound recognition of suprasensibilities:

And though our element’s a mystery
 we somehow still act out of what it marries –
 antennae seeking out other antennae
 as the empty distance carries (Rilke quoted in Paterson 2006: 14)

The spectre of assembled events that are consecrated in the passage from Rilke’s *Orpheus* use the aid of a curious wordplay on the part

of Rilke – an instance of the eventing of mysticism in poetic application – when he writes of relation in “still act out of what it marries” (“aus wirklichem Bezug”) and the carried distance which Rilke writes as “und die leere Ferne trug” where “trug” is borrowed from “tragen” [to carry], as much as from “trügen” [to deceive]. The multiplicity of the word “trug” lends an assemblage of meanings as per the reader’s will to interpret, and a potential death of the poet, to the poetic annexure and the individual senses that are characteristic of non-mystical explorations are diminished and replaced by deeper and more sensible inroads into the psychological framework of the triad constitutive of the poet, the reader and the poetic subject as a testament of the poetic cerebrality transmitting itself mystically. The mystical transaction projects that the spatiality is fallacious, and that “the empty distance can nevertheless bear our weight and sustain the relationship of what is related; its apparent void was deceptive” (Phelan 180). Furthermore, this refutation of spatiality results in an engagement with space that traverses the immaterial mystical locations to a neurological and cerebral, intangible space that helps in a precise comparison of the deceptiveness of emptiness.

The Events of Collapse: The (Meta)ontological *Offene* and Eternal Recurrences in Rilke

Rilke refers to a way of being that is distinct from the human or humanistic way in what he refers to as “die Kreatur” in the opening lines of his eighth *Duino Elegy*. In this elegy of 1922, already contextualized earlier with response to the mystical stimulus or event, “Rilke praises the capacity of plant and animal life to inhabit a seemingly borderless surround that he names, as the environmental correlate or sphere of the creature, *das Offene* – the Open” (Santner 2006: 1):

With all its eyes the natural world [*die Kreatur*] looks out into the Open. (1984: 79)

This state of the unspecified “Open” is what Heidegger responds to in the poetry of Rilke – the “Untergrund” or the unifying ground

which Musil refers to as a variety of feeling on which the world rests like an island. Although Heidegger is initially critical of Rilke in his *Parmenides Lectures* (Winter 1942-3), he also addresses the exact poetic aspects of the poet that Musil and Stefan Zweig celebrate: “the endlessly connected nature of human experience” that almost anticipates a Deleuzian rhizome which is similarly conducive to an immanent “openness” – liberating and emancipatory rather than legislative (Phelan 177). Heidegger complains that in the opening lines of the eighth elegy the representation is delimited and absolvent of the lacuna that exist as boundaries, and instead argues for its positioning as a “gigantic container.” Whereas this event would have outlined a Heideggerian event as primal to the conception of ontological propositioning in Rilke, for the poet “the Open” is “the limitless, the infinite wherein living beings breathe and unrestrainedly dissolve into the irresistible causal nexus of Nature” (Phelan 177). This becoming rather than being again anticipates Deleuze, a Deleuzian event, rather than a definite and *de*-liminal contra of Heidegger’s temporal being. Furthermore, the constant progress from being to a “being within the realm of beings” (“innerhalb des Seins den”) offers a vantageous view of what Zweig calls “the mutual interaction and intertwining of things in the vast integration of life” we encounter in Rilke’s poetry (qtd. in Phelan 177), as summarized in Heidegger’s position:

Heidegger’s emphatic objection is that this progress through things, creatures, beings is additive and extensive but cannot point us to the real nature of existence: what he calls ‘the Free of the clearing of Being in distinction from all beings’. (Phelan 177)

The recurrence in the ontological necessity of “the Open” in Rilke arises from the urgency of his poetic manoeuvre to allow for the situatedness of human condition as a subject of exploration, denouncing the non-being and obtaining a license for consistent Nietzschean returns of the one scaffolding event. However, as Heidegger insists, the times are destitute “not only because God is dead, but because mortals scarcely know or are capable even of their own mortality” (2002: 202).

This recurrence or return is manifest in Maurice Blanchot's reading of Rilke, for whom the "constant deflection of consciousness . . . opens up the possibility of a return" (Phelan 183). The eventual return is specified because the artist or the poet is preliminarily charged with creation and, for Blanchot, Rilke's "tasks are essentially those of the poetic word" (1989: 138) and the "higher meanings Rilke refers to . . . are gained by abandoning representations" (Phelan 183). This integration of the poetic production within the philosophizing structure, drawing from "the Open" and leading onto Blanchot's advocacy of the creation is prerogative of an enunciation and reciprocation to Edmund Husserl's attempts to capture pure perception through what he called phenomenological reduction. However, much like the emancipation of the "Open" from being a containment, in Rilke's poetry "the intensification of the inwardness of human consciousness and imagination draws all the supposed objects of our awareness into interiority in order to free them from human exploitation, so that their meanings change" (Phelan 183), that is, a non-arboreal union with the roots of language, creativity and production that does not disregard or destroy the impetus of the roots, the rhizome that structurally develops it. A visualization of the rhizomatic effect upon the poetic mind is to be found in his poem, "Auf der Kleinseite" ("In the Little Quarter") from the volume *Larenopfer* [*Sacrifices to the Lares*, 1895]:

Ancient houses, steeply gabled,
lofty towers full of bells, –
Heaven, flirting with the fabled
confined courtyards, weaves its incantations.

And on every porch and stairway,
languid, smiling, lovers breathe.
Baroque, on rooftops in the air,
vases rustle around wreathed.

Spider webs obscure the portal
in that place. The furtive sun
deciphers the mystic words immortal
on a Virgin's pedestal of stone.⁸

Finding an Aesthetic of Evental Construction

To conclude, a poetic event that seeks a rhizomatic ultra-construction or proliferation is speculatively a task of further prolongation of singularities but may justifiably be situated in the aesthetic ordination of the properties of the veritable event. The events in Rilke's poetry are evental not because they assume an exclusive poetic status, but because of the innate inclusiveness of experience one can witness in each poem. By associating the multiplicities of events, Rilke's poems are excellent instances of what Carolyn Williams terms "aesthetic historicism" (1989: 47), a homology and interdependence of aestheticism and historicism that itself leads to the positing of the visual, the cerebral and mystical, and the ontological and referential/recurrent. As Judith Ryan comments, "aesthetic poetry" is "more aware than its predecessors of the loss this shift has involved: a loss, primarily, of direct sensory contact with the world" (2004: 36). The linguistic assemblages in Rilke's poetry are interconnected and subsequently eschew any lateral references to extrinsic realities, relying instead on semiotic experiences derived from reflective ontological poetry that capture the aesthetics of transcendental signifiers that are constantly shifting. And to invoke Deleuze as conclusive evidence of the association, it must be noted that the Deleuzian war machine is not merely constructed but is also constructive, not only procreative but also recreative, not spreading out perennially as a rhizoid but also imploding with its inclusiveness – an evidential qualification that is verified in Rilke's poetry. The language and the particulars of expression in Rilke are also Deleuzian, or Deleuzoguattarian, as it shows the possibilities of each reference not as creative output of one supranatural mind, but as creative in its consumption after its composition. We may introduce an iteration of and a conclusion to the aesthetics of Rilke's poetry through the following extract from "The Seven Phallic Poems" that captures the event of poetic construction, the theorization of the event in Rilke's poetry and the furthering of the thematic that the poet is the creator of the event as well as its container:

The rose-gatherer grasps suddenly
the full bud of his vitality,
and at fright at the difference.
the gentle garden within her shrinks (1975: 33)

Notes

- ¹ 'Evental' is a derivative of 'event' as Badiou has developed the concept. "For Badiou, the relation between event and the ontology of the multiple constitutes the central problem for contemporary philosophy. What exactly is an event? Aleatory by nature, the event cannot be predicted outside a singular situation, nor even deduced from that situation without some unpredictable chance operation" (Bensaid 2004: 97).
- ² "Assemblages, as conceived of by Deleuze and Guattari, are complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning. Assemblages operate through desire as abstract machines, or arrangements, that are productive and have function" (Livesey 2005: 18).
- ³ The Theseus' paradox, or the ship of Theseus, "raises the question of whether an object which has had all of its components replaced remains fundamentally the same object." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_of_Theseus) (accessed 16 November 2013).
- ⁴ *Khôra* is a "[F]igure of multiple ambiguity, one possible translation of which would be 'the receptacle of meaning, invisible and formless, which contains intelligibility but cannot itself be understood.'" For Derrida, *khôra* "names that which is resistant to naming, and cannot be gathered by any name, and yet which is neither negative nor positive" (Wolfreys 130).
- ⁵ "The BwO is proposed as a means of escaping what Deleuze and Guattari perceive as the shortcomings of traditional (Freudian, Lacanian) psychoanalysis. Rather than arguing that desire is based on Oedipal lack, they claim desire is a productive-machine that is multiple and in a state of constant flux" (Message 2005: 37).
- ⁶ Scopophilia involves taking people as objects for stimulation through sight, "subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey 1989: 16).
- ⁷ My trans.
- ⁸ My trans.

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(Re)Writing the Body and Negotiating Patriarchy in the film *Chak De! India*

As an embattled site, the 'body' is not only a means of self-expression but "a social product, constituted by and located in culture" (Hargreaves 2007: 74). The 'body' has always been a contested site to locate and map the ideological underpinnings of a society. As such, it is a testimony to the way a culture and society operate.

This paper proposes to examine the nature of the 'body' as seen in the film *Chak De! India* (2007), locating it in the genre of sport films, and attempts to decode and deconstruct the production of gender identity based on the body image. *Chak De!*, a huge box-office success, won the National Award for the 'Best Popular Movie Providing Wholesome Entertainment' (2007) and was claimed to be the most spirited cinematic portrait of girl-power in Bollywood.

The portrayal of the transformation of lesser known female athletes into a powerful team with indomitable spirit, underscoring the ideology that “sometimes winning is everything,” not only enabled the gendered conception of sport to be critiqued but also helped to make this film an outright success.¹

In the film, the chief hockey administrator, Tripathi (Anjan Srivastav), refuses to sponsor or even appoint a coach for the prestigious Women’s World Cup Hockey Tournament arguing that a “Bharatiya Nari” (Indian woman), who is only good for “Chakki, belan” (domestic work), does not fit the paradigm of “playing hockey” in “short skirts” [my trans.]. He further maintains that a women’s hockey team, “devoid of any sponsorship as well as entertainment value for the public” would be a huge burden on the sport’s administration financially [my trans.]. Tripathi’s argument espouses the definition of the terrain of sport itself as a masculine prerogative wherein the female athletes’ aspirations are rendered negligible and absurd. But more so, his argument can be read as a veritable rewriting of the nationalist ideologies that located Indian women only within the stereotypical space of domesticity, suited to the essentialist construct of the nation. In the light of this perspective, not only is the engendering of body as characteristic of ‘en-gendering the nation’ examined, but through the analysis of the gender stereotypes in this film, the network of male power and authority that gets translated and transmitted onto the bodies of female athletes is also analyzed. The paper also attempts to observe the strategies of negotiation and resistance employed by the dominated female bodies against the patriarchal society contextualized within a global paradigm.

The film captures the triumphant journey of an Indian Hockey Team captain, Kabir Khan (Shahrukh Khan), who after missing a penalty shootout in the World Cup finals against Pakistan, loses the match.² More than the failure, the fact that he is a Muslim allows the religious fundamentalists to depict him as a traitor who, in sympathetic understanding with Pakistan, intentionally throws the match. After seven years of exile from active participation in sports, Khan takes on the mantle of the coach of the Indian Women’s

hockey team to train the women athletes for the upcoming world championship. His perseverance pays off when he creates a team that eschews local and regional differences to approximate the identity of a nation by finally striking gold in the World Hockey Championship. In the process, he has to overcome several hurdles, such as the rivalry within the team, the players' rebellion against his rigorous training methods and the lack of proper management by the hockey administration. The final frames of the film highlight his journey from being a misfit and an embarrassment within the sporting and mainstream fraternity (read: Hindu consciousness) to becoming a celebrated hero, his success mirrored in that of the women's hockey team earning the respect and acknowledgement of their families as well as of the larger public.

Sport and film have had a long association of shared history and development. However, sport films have been a rarity in the context of mainstream Indian cinema in spite of their commercial and entertainment appeal, so that only a handful of films (*Lagaan* [2001] and *Iqbal* [2005] being the popular ones) have been based on sports. *Chak De!* is a film that celebrates the victory of the women's hockey team, and thus offers contradictions in more ways than one: in a country dominated by cricket, the film depicts not only hockey but also the representation of women in sport which is exceptional in mainstream Indian cinema. *Chak De!* becomes an important film to explore the formulaic structure of sport films as well as to understand how it is situated "in a continuing tension (relationship, influence and antagonism) to the dominant culture" (Hall 1981: 235). The presence of these formulaic principles is encapsulated in the representation of a "heroic ideal that overcomes obstacles and achieves success through determination, self-reliance, and hard-work" (Baker 2003: 49), embodied in the character of Kabir Khan, the male coach, and to a lesser extent in the female athletes of the hockey team. Moreover, the journey towards success and redemption is also delineated in this film according to the logic pertaining to the highly popular genre of sport films where the ending, though delayed, is already known to the audience.

With reference to certain key images and characters from the film, the first section of the paper explores how the trope of the

body prefigures the symbolic construct of the nation, and in doing so, legitimizes certain notions of femininity/masculinity espoused during the anti-colonial discourse of the Indian nationalist struggle. In the second section, the various strategies available to the votaries of patriarchy, as well as the negotiations and resistances available to women within the heterosexual/patriarchal discourse are posited.

Revisiting the Gendered Discourse of Nationalism

The very conceptualization of sport as an arena of contestation and competitiveness has led to male and female bodies becoming far more distinguished and polarized, with women being construed as categorically unsuitable for sports because of the 'inferiority' of their body. With the presence of a male coach for a women's sport team, the film exhibits the gendering of the media coverage of sport, wherein women's presence in sports whether in the role of coaches, journalists or sportspersons is constantly elided and rendered invisible, recalling Gaye Tuchman's coinage of "symbolic annihilation" of sportswomen by the media (1978: 10-13).

The female coach, Krishnaji (Vibha Chibber), is placed in a secondary role vis-a-vis the male coach and is reduced to a maternal figure. Her plump body situates her more in the role of a nurturer and her position within the paradigm of a sport like hockey, that demands speed and fitness, becomes untenable. This "underrepresentation" of the female coach not only creates the impression that "females are non-existent in the sporting world," but reiterates the anti-colonial discourse of upholding women only within the traditional roles of mother/wife, discounting their roles and achievements in the public arena (Kane and Greendorfer 1994: 34).

Kabir Khan rigorously trains the female athletes to discipline and control their movements, and improve their performance in the sport. The drills and rigorous training sessions are designed to make them physically fit and fiercely competitive. Interestingly, the lyrics of the song, "Kuch Kariye" (Let's do something; my trans.), played

in the background during the training schedules and practice sessions embodies the ideology of ambition, hard work, competitiveness and success a celebration of the prototype of male ethos and values. This disciplining of bodies can be examined through Markula and Pringle's explanation of the intricate connection between the body and networks of power. Their discussion on Michel Foucault shows that power does not operate only from top to bottom but "is always present within human relations and the body... [as] the main site for the workings of power." The dynamic network of power "produce[s] certain bodies and also the desires, postures, and interaction of those bodies" (2006: 98). These explicit scenes of strenuous sessions depict a regime to create a disciplined body, one which represents and sustains the power of the patriarchy.

While the struggle for independence from colonial rule and the emergence of the postcolonial nation-state were articulated as a male enterprise, it established an essentialist location of femininity within the sacrosanct site of home and hearth, positing women as mere "symbols," "totems," and "bearers of tradition" (Boehmer 2005: 22). This gendered polarization of the nationalistic discourse was propagated through sport by leaders like Swami Vivekananda, who called upon the nationalists to "make [their] nerves strong" (qtd. in Banerjee 2005: 59); and Saraladebi Chaudhurani, who enthusiastically promoted gymnastics and football (2011: 118-19).

Even as men were reclaiming their manhood by strengthening their muscles, women were confined to the domestic space and its attendant duties of child-bearing and rearing. This domestic restriction was intended to "control the unbridled sexuality of women as it impinged on the very nature of body itself" (Chakravarti 1993: 583). The surveillance mechanisms and strict control measures employed by the male coach in this film reiterate the stringent guidelines placed on the female body by the male nationalists for assimilating the diverse energies of the "imagined community" (Anderson 1983: 6) to constitute a 'Nation'. Just as the regulation of women's sexuality was a means of asserting patriarchal authority by the male nationalists, in the film, to some extent, the coach's

attempts to control the female athletes' movements may be interpreted as a way of exercising patriarchal power.

Even while the film glorifies female athletes, the portrayal is embedded within the paradigm of gendered constructions and the athletes are forced to develop a masculine zeal. The captain of the hockey team, Vidya Sharma (Vidya Malvade) seems to have been chosen not just for her competence, skills or abilities, but also because she is petite, docile and obedient. Her slender body seems to espouse a value of homogeneity and inclusiveness that obscures the myriad voices of difference which seem to threaten the sovereignty of the nation-state – the locus of the privilege and power of the patriarchal order. As the coach Khan says: "Not only does he not hear the names of the states but he cannot even see them, what he does hear is the name of one country, India" [my trans.].³ The nationalistic fervour not only establishes patriotic unity, but also underscores patriarchal authority, as symbolized by the coach who restricts their movements by silencing all expressions other than the normative. Further, to make a woman-centric sports film acceptable to the viewers used to the regular Bollywood fare of romance, songs and drama, Vidya is portrayed more like a Hindi film heroine in a supportive role to the male protagonist. This representation of the soft-spoken 'Bollywood heroine' is evocative of the deified female of Aurobindo's vision of "Mother India" in constant need of her hero/sons to save her from calamity/oppression. This is particularly evident in the last scene when trying to save the penalty shot by the Australian opponent during the final match of the tournament, Vidya looks towards Kabir for a sign or gesture, and he guides her suitably, leading India to victory.

Participation in sport, particularly that of the aggressive body-contact type, poses the question about the femininity and sexuality of female athletes which creates a demand in popular narratives to reclaim them from a space of "hypermasculinity" (Burstyn 1999: 13).⁴ This is evinced in the portrayal of Kabir and Vidya's relationship, as one budding into a sweet love story, which seeks to entrench in the minds of the spectators a form of hegemonic sexuality, confirming and reinstating heterosexuality, and dispensing away with

the notion of any 'aberrant sexuality' like, say, lesbianism, which may be a possibility in an all-women's team. Even if one were to negate the potential relationship between Vidya and Kabir, the characters of Vidya and Preeti (Sagarika Ghatge) can still be observed as re-entrenching and perpetuating the notion of 'hegemonic sexuality,' as they are defined constantly in terms of their relationships with men off the field. Vidya's telephonic conversation with Rakesh (Nakul Vaid), her husband, who, on the one hand allows her to play for financial benefit but also expects her, on the other, to be confined only to a domestic role, demonstrates the lack of motivation and the game ethic in the case of the female athletes which otherwise is the hallmark of the male sportspersons' career. The archetypal images of women as mothers and housewives are invoked and reiterated in the film. These images subscribe to the stereotypes which limit the roles available to women. Even Preeti, ostensibly emancipated, measures her motivation and drive for the sport only in comparison against a male ideal: her competitiveness and motivation stems from the condescension received from her fiancé Abhimanyu Singh (Vivan Bhatena), who plays the role of the Vice-Captain of the Indian Cricket Team. The last few scenes of the film exemplify this skewed logic where another center-forward, Komal Chautala (Chitrashi Rawat) allows Preeti the chance to become the best player of the tournament, thereby forfeiting her claim to the title, simply to allow Preeti to show her mettle to her boyfriend.

Through the characters of Krishnaji, Vidya and Preeti, the body is defined as the prime location of power and its institutionalization "to serve the prevailing notions of dominance and subordination" (Bordo 1999: 252). Further, in its formulation of ideal femininity and masculinity, understood as the site of unequal power struggles, a community of nationhood is imagined.

Voice of the "Gundas": Resistance to the Patriarchal Order

If mediated images of sport regulate the ideal formulation of femininity and masculinity, they also express divergences from and subversions of the mainstream nationalistic, hegemonic discourse,

and this is pertinently embodied by the characters of Balbir Kaur, Komal Chautala and Bindiya Naik in the film. Balbir Kaur (Tanya Abrol) is a loud, aggressive, burly, foul-mouthed athlete, a Punjabi version of an Amazonian woman, unlike Preeti and Vidya. She is constantly at loggerheads with the team members as well as with the coach, and is portrayed as one who is highly susceptible to bouts of anger. During the first training session when she is kept out of the match for refusing to follow the coach's diktat, her body becomes the locus of disruptions. Similarly, in the eve-teasing scene, when Khan observes an unprecedented female violence as the foundation for making a 'national' team, the sisterhood of "Rakshasha sena" (Demon's army) also transpires.⁵ This female violence also empowers the sisterhood to decide whether or not to give a second chance to the male authority represented by the coach. It is at the end of this scene that Balbir, on behalf of the team, announces that they would continue with Khan as the coach even though the team had expressed their displeasure over his training methods a few scenes back. The establishment of the women athletes' "Rakshasha sena" and the re-instatement of the coach, Kabir Khan, can be understood as a new-found faith in the formers' own capacities to 'wrestle' with the male, hegemonic, coercive power.

Balbir's presence can be seen as a struggle for meaning and recognition and as a means for the females' active manipulation of the body to reduce the "physical power imbalances" which structure the patriarchal society (Castelnuovo and Guthrie 1998: 13). Interestingly, her portrayal conjures up the ethos of the discourse of 'body-building' predicated on the discipline and practice of Indian wrestling during the nineteenth century colonial India to challenge the colonizer's representation of the colonized as weak and effeminate (Alter 2003: 16-17).⁶ If the domain of *pahalwani* (wrestling) encapsulated the identity of the nation, then in the portrayal of Balbir Kaur's physical dimensions, the strictly masculine preserve of body-building is encroached to re-tell the narrative of "building the nation" (Alter 17). However, another group of sport sociologists believe that such portrayals of female athletes is a media discourse to devalue them, as their "active, spontaneous aggression"

is seen as an attempt to emulate male athletes and deny them “the power and prestige that is their due” (Kane and Greendorfer 32). Evidently in Balbir’s case, her aggression and burly body evoke peals of laughter from the audiences making her seem more like a stock comic figure. Alternatively, Balbir’s body can be seen as one which resists the model of slenderness. It is a body which “takes up space” and challenges the construct of gendered bodies (Tate 1999: 33). She strips away the essentialist notions of women’s bodies being small, slender and weak, and this is amply demonstrated in the game against Argentina during the World championship where her body serves as a means to rescue the team and the nation. Balbir’s body dynamics open up the space of resistance by refusing to be circumscribed within the mainstream patriarchal order.

In Komal Chautala, the foul-mouthed athlete from Haryana, a new dynamics of body politics is developed. In contrast to that of Balbir, Komal’s body seems to take up minimal space; the visualization of this dwarfish figure underlines a new ethos of somatic politics that resists the patriarchal essentialism of visualizing the female body as smaller than the male’s through parodic imitation. Her first appearance in the film, where she is seen playing the game of hockey instead of following her father’s injunctions to remain confined within female stereotypical roles, announces her defiance of the patriarchal order. Komal’s mother, on her part, displays a kind of “hybridized resistance” to the patriarchal order. Although she blindly follows dated customs like adorning the ‘ghunghat’ (veil), she encourages her daughter to pursue her dreams, embodying the logic of Deniz Kandiyoti’s “bargaining with patriarchy”: an active form of strategic negotiation to deal with the oppressive laws of the male-dominated society (1988: 274). Her pea-sized figure notwithstanding, the way in which Komal undertakes to straddle different opinions and perspectives that oftentimes mar the team spirit, without lowering her own sporting expectations, is commendable.⁷ The personal sacrifice of ambition and success, represented by her act of relinquishing the title of the ‘Player of the tournament’ to a fellow player, disrupts the male paradigm to espouse the cause of women whose achievements

have been crushed or marginalized throughout history. Her defiant shout to Preeti to demonstrate her skills and abilities to that *launda* (a pejorative term used for a young boy, in this case Preeti's boyfriend) disrupts the potency of the male order defined only in terms of success and ambition and instead, seeks to establish a community of females in dealing with pain, loss and oppressive structures in its place.

If Komal and Balbir form one angle of resistance to the patriarchal structures, Bindiya Naik (Shilpa Shukla) interrogates the unequivocal assumptions of male authority and privilege through "gundaism" (hooliganism). Bindiya, the most senior athlete, is shown to be a disgruntled player, harbouring the frustration of losing the position of captain and even her place within the team to the more docile and dutiful Vidya. Endowed with an athletic and toned body, she is constantly trying to create rifts and fissures within the team. Refusing to discipline her body according to the diktat of the male coach, Bindiya is shown to be highly assertive, courageous and inarguably confident about her abilities. This anomaly, as far as traditional ideas about sport and women are concerned, is portrayed in the film as well, as she is constantly kept out of the playing field. The trajectory of her role can be framed through two scenes in the film: one, during the first training schedule, in which Kabir Khan says to her that "in a team there can be only one goon!" [my trans.]; and the second, her challenge to the domineering attitude of the coach, when she defiantly states: "he is simply a coach and not God" [my trans.]. The first dialogue explicitly pits her against the dominant male-oriented, hegemonic discourse of nationalist enterprise represented by the coach, Kabir Khan, which in the course of the film tries to classify her as a "loose woman" with an "unbridled sexuality" (Chakravarti 579). But more importantly, this obstructs her entry into the competitive arena of sports. However, if her "gundaism" blocks her entry into the playing arena, the final few scenes of the film register the inversion of the meaning that marks the idea of "gundaism".⁸ The semi-final match against South Korea fractures the meaning of "gundaism" to incorporate a new signification. The term now implies the sporting skills of Bindiya

which represent a blend of talent and tactical acumen, abilities which force the dictatorial coach to reconsider his decision of not including her in the playing eleven.⁹ The scene unsettles the hegemonic narrative of Bindiya being a “gunda” and enables her to emerge as a subversive figure whose second dialogue about the “coach not being God” clearly illustrates the implication of this dissidence. Her resistance unsettles Khan’s authority as divinely ordained and destabilizes the normativity of male hegemony. She appropriates the construct of a “gunda” in her character to rewrite the male-centered hegemonic discourse and highlight the gendered violence inherent within it.

Bindiya’s transgression against male surveillance culture is brought to the fore in the locker room when she galvanizes the acrimonious female athletes against the coach after the strenuous training session. Her leadership qualities and “gundaism” push the dominant sporting order (albeit male) into a corner. But her freedom and agency is invoked and at the same time destabilized in the locker room where she tries to seduce Kabir. In sporting practice, according to a study conducted by Disch and Kane, locker rooms are perpetually found to be the site of displaying the ethos of male bonding, strength and sexual virility (2000: 112).¹⁰ Though *Chak De!* portrays the locker room as belonging to the women athletes, Kabir Khan’s entry into this sacred precinct invokes the rhetoric of the locker room being essentially a masculine domain. It is this mystic domain of uncontestable male ideology which Bindiya challenges in displaying her own overt sexuality. She wrests control and power from the dominant male echelons by chasing a man not for love but to gain success and achievement, all of the linguistic terms which structure the male order and sporting activity.

Bindiya, Komal and Balbir are not afraid of their physicality and in particular, seek “to extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them” (Grosz 1994: xi). Though Bindiya’s display of sexuality makes her prone to gendered violence and she, like many others, loses her place within the system to become ‘invisible’, her act of defiance challenges male hegemony to its very core. Her “gundaism” threatens to subsume the normative relationship of Vidya and Kabir

within her breach of the rules of civility and decency, and lay bare the inherent gender discriminations within society. One could explain these characters, as Grosz observes, not only as “the raw materials on which power works” but also “the sites for possible resistance to the particular form power takes” (155).

If Balbir, Komal and Bindiya’s portrayals seem to be at odds with the nationalist agenda as they cross the so-called threshold of tradition and sanctity, then one needs also to be reminded of how the agenda itself is being re-worked through the film to fit in with the global and multicultural world. *Chak De!* caters to a global audience and the presence of Shahrukh Khan, a star with global appeal, exemplifies the transnational ethos of the film. Moreover, the whole story is built around the participation of the athletes in the World Cup tournament, a global sporting spectacle. A key event of the film, the establishment of the “Rakshasha sena”, has for its backdrop a McDonald’s restaurant, a paradigmatic metaphor of global culture. It thus becomes imperative to reconstitute the embodiments of the nationalist agenda of tradition, ritual and sanctity within a global context. *Chak De!* would, therefore, be located within the specific historical moment of “translocality” where identities are constituted and re-constituted “between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility” and not in terms of some universal, eternal logic (Appadurai 1996: 192, 31). The film is an account of how the past is being re-interpreted in the present in terms of the logic of mobility engendered by the processes of globalization.

The dramatic transformations that took place in the post-liberalization era in the 1990s exhibited a change in the political economy produced by the “interaction of transnational flows and local practices” (Chakravorty 2006: 116). The film can be read as a narrative of global transactions, wherein the female athletes elide and slip into various roles as mother, wife, lover, adulteress and achiever, as symptomatic of a global flow of people and ideas. These female athletes represent a new subjectivity of individuals who are focused, confident and willing to take risks: the “poster image” of a changed economic and social system (Heywood 2007: 101).

However, in spite of these global formations, the “Indianness” of these athletes is foregrounded in the way their traditional roles are underscored in the mediated representation of these sportswomen.

The representation of Kabir Khan is a narrative of the toughness of the ‘body’, exemplifying mental strength to withstand religious fundamentalism, rebellion from within the team and obstacles of institutional mismanagement, aptly demonstrated in the song “Kuch Kariye”, which emphasizes the need to move beyond words to the realm of action. His success story is that of a body which is competitive and willing to fight against all odds, a machine that has internalized the principle of “maximum productivity” to counter the challenges of limited resources (Whannel 2002: 196). He represents the patriarchal discourse which obfuscates the multiple voices of marginalized regions, communities and women to portray a homogenous vision of India. Being the coach of the hockey team, this paragon of male power plays a key role in guiding the errant female athletes and drilling some passion into their inert bodies so that they may rise above their petty jealousies to win the World Cup for the nation. Kabir’s patriotic fervour is balanced by his control of desire, evident in the scene in the locker room where Bindiya tries to seduce him. His self-control conjures up the image of “ascetic warriorhood” of Swami Vivekananda (Banerjee 45). His reification of the trope of the nation, apparent in his first address as the coach to the whole team (“I can hear only one name: India”; my trans.) displays a sense of inclusive citizenship – an ideal prototype of democracy and egalitarianism in India. Even though his hegemonic narrative is punctured at times by the “Rakshasha sena”, his role exemplifies the patriarchal nationalist discourse prevalent in contemporary India.

To conclude, the ‘body’ emerges as one of the most important signifiers to articulate the social, economic and political dimensions of a nation. A reading of the trope of the body image in the film *Chak De!* allows for comprehending the anxiety of “purity” on which the “invention” of India was premised. The analysis of gender stereotypes in the film *Chak De!* exemplifies the historically and socially contingent nature of these identities and foregrounds how

'national' identities are shaped by the nexus between media, sport and global interconnectedness. Locating the body as the site of constructing feminine and masculine values that are constantly being framed and re-framed in different contexts, *Chak De!* offers more than mere glorification of female power. It provides a complex account of how reality is mediated in the interface between ideologies of the past and the intricacies of the present.

Notes

- ¹ The ideology that "sometimes winning is everything" is also the tagline of the film.
- ² The film is said to be loosely based on the life of Mir Ranjan Negi, the former Indian hockey player. He became the coach of the Women's Hockey team, which won the Commonwealth Games (2002), and the Men's Hockey team which won in the Asiad Games (1998). This former Indian goalkeeper was disgraced on account of his team's ignominious defeat against Pakistan in the final match of the Asiad Games (1982), which was believed to have been lost because of Negi's alleged links with Pakistan. Though the screenplay writer, Jaideep Sahni, acknowledged that he was inspired by the victory of the Indian Women's hockey team in the Commonwealth Games (2002), he denied that the story was based on Negi's life.
- ³ The lack of substantial representation of the players from Manipur and Jharkhand who are paid only lip service at the beginning of the film, points to the same occlusion of regional, class, caste differences inherent within the nativist discourse as expressed in the introductory scene of Vidya and the other players. This not only reiterates the notion of an 'imagined' inclusive nation-state but substantiates the logic of male nationalists, predominantly categorized from a Hindu consciousness.
- ⁴ Though the earliest known use of the term was in a psychiatric article written by Leonard Glass (1984), the term became popular as it was used by Vanda Burstyn to describe an "exaggerated ideal of manhood" (1999: 4). Associated primarily with the role of a warrior, the term is an expression of power. Though a fluid term, hypermasculinity embodies primarily the hegemonic conceptions of masculinity.
- ⁵ The reference to a demon to represent the friendship of these female athletes is interesting as it invokes the sense of subversive power, outside the norms of patriarchy.
- ⁶ As part of the revival of physical culture during the nineteenth century, Indian wrestling, circumscribed within a multiplicity of discourses, for instance, celibacy, dietary practice and health regimes, was postulated as a

mode of political resistance against the colonizers' categorization of the natives as physically and morally deficient.

⁷ Komal changes her allegiances between the two groups within the film: the group in favour of Kabir Khan's training methods, and that led by Bindiya Naik, which is constantly on the lookout to challenge Kabir's tactics and his pre-eminent position within the team. Her shifting allegiances point towards an inward struggle, one that at once proclaims her need to affiliate herself with a peer group (not necessarily the one displaying the popular sentiment within the film's narrative logic), and that of a mind that seeks to proclaim its independence from societal and peer pressure. Komal's psychological conflict can be read as a dramatized re-interpretation of the 'hybridized resistance' manifested by her mother.

⁸ A male "gunda", represented in the figure of Kabir expresses superhuman attributes invested with power and authority of the nationalist discourse whereas a female "gunda", symbolized in the figure of Bindiya, portrays a disruptive force that is up to no good.

⁹ It is interesting to note that Bindiya nicknames Kabir "Tughlaq" in an earlier scene for his dictatorial attitude, but even he is forced to reconsider a decision that he made to establish his authority.

Mohammed bin Tughlaq, ruled Delhi from 1325-1351 and is known for shifting the administrative capital of his Empire from Delhi to Deogir (now Daulatabad) to consolidate his power over the Southern states. As an administrative policy, it failed miserably causing immense hardships to the common citizens who were also forcibly displaced. However, the long-term cultural effect of this policy engendered the rise of Urdu language along with its associated culture in the Southern belt.

¹⁰ Disch and Kane's study on the locker room as invested with male power, is based on the sexual harassment case of Lisa Olson, author of *The Best American Sports Writing* and former sports reporter for the *Boston Herald*. This incident in 1990 is considered a watershed event in women's sport journalism.

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**Ideology and the Novelistic Narrative:
Peasant Revolt in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*
and Mulk Raj Anand's *The Sword and
the Sickle***

In 1921, Gandhi was informally handed over the leadership of the Indian National Congress, which led to a widespread reorganization of the party. Where so far it primarily represented the privileged classes of intellectuals, brahmins and upper class traders, its representation now extended to classes which had been excluded from its fold. Historiography, literature, and consequently literary histories written in or about the two decades preceding independence are dominated primarily by the figure of Gandhi. Fictional narratives revolve around him, positing problems and their Gandhian solutions, creating Gandhian characters, or depicting Gandhian principles, while non-fictional works devote large sections or even entire chapters to

the influence of the 'Mahatma' on the 'masses' whom he 'awakened,' or to the literary works he inspired.

There was, however, a significant group of writers that were inspired not by the ideas of Gandhi but by events occurring on a more global level. The Progressive Writers' Movement, which began in 1935, was influenced to a great extent by the political philosophy of socialism as well as the Popular Front movements of Europe. To the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), the conflict between the nationalists and the colonial government was but one of the many conflicts between the oppressor and the oppressed. Though not hostile in any way to the nationalist movement, and even acknowledging the necessity of fighting imperialism, the larger goal of the "Progressivism" practiced by the PWA was "[to] relate to the common people of the country – the labourers, the peasants, and the middle classes, and . . . [to] oppose those who exploited and oppressed these people" (Zaheer 2006: 46). According to Aijaz Ahmad, the "critical realism" of these writers required the critique of colonialism to be undertaken alongside "an even more comprehensive, multi-faceted critique of ourselves: our class structures, our familial ideologies, our management of bodies and sexualities, our idealisms, our silences" (1987: 21). In his history of the Progressive Movement, Sajjad Zaheer posits progressivism against conservatism. He also attempts to define the reformist or revivalist strain in Indian nationalism and set the movement apart from it. His discussion of reformism clearly echoes Gandhi's post-'swaraj' ideal of the nation.¹ Refuting a revivalist tendency, he aligns himself more with Marxism as he writes of the "emergence of new classes in society" as a result of the unearthing of "new modes and implements of production" (31).

Of the two novels I have selected for analysis, Rao's *Kanthapura* is based on an understanding of the political philosophy of Gandhi and Anand's *The Sword and the Sickle* (henceforth *The Sword*) is written in alignment with the ideology of the Progressive Writers' Movement. In this paper I analyze the representation of the Gandhian and the Socialist ideologies within the framework of peasant revolt in these novels. The paper begins

by exploring the two ideologies in terms of their treatment of the peasantry and their understanding of the problem of nationalism. The ideologies are then compared in terms of modes of organization, leadership, development of the peasants' consciousness and their agency. It then argues that the nature of the struggles depicted in both texts is representative of the ideological standpoints of the two authors. Lastly, it analyses the functioning of the two narratives vis-à-vis the distance between the author's intent in representation and the implication of the narrative. In other words, in the discussion of the authors' ideologies, an attempt is made to understand the distance, if any, between the authorial discourse and the narrative discourse,² and whether or not, or to what extent, the novels are successful in representing the above ideologies in the narrative.

***Swaraj* versus Socialism**

Gandhi's role as a leader of the masses has been treated with skepticism by historians, particularly in view of his leadership of the Congress.³ In so far as Gandhi influenced the lower classes through his discipline, austerity and what may be called his 'spiritual strength' (all three of which can be seen as building the 'charisma' of his personality⁴), he was rightly termed their 'leader'. But the gap between his 'spiritual' leadership and the socio-economic consequences of his decisions and instructions brought this leadership into question. Gandhi was, first and foremost, aligned with the interests of bourgeois nationalism as articulated by the Indian National Congress. Far from being a monolithic group, the Congress was a conglomeration of a wide range of political perspectives from the Left to the Right which, however varied, were united by a belief in the priority of independence. It was further commonly believed that all conflicts would be resolved once nationalist self-determination was achieved. This belief was particularly central to Gandhi's thought: the achievement of *swaraj* depended on the practice of a certain spiritual discipline, and the improvement of the lot of all oppressed peoples was possible only with the resulting 'change of heart' of all people in society.⁵ The Gandhian ideology, centered entirely around the attainment of *swaraj* as a utopian time and

place, in which structures will essentially remain the same as the present and yet function more humanely because of this 'change of heart,' was problematic because it evaded any structural change. The complicity of Gandhian nationalism with the mainstream nationalist movement as run by the soon-to-be capitalist bourgeoisie also led to the suppression of all conflicts within the nation such as those between distinct castes or classes.⁶ It was essential, according to Gandhi, to maintain the 'unity' of the nation in the face of colonial power, even if that unity was imposed at the cost of the welfare of the people.

The socialist ideology favored by the progressive writers was radically different from that of Gandhi. Socialism was aimed against capitalism as a whole, and saw imperialism as a symptom of the latter: as a means of generating capital for the economic development of the bourgeoisie. The goal of socialism then was to incorporate the proletariat all over the world in a global struggle against capital. In the pre-independence class hierarchy, the peasantry found itself at the very bottom, and oppressed by the functioning of both growing capitalism as well as seemingly residual modes of production such as feudalism.⁷ In order to overthrow this oppression, the socialist agenda required that they be educated along with the urban proletariat so that they may join in the struggle against capitalism and lead it without the aid of the bourgeoisie which would inevitably choose its own class interests eventually. Antonio Gramsci, while writing about workers and peasants, describes the peasantry as a potent force along with the urban proletariat, and highlights the centrality of communism to the betterment of their lives:

Factory workers and poor peasants are the two driving forces of the proletarian revolution. For them, especially, communism is a vital necessity: its advent signifies life and liberty, while the continued existence of private property signifies the imminent danger of being crushed, of losing everything, including life itself. . . . For them, communism represents civilization: it stands for the system of historical conditions in which they will acquire a personality, a dignity, a culture, and through which they will become a spirit creating progress and beauty. (2000: 117)

Gramsci's ideas for the peasantry as well as the proletariat were centered on their education and discipline, and the establishment of solidarity between them. According to him, it was only when a unity had been forged, that the socialist state would "be able to foster the introduction of machinery and direct the immense process of transformation of the agrarian economy" (118). Despite his skepticism about the capabilities of the peasantry in the absence of systematic guidance, Gramsci sees the industrial working class as the primary agent of change – a class formed precisely by the movement of the peasantry into the factory environment. Located in the capitalist system, the oppressed classes are provided with an atmosphere conducive to the forging of solidarity.

Though Gramsci as well as the PWA supported the struggle against imperialism, this support was based on seeing the struggle as a symptom of the larger opposition to western capitalism. As opposed to mainstream nationalism, the socialist struggle in India was not a conflict between indigenous and western capitalism, that is, a struggle led by the rising bourgeoisie of the colonized nations. Instead, it was a manifestation of the rising power of the oppressed peoples – the peasantry and the proletariat. Its intention, rather than the creation of a self-contained nation state on the lines of the Gandhian *ramarajya* or even the Nehruvian democracy, was the establishment of a global socialist system.

Peasant Radicalism, Agency and Revolutionary Consciousness

Written in 1938, *Kanthapura* tells the story of a small village 'awakened' by the teachings of the Mahatma to join the freedom struggle. As an idealistic historical fiction, it presents a glorified picture of the village as the repository of Indian tradition and culture, undisturbed by the harmful influences of the city coterminous with Gandhi's concept of 'Western civilization'. In the frame of Rao's narrative, Moorthy, the torchbearer of Gandhian struggle in the village, is an endearing character. When referred to by the village men and women, he is mostly "our Moorthy" – the soft spoken, religious brahmin who brings to the village the message of the

Mahatma (Rao, 2008: 45). But a glance at Moorthy's social status complicates the nature of his influence on the villagers. G. Aloysius's discussion of Gandhi's "vertical mobilization" of the masses in *Nationalism without a Nation in India* may throw some light on Moorthy's leadership:

Gandhian mobilization . . . took the endogamous and hierarchical structure of the communities as it was, and the traditionally dominant individuals and groups within this hierarchy were expected to organize and lead the traditionally subservient classes . . . Gandhi was acutely sensitive to the traditional pattern of power-spread within the communities and exploited this to the maximum. He never approached the masses directly but always through the regional and local elite, who in the process tended to gain importance, which they then owed to the supreme leader. (2011: 203)

Aloysius goes on to attribute to Gandhi a reinvigoration of the oppressive traditional hierarchical structures which also functioned as a safety valve against conflicts between the different levels of hierarchy. In the novel, although Moorthy leads both the "traditionally subservient classes" and the brahmins of the village, his influence is necessarily a product of his caste. The villagers' adoration of him as "the learned master" shows that the task of leadership would not have received the same response had it been taken up by a pariah (Rao 74). When Moorthy sets out to convince the villagers to join the struggle either by becoming members of the Congress or by spinning, he receives the same response from most of them: being the "learned master," his word is as good as that of the Mahatma, and "the Mahatma's word [is] the word of God" (Rao 74). Similarly, though Range Gowda does not completely understand the implications of Satyagraha, he agrees to follow Moorthy's instructions. "If you think I should become a member of the Congress," he says, "let me be a member of the Congress. If you want me to be your slave, I shall be your slave" (Rao 74). Range Gowda's surrender is significant because it underscores the villagers' adulation for both Moorthy and the Mahatma, which becomes their main motivation in joining the struggle rather than any real politicization. Once the Provincial Congress Committee of Kanthapura is formed, the villagers openly avow their allegiance

not so much to the cause that they have been ascribed to, or to the Congress, but to Moorthy. Looking at his picture in Rangamma's 'blue paper' they exclaim: "Our Moorthy is a great man, and they speak of him in the city, and we shall work *for him*" (Rao 80; my emphasis). Moorthy's personality then becomes as charismatic as that of the Mahatma. If the Mahatma is the "Big Mountain," Moorthy becomes the "Small Mountain" (Rao 128).

The lack of politicization or change in the consciousness of the villagers becomes most prominent in the narrator's reaction to Moorthy's distress after he leaves pariah Rachanna's house. Achakka narrates how Moorthy purifies himself before he enters the brahmin household by washing and changing his clothes. It is only upon consuming the water of the Ganges (on Rangamma's suggestion) that Moorthy "feels a fresher breath flowing through him" (Rao 77). It becomes evident here that even as the agent of the ostensible change of consciousness in the village, Moorthy has escaped any real politicization. Achakka too, subsequently exclaims to the audience – "after all a brahmin is a brahmin, sister!" – a statement as difficult to reconcile with the claimed transformation as Moorthy's desire for purification (Rao 77). This claim to a change in consciousness is additionally problematized by the villagers' constant need for leadership once they start taking political action. When Moorthy and Rangamma are not around to fulfil this need, the women turn to Ratna.

As opposed to the idealism of *Kanthapura*, Anand's novel presents a brutally realistic narrative. Written only four years after Rao's novel, *The Sword* sketches a bleak picture of the Indian village and the condition of the peasantry. The protagonist Lal Singh, just arrived from France after the end of the Second World War, is particularly sensitive to the deterioration of his "glorified village" to "an antheap" where he finds "humanity littered all over the place" (Anand 1984: 28). Soon after, Lalu runs into a horde of beggars who he discovers to be dispossessed peasants. In his conversations with them, he learns of the loss of their land and conditions of extreme poverty that have rendered them incapable of even buying seeds, thus leading them into beggary. When deprived of his own land and

a source of income, Lalu finds himself critical of both the exploitation of the peasants at the hands of the zamindars as well as the peasants' abjectness and their acceptance of the status quo.

Though the absence of a tangible change in the peasants' consciousness and their constant need for leadership are observed in *The Sword* as well, this lack is problematized here and the concept of leadership put under scrutiny. The narrative, through Lalu, draws attention to the peasants' revolutionary potential on several occasions. The first demonstration that Lalu witnesses – Harnam Singh's *jatha* (procession) – makes him instantly aware of this potential, and as the novel progresses he observes a clear transformation in the behavior and temperament of the peasants. When arrested by the police for attacking a *chaprasi* (orderly), Lalu realizes from the confident cries of the Kisan Sabha that a considerable change has been wrought in their natures already, which has turned them from weak, abject and frightened individuals into willing protestors against their exploitation at the hands of the zamindars:

The agents of Authority had triumphed. But it seemed to Lalu that they had not succeeded in breaking the spirit of the kisans. For, from the way the men had shouted their farewell to him, they seemed to have given up their habitual respect, born of fear, and discovered a new will which had hovered, ominous and incalculable in their obscure faces, so that he himself had been frightened, not knowing what they would do to the police at any moment. He had heard the heaving of one man's breath next to him and the curious, gurgling whispers and raised, intent heads all round. The doleful looks of glazed, soft eyes, suspended in fear, and the instinctive loyalty to Authority with which they were born, and with which they died, had been transmuted into a sense of opposition. (273)

At the same time, Lalu is aware that the peasants continue to respect the feudal hierarchies: "A word from Kanwar Rampal Singh and they would have resisted ... their reverence for the landlord patriarch was strong in them – specially their reverence for such a rebel landlord patriarch as Kanwar Rampal Singh" (273). While Singh's leadership of the peasants encourages resistance to economic oppression, it operates through a reassertion of the cultural superiority of the landlord over the tenant. The only apparent difference then between the Count and the Nawab of Nasirabad lies in the fact

that while the latter is exploitative, the former is patronizing. Nonetheless, both play traditional roles. The reinvigoration of the tenant-landlord hierarchy is aided by the fact that Singh has retained many of his landlord privileges (as evident in his lavish lifestyle and ill-treatment of the butler Ganga), as well as by the fact that he thoroughly enjoys the attention bestowed on him.

The peasants' "reverence" for the Count, their volatility and their need for leadership are a testament to the fact that their transformation is only partial: though their nature and behavior change with Lalu, their consciousness remains unaltered. Moreover the limited change that Lalu witnesses is more a result of the arousal of their passions by the leadership, than an understanding of their political situation. The peasants also fail to grasp the nature and scope of their struggle, and aim only to put an end to their immediate oppression by the landlords. Though he is aware of these problems, it is specifically in his discussion with Sarshar that Lalu understands the actual import of the matter. Sarshar, Anand's 'true' revolutionary as it were, virulently criticizes the Count for posturing as a revolutionary hero while "exalting himself by deliberately exploiting his position as a feudal patriarch and leading the peasants into the blind-alley of spontaneous expression" (351). In their tendency to 'follow the leader', Anand's peasants can therefore be identified to a certain extent with their counterparts in Rao's novel. Even their devotion to Lalu, himself an 'organic intellectual',⁸ who gains greater respect and authority as a result of his experiences in the war, is similar to the devotion to Moorthy as evinced by Rao's peasants.⁹ However, Lalu and Sarshar's observations about the Count's influence on the peasants clarify that this dependence is posed as a critique of leadership in Anand's novel.

In neither of the two novels do the peasants deploy their agency in any notable sense that contributes to the narrative. Nonetheless, it is significant that the protagonist of *The Sword*, who is also one of the main leaders of the depicted struggle, is a peasant whose consciousness matures through his experiences in the war, and later when he is in prison.¹⁰ The agency of the peasant is then evinced in *The Sword* in a manner that it is not in *Kanthapura* that valorizes

the villagers' unquestioning faith in Gandhi. The peasants of Anand's novel too remain dependent on leadership throughout the course of the narrative. However, the reactivation of their agency is a central concern of the novel, evident in the fact that towards the end of the narrative they are forced to take an independent decision.

Choosing a Struggle: the Representation of Conflict

In an analysis of the peasants' agency, it is relevant to observe the nature of the struggles depicted in the selected texts. In *Kanthapura*, Rao chooses to depict the bourgeois nationalist struggle. The villagers' fight against the British administration to recover their appropriated land is important though it is directed entirely by the mainstream nationalist movement that served the class interests of the bourgeoisie rather than the peasantry. Gandhian nationalism was centered entirely on the attainment of *swaraj* and had either ambivalent or extremely problematic views on the issue of any other reform, one of these being Gandhi's justification of the Varnashrama Dharma system by emphasizing the ultimate spiritual equality of souls.¹¹ In the novel, these ambiguities are elided in favor of representing the participation of the pariah inhabitants in the struggle. Gandhi's actual views on the caste system in fact remain unrepresented and irrelevant to the pariahs who have as little information about the Mahatma as do the rest of the villagers. Their participation in a struggle, which may at some level have been counter-productive to their interests, is based solely upon their adulation of Moorthy, and through transference, of Gandhi. As observed earlier, the peasants' decision is not political. They do not work for their own liberation; they do so because "the Mahatma's word [is] the word of God" (Rao 74). In Rao's narrative, as much as in actual Gandhian political practice, the peasantry serve not so much as agents but as instruments for the attainment of a *swaraj* that would (only if accomplished in its perfection and precision as prescribed by Gandhi) *eventually* lead to the alleviation of the peasants' troubles.

Rather than depicting the struggle between the indigenous population and the colonial forces, Anand chooses to depict a conflict

between two sections of a population that was constantly being homogenized by the nationalist movement. Though socialism did not reject the pursuit of nationalism, Anand clearly portrays the latter as a movement of the bourgeoisie, little concerned with the oppressed classes. The nationalist movement is represented in the novel mainly by Srijut Tiwari, and the bourgeois intellectual Verma. Where Tiwari is depicted as an opportunistic lawyer, for whom a visit to the village is “a welcome relief from the strain of advocacy at the Allahabad High court,” as well as a means to “gain influence” and garner future electoral support (Anand 159), Verma turns to Gandhian nationalism in the course of the novel and loses all interest in the Kisan Sabha. He soon discovers immediate action to be futile and embarrassing, and even refers to it as “hooliganism” (326). Lalu also encounters the nationalist ideology in his meeting with Gandhi, who bluntly refuses to support the Kisan Sabha except on his own terms. The behavior of Verma, Tiwari and Gandhi, the nationalist characters in the novel, sets up a conflict in the narrative as well as in Lalu’s consciousness between bourgeois nationalism and the peasants’ struggle. Lalu’s own thoughts on nationalism are presented to us in one instance but he soon decides that it is not the struggle for a separate nation or one’s own land that is important but the struggle against oppression by “people in authority”:

It was the things people in authority did, the wrongs they heaped upon the people that had hurt his conscience. And it was so everywhere, in France, in Flanders, in Germany in England and in Hindustan – in China too, and Japan, if Uncle Kirpu’s jokes were to be trusted to tell the truth. Everywhere it was the same. In fact, it seemed to him, there were no black or white people, no yellow or brown people, not even Francis and Germans, and English and Hindustanis, and Chinis and Japanis, but there were only two races and two religions in the world, the rich and the poor. (Anand 83)

Instead of the nationalist struggle then, Anand’s narrative depicts a struggle that impinges directly upon the lives of the peasants, and one that they initiate; though they need direction to take it forward. As opposed to the peasants in *Kanthapura*, those in *The Sword* are conscious of their exploitation. Their struggle is driven by a desire for their own emancipation rather than religion or the awe of

a charismatic leader. The initiation of the movement for them then becomes political as they take deliberate steps to undermine the system.¹² That the narrative ascribes agency to them is evident from the fact that the ultimate aim of Sarshar as well as of Lalu is to educate and discipline the peasants in such a way that they may be able to join hands with the proletariat and work towards a systemic transformation.

Representative Disjunct: the Author versus the Narrative

In his essay on the prehistory of the novelistic discourse, Bakhtin writes: “[T]o a greater or lesser extent, every novel is a dialogized system made up of the images of ‘languages’, styles and consciousnesses that are concrete and inseparable from language. Language in the novel not only represents, but itself serves as the object of representation” (1981: 49). Bakhtin’s theory can be applied to the two novels in consideration here since an unconventional narrative structure and the ‘representation of language’ are evident in both. A clear narrative language/discourse in the texts is perceptible in the narrative action and comes across as the cumulative product of the multiple languages represented in the novel. Additionally, like any text, literary or non-literary, they consist of an authorial language/discourse, one which may be marked and located ideologically, though “[t]he author participates in the novel...with *almost no direct language of his own*” (Bakhtin 47). These authorial languages in *Kanthapura* and *The Sword* are employed by both Rao and Anand to represent the Gandhian and the socialist ideologies respectively.

In *Kanthapura*, the distance between the two discourses – the narrative and the authorial – is highlighted in the foreword, where Rao writes of the need to “convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own” (v). But the conflict between the two discourses, which surfaces on a number of occasions, leads to a critique of the authorial by the narrative. Achakka’s upper-caste narration attempts to maintain the authorial idealism by hiding the woes of the peasants under layers of religion, faith in the presiding deity and community living. Her faith in Kenchamma leads her to

believe that the village is prosperous although the narrative provides evidence to the contrary: the villagers are exploited at the hands of Bhatta; Subba Chetty and other middlemen pile expenses on to the rice that the villagers grow and sell it back to them at a higher price; the village is struck by famine from time to time; and the rigidity of the caste system cripples the community. If Rao's writing paints the picture of a village almost sanitized of corruption and dirt, the narrative elucidates that this is so because the action is primarily located in the brahmin quarters and the temple. The conflict also becomes evident in the portrayal of the village women as *Satyagrahis* [participants in the spiritual struggle of *satyagraha*]. Though Gandhi propagated the use of *Satyagraha* and non-violence as moral 'weapons' against any kind of violence, Rao's depiction of the sexual violence inflicted on the women by the police officers dismantles this idea. During the struggle, as Puttamma is raped and Seethamma and Ratna are molested the failure of the other women to react violently to protect each other becomes problematic. Gandhi's claim that "if a woman is self-controlled and pure in mind, violation of her virtue is impossible" (2012: 4), is undone by the narrative as we see a traumatized Puttamma, plagued by a sense of guilt and shame, flinging her child away. Equally critical is Moorthy's turn to Nehru at the end of the novel. Though the authorial discourse attempts to portray Moorthy as a young man easily swayed by the more 'revolutionary' Nehru, the city and the influences of Western civilization,¹³ his letter to Ratna provides a critique of the Gandhian ideology which was widely prevalent at the time. He writes, "[I]s there not Swaraj in our States, and is there not misery and corruption and cruelty there? Oh no, Ratna, it is the way of the masters that is wrong" (Rao 188). Moorthy's visit to pariah Rachanna's house too provides a criticism of the authorial ideology. His hesitation at the threshold of the pariah house is interesting because it provides an accurate depiction of the individual still in transformation from the brahminical to the (desired) nationalist ideology. Despite his hesitation, Moorthy enters the house and drinks milk from the tumbler offered by Rachanna's wife. The authorial discourse controls the narrative up till here as it shows Moorthy

overcoming his brahminical reservations. But this control is lost at the point where we are shown a doubtful Moorthy pressed by the need to purify himself before he enters Rangamma's house. Here, the narrative discourse, projecting the impossibility of the kind of transformation the authorial discourse expects from the ideology it represents, overwrites the authorial discourse.¹⁴ In these three examples, then, the authorial discourse is critiqued by the narrative discourse through the language of a feminine response to sexual violence and its cognitive response to sexual violence, radical action and brahminical tradition, as all three refute the claims of the ideology that the authorial discourse attempts to represent.

In *The Sword*, the multiple languages represented in the novel are encountered through the engagement of the protagonist with different ideologies – the Gandhian, the nationalist, the violent/anarchist and the socialist.¹⁵ The last of these is chosen by the protagonist only after careful consideration. Since the narrative openly engages with all of these languages, they are not relegated to the background to undermine the authorial standpoint. Moreover, the authorial language erupts into the narrative in the same manner as the others through the voice of Sarshar. It is a result of this moment of the coincidence of the authorial and the narrative that the novel culminates in a fruition of the authorial intent, that is, the representation of the socialist ideology. It is therefore after Lalu's conversation with Sarshar, when the former lies in jail, that he develops a socialist consciousness. Where the narrative discourse of Rao's novel ends up critiquing its authorial discourse, Anand's novel culminates in a synthesis of the two.

Both Rao and Anand attempt to represent specific ideologies. These ideologies determine a number of factors in the narratives of both novels, such as the role of the peasantry in the land struggles, the nature of the struggles they undertake, and the idea of leadership. However, the necessary distance between the authorial and the narrative discourses determines the extent to which the authors' representations of these ideologies are successful: where Rao's representation is ultimately undercut by the functioning of the narrative, Anand's narrative functions to support the representation

leading to the development of the peasant-protagonist in the desired direction.

Notes

- ¹ "Our reformers tried to prove that the religion that prevailed among the common people was not the 'real' or 'authentic' one. In contrast to life under the feudal system, which was more complicated and materialistic, they pointed to tribal life or life in the small towns, where trade, herding of cattle, craftsmanship, and small landownership was the norm. There, life was more egalitarian" (Zaheer 2006: 28).
- ² This is somewhat similar to Sethi's distinction between "the ideological and the novelistic/dramatic," or "the Gandhian/national and the brahminical/cultural" (2006: 90). Whereas her analysis sees the conflict between "the ideological and the novelistic/dramatic" as a "constant interplay between the ideological and the dramatic, each of which dictates opposing standpoints," I see the "dramatic" as always superseding and critiquing the "ideological" (93).
- ³ See Aloysius 2011 and Kumar 1988.
- ⁴ See Amin 2014.
- ⁵ When asked the question, "[C]an't we say the system of zemindari is an anachronism and should go, by non-violent means of course?" the Mahatma replied, "Of course we can. The question is: 'must we?' Why can we not say to the zemindars, 'These are the evils which we ask you to remove yourselves'? I admit that this presumes trust in human nature" (Gandhi 1999, vol. 73: 99).
- ⁶ Gandhi's suggestion to the peasants oppressed by their landlords is telling: "You should bear a little if the zemindar torments you. We do not want to fight with the zemindars. Zemindars are also slaves and we do not want to trouble them" (qtd. in Pandey 1982: 159).
- ⁷ Alavi elaborates on what he refers to as the "colonial mode of production" as a kind of semi-feudal structure in which feudal and capitalist modes of production coexisted. Here, the feudal mode comes to be "at the service of imperialism rather than antagonistically in contradiction to it" (1247).
- ⁸ "Gramsci defines intellectuals in the prison notebooks as people who give a fundamental social group 'homogeneity and awareness of its own function'. Intellectuals are educators, organizers, leaders. 'Organic' intellectuals are those who emerge from out of the group itself" (2000: 425).
- ⁹ This is evident when Sukhva hits Kanwar Birpal Singh because the latter had tried to molest Lalu's wife Maya – the action is motivated partly by defiance and partly as a gesture of standing up for Lalu.
- ¹⁰ The development of Lalu's consciousness is of almost exactly the same kind that Gramsci had desired for the peasants.

- ¹¹ Of the caste system, Gandhi said that it “is not based on inequality, there is no question of inferiority...if Hindus believe, as they must believe, in reincarnation, transmigration, they must know that nature will, without any possibility of mistake, adjust the balance by degrading a Brahmin, if he misbehaves himself, by reincarnating him in a lower division, and translating one who lives the life of a Brahmin in his present incarnation to Brahminhood in his next” (qtd. in Anderson 2012: 16).
- ¹² This initiative can be seen in Harnam Singh, who organizes the ‘jatha’; Santokh Singh, who practices a kind of anarchism; and the entire group of Pratapgarh peasants, who on the death of Bhupendra’s son decide to approach the Count to improve their situation.
- ¹³ Rao himself explained, “Moorthy was a young man who felt dissatisfied after he suffered a defeat. His faith in Gandhi was shaken for a moment. But the novel does project the Mahatma as the chief inspiration” (qtd. in Sethi 100).
- ¹⁴ It is the same transformation or change in consciousness that the authorial discourse also attempts to depict through the optimism of the narrator in the final sentences of the novel, when the latter claims, “[N]othing can ever be the same again. You will say we have lost this, you will say we have lost that. Kenchamma forgive us, but there is something that has entered our hearts” (Rao 188). But the change is contradicted again when we realize that even though Achakka is narrating the story in retrospect, possibly years after the sense of this change, she validates Moorthy’s actions with respect to the pariahs.
- ¹⁵ The three ideologies other than socialism—Gandhianism, nationalism and anarchism—may be said to have been encountered by Lalu through the figures of Gandhi, Srijut Tiwari and the student leader Razwi respectively.

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IN CONVERSATION

... with Catherine Belsey

“To Read More Subtly”

What spurred this interview was Catherine Belsey's vision for new directions in critical practice in her recent book, *A Future for Criticism*, which has brought centre stage the idea of pleasure as being intrinsic to fiction and its complete neglect in contemporary criticism. More than the Leavisite notion of an “assessment of a text's commitment to civic virtue,” she has explored the associations with expectation, with gaiety and yearning that together explain why we so deeply derive pleasure from our reading of fiction.

It is difficult to imagine contemporary critical practice without Catherine Belsey, who with her fearless brilliance, robust wit and intrepid turns of argument, has unremittingly deflated – with joyful uninhibitedness – received assumptions of the place of realism, history and biography in literary criticism, all the while raising some important and uncomfortable issues.

Working for most of her career with Christopher Norris, Margaret Attack, John Hartley, Chris Weedon and Terence Hawkes at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory at Cardiff, she has been a major radical voice that has turned the culture wars inside out. Being always unintimidated by power or critical authority of 'truth' from her early days at Warwick University, she has remained intellectually and politically alert. Professor Belsey, with her intellectual encounters with philosophy and cultural theory has written provocatively on the nature and practice of criticism and its varied theoretical intricacies, resisting always the inducement of diminishing the essential complexity of an idea. In times when the field of English Studies is riven with heated debates, her writings find a balance between criticism as an effective political tool on the one hand, and as an aesthetic pursuit on the other. Literary criticism, indeed, cannot be an end in itself. What we read matters, as much as the way we read it, because finally all reading impacts our understanding of the world we live in and the world in which a text is located.

It is perhaps out of such a disposition, with a deeply historical training attained under the guidance of her Ph.D. supervisor George Hunter and her meaningful polemics with her colleagues at Cardiff, that Professor Belsey wrote the now famous *Critical Practice*. Her disagreement with F. R. Leavis's notion of discovering texts with moral truth seems to her to be too restricting as such an approach ends up in being extremely selective of what one reads. She has always stood against this Leavisite idea, moving towards the pursuit of wide reading so as to come to grips with cultural history and difference.

Rumina Sethi: Though the recent issue of *Textual Practice* covers your lifetime's work, tell us briefly about your formative years leading to your academic career. I believe you grew up under the influence of a father who was committed to socialism.

Catherine Belsey: Yes, my father voted Labour. He and I used to do the washing up together. He washed and I dried, which made me feel he had the privileged task. That might have initiated my feminism, except that my father was egalitarian in other ways too,

and paid a great deal of attention to finding me a good state school. We had serious discussions over the dishes: he had no patience with the supernatural and offered a good, caustic counterbalance to my adolescent religious leanings. Unfortunately, he wanted me to be a scientist. I think he was disappointed to his dying day that I showed no aptitude for physics and chemistry, although it was partly as a result of his habit of reading poetry in his spare time that I opted for English. But it was my mother who treated language itself as something to relish. She loved any kind of wordplay: puns, spoonerisms, and nonsense verse. The first hardback book I ever bought for myself, when I was sixteen, was the *Collected Poems* of Dylan Thomas, which probably combined the influence of both my parents.

I've made myself look very docile. In fact, I put up the usual teenage resistance. At the time, I'd have been horrified to concede that my family had any influence at all! I think I had the illusion that my values sprang fully armed from my own individuality – which only goes to show how pervasive a culture of individualism can be.

RS: Would you say that you have particularly well-defined Marxist leanings which have drawn you towards your deep-seated interest in theory? You have thought deeply on Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Althusser, Macherey, Leavis, Fish and Saussure, and your enduring commitment largely has its origin in the rise of theory in the 1970s and 1980s which explains your interest in poststructuralist understandings of language and subjectivity.

CB: I think my most enduring commitment, as you kindly put it, is a hostility to injustice. I hate to see people treated unfairly, and even at an age when I ought to know better, I'm still all too ready to intervene if I think someone is wronged. I grew up in a post-war Britain of scarce resources and rationing, where people who took advantage of others were roundly condemned. There was a powerful ethos of public service at that time and a widespread commitment to the welfare state. I don't pretend it was a golden age: it was racist and casually misogynist, not to mention homophobic, but greed was definitely not good.

To someone who had grown up with that assumption, the government of Margaret Thatcher, elected in 1979, was a shock. Competition, exploitation, extremes of inequality were now declared acceptable. Of course, this didn't come out of the blue. The new (that is to say, very old) self-interest was building all through the seventies and perhaps earlier. Meanwhile, I had had four years working in London and elsewhere for very low wages and I knew what poverty was like. In my case, it was temporary but I could well imagine a state where not being able to pay for the basics might be a life sentence.

When I went back to the academic world, I cast around for a theory that would explain the unjust present and vindicate the possibility of change in the future. I still think Marxism is the best economic analysis we have. In a nutshell, shareholders do well when wages are low; decent conditions for workers (reasonable hours, holidays, maternity leave, health and safety) all threaten profits. Capitalism incites conflict between the perfectly reasonable interests of capital and the perfectly reasonable interests of workers.

But I should probably make clear that I have never subscribed to the idea of violent revolution or the values of the Soviet Union. From the perspective of the English department, what interested me most in Marxism was the understanding of ideology as legitimating the prevailing state of affairs. I don't know how it is in India, but in the UK I'm still surprised by how deeply people who have nothing to gain from neo-liberal economics have swallowed the view that extreme wealth is good because it trickles down to the poor. It doesn't. We now have greater concentrations of wealth in the UK than ever before – and more and more food banks for those who can't afford to eat.

Poststructuralism coincided with Marxism – and was, of course, heavily influenced by it – as an understanding of the way language and culture work to inculcate values. Specifically, when we learn our native tongue, we also learn what that language designates good or evil. Because it is passed down from one generation to the next,

language loads the dice in favour of past orthodoxy and against new ideas, which always have to struggle for acceptance.

RS: When you arrived at the University of Wales, Cardiff, it was even more Leavisite than Cambridge. How did this impact the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory, where you remained for a major portion of your academic career? What kind of intellectual atmosphere did you confront there in literary studies and how was it different from Cambridge? For instance, Frank Kermode found the atmosphere in Cambridge “disgraceful” especially after Colin MacCabe was denied tenure resulting from the dispute arising from the teaching of structuralism at the university.

CB: Yes, post-MacCabe Cambridge was disgraceful but nothing like as claustrophobic as the Cardiff I found in 1975. Cambridge is a big place, relatively, and progressive values can always find a corner to survive in. But Cardiff was very reluctant to make a space for someone like me. On the other hand, because there was every danger that my ideas would contaminate the student body, they didn’t give me much teaching to do. That left me free to develop organizational skills in the trade union, and write the books I hoped would challenge the prevailing orthodoxy. For many years I was the only woman in the English department. Terence Hawkes gradually became an ally and then Chris Weedon arrived in the German Department. It was the advent of Christopher Norris that finally convinced us that between the four of us we had the makings of a research centre in 1989 as a way of securing autonomy for ourselves and our plans. Sustaining the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory was unbelievably hard work – but worth every minute of it. At last we were teaching what we believed to students who wanted to learn what we had to offer, and welcoming visiting speakers who talked about topics that mattered. You were one of them, I remember, and your talk was extremely well received in an atmosphere of shared values.

RS: Yes indeed. That was a very enriching visit, especially meeting a stimulating person like you. Some of what was discussed then comes to my mind now. While one is speaking to an academic audience in a lecture theatre, I often wonder what would be the

implications of a post-humanist cultural criticism that shifts the function of criticism towards an intellectual and political confrontation with the world. What do you think? Would you agree with Terry Eagleton who feels that approaches like New Criticism, postmodernism and poststructuralism are merely “recipes for inaction.” I believe that you have been a great advocate of close readings of a text.

CB: I don’t agree that poststructuralism is a recipe for inaction. Like all theoretical positions, it can take the place of analysis and become an end in itself, but that is a betrayal of its possibilities. At its heart, poststructuralism concerns itself with the way language works to shape attitudes and values. The only form of action I can imagine that chooses to ignore the way people think, and why they think what they do, is violence. In democratic countries violence has no place in the political process. Instead, we need to persuade and convince – to be aware, precisely, of the way others distort meaning to mask, deflect attention, delude, or challenge.

RS: Cultural Studies theorists like Bourdieu emphasize that art is split between elitist high art and popular ‘low.’ Do you think that artistic traditions can be relatively free of economic determinism? Some Marxists do stand up for the autonomy of art and its realistic scrutiny of capitalism. Do you think that art is capable of stepping back from a realistic examination of ideology of the ruling class so as to create a visionary world that proposes some form of an oppositional discourse?

CB: I have never found it useful to dwell on the distinction between high and low art. I think film studies unpicked that contrast pretty thoroughly as soon as it started taking blockbusters seriously. Where would we put Hitchcock, say, or the Coen Brothers? In our own field, what about Dickens, a hugely popular writer in his day, who has been on the syllabus, even so, throughout my lifetime? Jane Austen now has her own cult status way beyond the educational establishment. And then there’s Shakespeare, who made money and has continued to be a commercial success ever since the theatres reopened in 1660. I read with interest Hema Dahiya’s essay in

dialog 25, arguing that Shakespeare was not just a tool of imperialism in colonial Bengal but also a source of stimulus and pleasure.

As for oppositional stances, a great deal depends on interpretation. I was brought up in the wake of E. M. W. Tillyard to regard Shakespeare as an old reactionary. I don't any longer. The history plays can be seen as critical of the monarchy; *Julius Caesar* can be read as republican. Conversely, a dramatist such as Berthold Brecht can strain every sinew to make his audiences sit up and think sceptically about the way their society works, but critics continue to reduce his plays to character studies.

I don't want to be misunderstood. I don't believe that any reading is as good as any other, or that criticism can legitimately make whatever it likes of any work. But meanings are not always singular or fixed and most combinations of words are open to more than one interpretation. To that extent, art's oppositional stance is to some degree in the lap of the critic. We can draw attention to what is radical in any work, since it's so readily overlooked. We can, in other words, read constructively, to draw out in the works we study their potential to change minds.

RS: In your very challenging book, *A Future for Criticism*, you have emphasized the neglect of the pleasures of fiction in contemporary criticism. How does this approach reconcile with the overpowering interest in theory that we have seen in the last few decades? Could you explain briefly what led you to the writing of this book and how it lays out a road map for the future of English Studies and criticism?

CB: Here's a confession: I am tired of piety. Conventional criticism has been preoccupied with three issues: value judgements, authors' lives and moral instruction. In other words, critics have been busy making league tables and hierarchies of their favourite works; they have sought explanations of texts in the minds of their authors; and they have insisted that great art is good for us or, conversely, that specific texts are bad for us because they encourage wickedness. In my view, the first of these activities is a waste of time: critics can

find material to interest them in works nowhere near the top of any league table. The second evades the issue: if the text is difficult, no amount of research among diaries and letters will help us do justice to its complexity. And the third comes in only because the other two are ultimately so lightweight. English departments find themselves on the defensive, and come up with ethics to make themselves look serious. In my view, if we want ethics, the philosophers do it better.

As I've suggested, our shared concern is with language and the way it works. Specifically, we discuss fiction composed of language and the distinguishing feature of fiction is that it gives pleasure, or it did to someone, once. (I use the term *fiction* to include drama and poetry and to avoid the value judgement that *literature* seems to bring with it.) My project in the book was not to promote pleasure itself (if people don't get it, they don't, and nothing I say will change that). Instead, it was that in all our solemn, diligent and pious researches we have failed to come up with a satisfactory account of that pleasure, or the feature or features of the texts we study that make (or once made) people want to read them.

Let me put it another way. I remember an announcement on a railway station that our train was facing long delays and we might not reach our destination for several hours. My immediate reaction was to count the remaining pages of my novel, only to realize that I was due to finish it shortly. Fortunately, the station bookstall was still open and my problem was solved. Many people have a work of fiction beside their bed; at any given time, a lot of people are in the process of reading a story; people flock to plays and films; if nothing else, many of us watch fiction on TV. And yet English departments, where we study fiction in a protected environment, can't explain this because we're too busy insisting that what we read is doing us good. What would a visiting Martian make of that, I wonder? It's time we turned our attention to the question of what draws us to fiction in the first place. After all, if it doesn't appeal (or didn't once) its message remains unheard.

RS: You wrote *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* in 1994. I mention this because almost twenty years after that you again

emphasize the notion of desire. You argue for a return to all the “formal components of the text” which incites loss and pleasure by drawing our attention to the cultural specific in form and its universal appeals to the human urge to “bridge the gap” of desire between our “real, biological, organic” beings and the “symbolic, the place of meaning and consciousness.” Will you then say that the work of the critic is also that of a psychoanalyst who has the faculty of explaining the pleasure principle?

CB: I place desire among the categories we have neglected. My main interest in 1994 was in sexual desire and its place in fiction. How many accounts of Shakespeare’s comedies look for moral truths while ignoring the fact that they’re love stories? But, even then, I was conscious of what we might call textual desire, or the longing for stories, or for more of the story we’re currently reading. That desire seems to go back a long way, if we can trust epic accounts of heroic tales told after dinner in Homer and *Beowulf*. Desire is ultimately the desire for pleasure, so any theory of pleasure needs to begin with desire, and to allow for the fact that complete gratification isn’t always delivered, or not in the form we thought we wanted. Some of the best reads are open-ended (and I cited *Gone with the Wind* as a non-canonical example). In other words, they keep desire in play, a state which can be pleasurable in itself.

Psychoanalysis comes into it, since that is where desire is most thoroughly explored, and Jacques Lacan in particular seems to me to help. He proposes a model of the little human animal cut off by language from the direct, im-mediate experience of things and sensations. In learning our mother tongue, we submit to the range of meanings that already exists outside us, the conventions and convictions of “our” culture – ours only to the degree that we go along with its already established world picture. Speakers of more than one language will perhaps recognize something of this as they move from one to another. Language is useful, obviously, but its acquisition also entails a loss, creating a gap that we seek to plug in many ways. What most concerns us in English departments is the attempt to fill the gap between being and meaning with more and

more language, or more and more stories and poems. They won't ultimately do the trick but they can seem to come close, and that's when they deliver a pleasure like no other.

But I'm not so ambitious as to ask for a theory of human nature. What we can do in English departments, in my view, is to draw on whatever resources are available to us, including psychoanalysis, to account for the specific ways fiction enlists desire, including suspense, the promise of inhabiting a different world, a provocation to think differently, or the hope of touching in words that lost realm of unmediated things and sensations.

Our job is not to supplant psychoanalysis, or become psychoanalysts, but to borrow from them where we can to focus on textual desire and textual pleasure.

RS: Terry Eagleton has examined the binary opposition between writing seriously and humorously, and succeeds in overcoming "the most bourgeois of all assumptions that the intellect is deadly serious and unpleasurable, and that pleasure is essentially frivolous and non-intellectual." You have recently written and thought deeply on the question of pleasure – for instance in viewing tragedy – and you do not agree with the conventional arguments that emphasize the role of the playgoer more than that of the play, or as you write, "on the intellectual process after the event." You apparently are of the view that "we impoverish criticism, nonetheless, when we fail to reflect on the nature of the power that is exerted in the moment when we hear and see them by words and images combined as stories." Could you elaborate?

CB: My concern has been that the theories of tragedy I've come across mostly seem to moralize the experience of playgoers: once again, there's a desperate desire to make fiction do us good. Aristotle thought it did us good because it let off steam; later theorists have stressed the reflection we were supposed to undertake after we'd left the theatre. Critics are paid to reflect afterwards, but what about playgoers with no professional investment? Are we to suppose they don't get any pleasure from the plays – and films – they pay to see if they don't rack their brains about them after the event? To

my mind the pleasure has much more to do with the way words and images gesture towards feelings or thoughts we don't or can't normally talk about, because ordinary language doesn't seem to reach them. A work can find ways of pointing to what is otherwise hard to name, touching, as I proposed, that visceral realm we once inhabited, or dream we did. What are the great themes? Love, loss, death. Everyday language doesn't seem to do them justice: it's only in fiction (in the broad sense of that term) that we seem to come close to finding a vocabulary for them.

RS: How then would you view the teacher of English in contemporary times when we see an ever widening divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities? You would agree that theory must not become self-generating and should be at the service of certain types of literary practice and not become progressively more uneasy when it begins to approach the texts that are part of routine academic study.

CB: If theory doesn't affect the way we read, it's pretty useless; as far as I'm concerned. I can't see much joy in describing what other people think. What's interesting about the figures who have exerted most influence on the way we work is that they are all very close readers. There have been endless summaries of what Roland Barthes is supposed to have believed but no one, to my knowledge, has ever emulated the fascinating combination of micro-reading and macro-reading he undertook in *S/Z*. I defy anyone to come up with a more provocative reading of *Antigone* than Lacan's in *Seminar 7*, but then psychoanalysts listen closely to their analysands as a matter of course. Jacques Derrida made his name in the first instance by his minute attention to Rousseau, Saussure and Levi-Strauss in *Of Grammatology*. I like the phrase in your editorial in *dialog 25*: theory is "an invigorating device," not a master but an asset to draw on in order to read more subtly.

In my view, we were never going to stand up to the claims of science by going on about value judgements, authors' intentions and the ethical uses of literature. Scientists are looking for the laws that brought our universe into being, not to mention a cure for cancer.

But they couldn't do that without access to language, or, more precisely, signifying practice, since mathematics and logic are also "languages" in that sense. Our job resembles theirs to the degree that we're all concerned with the relationship between signifying practice and the world – and the fact that they don't always or necessarily match each other. One of the major scientific developments, mapping the genome, concerns what human beings are, what we have in common, and the differences between us. Couldn't the same be said for the study of culture? Language, or the inscription of culture, also exercises a defining influence on what human beings are or might be, the common ground and the differences.

I know there's a school of thought that treats genes as determining and cultural difference as trivial, or merely instrumental. That position is just wrong: culture plays its part too. But we let the determinists get away with it if we stay at the shallow end, fretting over whether this novel or poem is better or worse than that one.

RS: Are you then not proposing a theory of pleasure, though you deny it on the ground that your interest as a critic is deeply textual, which draws attention to the particular features in the text that "initially caught the attention of some part of the public on the basis that it pleased them?" In your recent book, for example, you speak of the English curriculum and how the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK has defined the nationwide framework of English Studies emphasizing the usual focus on authors, global literatures in English, genre and literary history. But you appear somewhat uncomfortable with the fact that there is "not one word in the entire document about accounting for or analyzing the pleasure that sustains reading and playgoing."

CB: I'm not so much putting forward a fully formed theory of pleasure; instead, I want us all to give the matter more thought. I have the impression that individual teachers of English are becoming more and more specialized, encouraged by increasing surveillance to keep their heads down among the details. I want us to raise our

gaze from time to time to ask about the role of our field in culture. And we needn't apologize when we do. There has never been, as far as anyone knows, a society that didn't have songs and stories. What answers do we have to the question why that is? The evolutionary psychologists are all too ready to tell us that fiction is purely functional (love stories encourage pair bonding, for instance). Heaven help us! Surely, we can do better than that? And we can begin by thinking about what draws people to fiction (including poetry, of course).

RS: We would have to agree in the light of what you say that criticism at the present moment fundamentally lacks that wider potential in which to make theory appropriate, and consequently limits itself above all to the theoretical rather than to the political. I understand that the "philosophic critique" of Kantian aesthetics – what Paul de Man calls the "aesthetic ideology" – governs the humanistic study of literature in contemporary criticism. But while some theories have survived because of their undoubted intellectual vigour, what we will have to fall back upon is a body of theory that will more resolutely make a difference.

CB: The discussion you and I are having – our dialogue – has taken us a long way from politics and I'm glad you bring me back to that issue. To my mind, politics is about power. In a globalized world, power is increasingly unequally – and unjustly – distributed. And in democratic societies it is maintained by promoting the view that the way things are is also the way they have to be. You know the mantras: 'in the end, the market delivers what people want'; 'capitalism suits human nature'; 'change is impossible'. Well, if there's one thing the study of fiction dislodges, it's the idea that there's only one way to organize the world, or only one set of conventions to live by. The societies and values depicted in *Gilgamesh*, *The Odyssey*, *Paradise Lost* are not mine; they're not even very like mine. And they don't offer us now models of how things should be (perish the thought). But they do show that things change. Even reading Anthony Trollope throws into relief the way values have altered since the nineteenth century, for better or worse.

And if they have changed so much and so fast, they can change again. We just need to want them to, and to persuade others to want them to.

It might look as if my concern with pleasure is at odds with my politics. But there is a link. Fiction expands horizons in all the ways I've indicated: giving names to thoughts and feelings we suppress from day-to-day for want of a vocabulary to discuss them; depicting unfamiliar worlds; provoking new ideas. But it can't do that unless it appeals to people in the first place. The way fiction coaxes us to read it is not separable, in the end, from what it cajoles us to believe. I want to understand the persuasive power of the writings we study and how and why they can, if we read them constructively, change minds.

RS: Let me ask you the final question. As the writer of *Critical Practice*, the book that is now universally read by students, would you agree that the future of theory lies in an aesthetic experience enjoyed cognitively? I fear that as most theorists are institution-based they fail in their contribution to the larger non-academic audience they wish to change. This remains a problem for the future of criticism and for theory. How then have we moved into the moment of post theory?

CB: I like your formulation, although I'd hesitate to use the word 'aesthetic'. The term brings with it all sorts of Kantian baggage, particularly judgements of value as between the sublime (grand and misty) and the beautiful (fit for curtain material). And that in turn takes us back, if we're not careful, to those tiresome hierarchies of great works. But pleasure enjoyed cognitively would do it perfectly!

I do strongly believe that we need to address a wider audience. The surveillance culture (promotion based on research, research assessment, quality assurance, etc.) militates against that, as do the habits inculcated by the PhD as the last exam. So it will be an uphill struggle for many to produce their required quota of scholarly work and address a wider public in addition. However, in my personal case, the problem has solved itself. I have now retired and I'm free

as a bird from surveillance of all kinds. The challenge that faces me now is to write in a way that will engage readers outside universities. I think that means I have to find a way to discuss ideas in a manner that gives – forgive me – pleasure!

In conclusion, I've very much enjoyed our exchanges. You have made me reflect on connections that too easily become unclear and ideas that lose their sharpness as they grow habitual. It's been – oh dear, there it is again – a pleasure!

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POETRY

TEJ GROVER

Sentences

From under the table, rotting our feet, they would surface where sometimes the pages happened to be.

All syntaxes of being turned their faces to trees that still smouldered in our memory twined in creepers. We were beginning to get drunk on the trees, on the soft breezes that arose in them when a thought but crossed our minds.

Falling asleep in the blue grass we were beginning to get drunk on the crows circling the blue sky.

As if the floss of silk cotton loosened from the tree had drifted into black.

[Translated from Hindi by the poet.]

Poems of the Path

[For Satish Kumar whose book *You are Therefore I Am* led to these poems]

1

Now this is the name it has

In the shadow of this rock
neither any fear
nor could anyone say
that in the flowers of the bushes
the form of blue bells
is not seen anymore

Look,
in the sunlight in view
how clean they appear—
its black stones

On the sidewalks
every object grows its own tall hood

Above,
in the blue of the sky,
clouds are bleached white
like antonyms.

[Translated from Hindi by the poet and Arlene Zide]

2

Come to think of it
and every meaning is its own opposite

Every word is close at hand
but so close
you can't see

In the smoke of war
someone says –
if there's no water
no one can smile

He has forgotten it behind his waterpot,
like a stray word
on these black stones

[Translated from Hindi by the poet and Arlene Zide]

3

If someone says
he has just left two unstitched whites
on these black stones

and a waterpot
filled with sunlight

that clouds drift along
like synonyms of white

that the word water
walks farther away
from the word thirst –

No one appears on the scene
to cross the path

wandering lost in the tale for miles –

the one clad in a white robe

[Translated from Hindi by the poet]

4

*Supatra** — a worthy chalice
someone says

A thought takes root

I
am not that
which has been uttered

On these black stones
for the first time

a rain of grief.

**Supatra*: A deserving chalice/bowl/vessel: a suitable person.

[Translated from Hindi by the poet and Arlene Zide]

5

So
who is this 'I' then
and why handed over just to me?

It doesn't get made by 'me'
a single
pure image of 'I'
on these black stones

If an image comes up
that feels the thirst
it fades away
with just one sip of water.

[Translated from Hindi by the poet and Arlene Zide]

6

So
they began to inhabit the same thirst

(If this can be done in these lines)

It was the time
when on the path of black stones
there was water in the animal's eyes

No surface
good enough for reflection

No source of shadow
but the body

In our water bowls
nothing aside from touch —

that's what they thought

the ones clad in white

In their pages
some few words opened up —

“For thy sake there is nothing that cannot be granted.”

[Translated from Hindi by the poet and Arlene Zide]

How Many Times in a Day

How many times in a day after all do I feel
this is the last moment

How many times, kissing your eyes
are past lives to go flashing by

Two green grass snakes endlessly inhabit my dream
Who are they, Assu, my child
peeping from the pocket of my shoulder bag
what do they seem to be asking for

Who is it, mother of mine
that comes seeking my love at this hour

In search of a body,
why would sorrow approach us
yet again

Why am I talking so much

[Translated from Hindi by the poet and Arlene Zide]

Reflection Poems

1

In the water
a peacock feather falls
on the reflection of the moon.

2

That's all right
Let it be just a reflection
However much there is of you in the water
I can quiver that much!

3

I touched the reflection

The earth moved aside
lifting the shadow
from God's skin.

[Translated from Hindi by the poet and Arlene Zide]

ANAMIKA

Grandmothers are the Salt of the Earth

"Jeernani Vastrani....."

The body is a mere attire –
This bit of the *Bhagwad Geetha*
Hit my ears in Grade Three.
Grandfather had breathed his last
Papa sat weeping beneath his breath,
Like a vest drenched in sweat,
One with his skin, I hugged him tight
"Why weep"? I heard someone say,
"The soul goes for a change of apparel when
it wears away."

As a housewife now I know, for sure,
Tattered clothes are more functional
You can use them as a mop and a duster.
Rugged saris serve as decent stoles,
And sometimes they are made into dolls.
Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Sweeter still the sight of
The privacy of clothes dissolving,
Going public, free for all!
Degraded and yet so functional.

Old women too are robes of Queen Razia
 gone to the actors of a farce.
Functional, I said and I mean it,
 With an old woman around, your kitchen can
 produce
Exquisite cuisines for your boss.
 You save on the expense of a seamstress, Sir,
The house is in order, spic and span and
 You get a baby-sitter, par excellence.
They keep up all night
 Attending to the babies' tiny-winy needs,
Weaving quintessential wisdom of herbs
 In the inner fold of their deepest memory.
Functional and yet so out of place,
 Not a corner for them in the whole sphere.
Hurrying out of drawing room when guests arrive
 They almost apologize
For living too long.
 Jeernani Vastrani
Old women are the salt of the earth.

[Translated from Hindi by the poet.]

An Unborn Daughter of a Minister's Young Mistress

Is it morning already?
Morning means
A conscious crawling back
To the wide world,
So let's get up,
Pick up clothes
And gather limbs,
Gather all that we are

Made up of –
Thoughts and elements,
Words and silence translucent,
Dreams – let loose like horses –
We must now gather up
To ride in directions diverse.

Look, our unborn daughter,
Wakes up too.
Absent
As the trace of tears in eyes
That cried all night –
She is there,
And she isn't –
Our little unborn daughter.
Let me knit
Opposite loops of your flurried breaths
Into a baby sweater.
Careful, man,
Your eyes are spoonful of honey for my daughter,
For God's sake
Do not spill it over.
To the fawn she has lent her eyes,
And to the oyster her ears,
Turn to the Infinite
And look for her,
Look, how she shivers,
Hold her tight
Like cuddly impossibilities.
Playing hide and seek with life
She is there and nowhere, fading in thin air
Like love, and life and desire!

Ode to Medicinal Herbs

An Ayurvedic doctor, my neighbor,
Sits like a Buddha in his lonely chamber
keeps smiling all day.
We share the same newspaper,
and often have the morning tea together.
That day after the usual terrorist attack he sighed and
said
“In this patented world
of short expiring capsules and cures
These medicinal herbs are the only ones
with no expiry date.
Seeking permission from the mighty Doctor
Mahakaal, the Lord of time,
These tender herbs roar in your deeper folds,
And diseases disappear
Like the herd of feeble deer,”
An Ayurvedic doctor, my neighbor, can
Examine wounds in the dark.
He says, “All wounds are aglow
with a tender realization,
and with one soft pat on their back
they willingly subside and go.”

Yesterday he pointed out to a creeper
“Look intently, these creepers are no creepers,” he said
“They are mighty mares, swift and agile.
They gallop and carry us beyond all distresses.
They are mares in the battlefield, they help us fight
diseases.
Though they are selling off their natal home,
Jungles and banks of rivers to weird foreign investors,
Herbs survive still in nooks and corners.
Look at Tulsi, grandmother of gods, she bore us all,
All cures are at her beck and call

They emerge out of her with the gracious gait
of cows emerging out of a cool cowshed.
Every morning, my neighbor,
and little known Ayurvedic doctor,
folds back my newspaper
and prays for the wounds of the hurt.
“Hey goddess of medicinal herbs,
Please bless the herbs I’ve just dug out
From the margins of my fields
Bless them with rasa,
May they soak and caress
the crackling back
of Mother Earth
And quietly spread all over.

SUNAINA JAIN

A Fragile Bond

Exchanging formal cold looks
at the funeral
of a distant cousin

Years rolled by
memories faded
Tightened knots
find no way to untie
The verbal collage
of randomly shared thoughts
dissolving into oblivion.
The childhood tricks
bunking school
Sharing room space
and dreams with wings
Bickering over trivial things
Yet for each other, standing tall
as a protective wall

Roads diverge
world's ways strange
They shared the same womb

to enter the world
of mirrors and facades
Kindred souls
till the little tongues grumbled
and wobbly feet fumbled
in sheer innocence

Now, a fragile bond
Only past moorings remain
of reminiscences fond

Ever thought
why do love,
brotherhood,
and companionship
As a matter-of-fact
many relations
wither and lose their glow?
Who is the invisible culprit
with a tip-toe?

They say old is gold
Then why do relations
get dusty with grime and
sometimes lose their warmth
with the horses of time?

Saga of a Tree

Why don't you look at me now?
Because I am withered?
It is not the age
that has crushed me
nor the massive stroke of brutal axe
No. . . .

My inside screams alone
wanting to share my anguish
It is the scar of indifference
of loneliness, of isolation
that has crippled my sanity

Once I stood
tall and proud
with my branches
swaying in abundance
In my splendid grandeur
I blushed
with purple blossoms
in early spring
Sometimes humbled
to allow passers-by
to admire me
living in my opulent comfort
of having the privilege
due to my accretion
as the largest magnolia tree
Humming the music of life
as the wind passed through
the fields of wavy grain
my faintest notes would
turn into a melodious warble
Churning narratives
embedded deep within
seeping in through my roots
Yes. . . . I am a witness
to countless love sagas
tales of deception
train of impulses
forces of resistance
A sage I have become
singing paeans and dirges

hymns of praise or tributes
with a refrain
A sheltering shady comfort
I have been through ages
But now
standing aloof
with no one to spare
a glance
I ruminate over my fate
All my fellow friends
have weathered
the fangs of greed
Many succumbed
Replaced by other ones
more profitable for owners
I withstood
Now I want rest and peace
not the agitated fervour
of my youthful times
Like a grandfather
I want to spill out
stories of distant past
to my children
Alas! No one comes
and I ponder my grief. . .

Review Article

Subverting Prevalent Perceptions of Hindi Dalit Literature

Sarah Beth Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2014. Pages 264, Rs. 695.

The wide range of mentors from different scholastic backgrounds guiding Sarah Beth Hunt's study, and the family-like association with "all the Hindi Dalit writers" she duly acknowledges, prepare the reader for a well-researched book on the growth of Hindi Dalit Literature, with its ideological ramifications emerging from the Hindi belt, specifically from the state of Uttar Pradesh.

The book draws upon three major arguments; it first subverts existing perceptions of Hindi Dalit literature as a sudden phenomenon stemming from the Dalit political assertion of the 1980s. The second argument asserts the significance of discerning the important

distinction between the pamphlet and autobiographical fields of Dalit writing. The third traces the outreach of Dalit literature in challenging the Hindi literary discourse and its thrust on 'art for art's sake' since its institutionalization in the 1920s.

The opening narrative of the celebratory visibility of a community, which has outgrown and shed its baptized nomenclature of 'Harijan,' and donned a more distinct identity through the metropolitan celebration of Ambedkar Jayanti, documents an epoch-making event. What is pertinent about Hunt's study from the outset is the irony, spelt out directly or stated implicitly: "It was Ambedkar Jayanti – the most important contemporary festival of the Dalit community. From every angle, one's vision collided with the colourful portrait of the most beloved Dalit leader, Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, smiling from framed pictures. . . . As one of the most marginalised and oppressed communities in India, it has taken decades of struggle for Dalits to celebrate their identity in such a public way. *The continual marginalisation of Dalits is perhaps no more apparent than on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti, as Dr Ambedkar, Father of the Indian Constitution, continues to be commemorated only by members of the Dalit Community.* Celebrated next to the Indian Parliament at the heart of the nation's capital, Ambedkar Jayanti symbolically represents the community's fight to claim a central place in the nation."

The role of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in politicizing Dalit identity, and the contribution of Hindi Dalit Literature in critiquing and creating space for a new literary movement, are the major parameters on which the study grows – accentuating the paradox of political proximity and distance assumed by the writers from time to time. The profusion of 'literature' on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti served to juxtapose two specifically different genres of Hindi Dalit Literature – the 'autobiographic' and the 'pamphlet.' The crux of the argument of Hunt's study is to demolish claims made by writers of autobiographical writing that all Hindi Dalit Literature began with them in the 1980s, the Marathi Literature of the Dalit Panthers being their source of inspiration. She brings into focus the 'Pamphlet' literature of the 1920s in North India that

was published in the form of small, inexpensive pamphlets by Dalit presses and distributed to an exclusively Dalit audience at community festivals and political meetings. Over a period of time, Dalit literary production has apparently evolved in direct relation to Dalit institutional politics. However, the co-relation often remains complex, especially in situations where Dalit political parties have “joined in coalition” with right-wing Hindu parties.

Hunt’s style adds tangibility to the historical beginnings of Dalit Literature in Hindi. Her research goes back to the Lucknow family home of Chandarika Prasad ‘Jigyasu,’ one of the earliest Dalit writers and publishers of North India. A series of visits and interviews with Brahmanand, Jigyasu’s son, who is carrying the literary tradition forward, are central to the methodology used in constructing the thesis as evident from Hunt’s statement: “[W]e entered ... the back of the house – the centre of early Dalit publishing activities in Hindi, from the 1930s until the mid-1960s ... stacks of newly-printed pamphlets stood alongside the small modern press Brahmanand now uses to republish many of his father’s most popular pamphlets.” In other words, the book makes a claim for the special role of Dalit Pamphlet Writings in circulating a discourse that contested mainstream Hindi literature in the public sphere. Hunt also gives a detailed account of the value of Jati histories in the Kshatriya reform movements up till the early twentieth century.

The study is rich in inter-textual references ranging from Raghuvanshi’s *Shri Chanwar Purana* (1910) to Ramnarayan Rawat’s *Reconsidering Untouchability* (2011), and helps in understanding how the desired effect of registering the Scheduled Community as ‘Kshatriya’ in the colonial classification system, was far-reaching in the assertion of ‘untouchable’ identity. In keeping with the structure of the book which traverses through multiple sub-sections characterized by identifying a seminal moment, period or person, the reader can scan or read intensely. Thus the interview of the Dalit activist, Cheddi Lal Sathi, is an example of the methodology used to explore resources which trace and reveal the junctions between various strands of ideological influences on the writings that emerged specifically in Uttar Pradesh. Ambedkar’s

book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957) represented a new turn in Dalit writing and activism. Other activists of Sathi's generation, namely Bhagwan Das, Sundarlal Sagar and Buddh Sharan Hans strengthened the discourse through a network of privately owned presses. The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party and the increasing force of right-wing Hindutva politics across north India have helped in the endurance of the vibrant networks on the one hand and created new institutional support in the form of *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* and *Dalit Sahitya Akademi* on the other.

The close connection between readership and the writings is another important aspect of Hunt's book. In general, the dominance of BSP in Uttar Pradesh from the late 1990s has facilitated the distribution of Dalit literature. Several decades of BSP activism across urban and rural north India has had a major impact on the way individuals from Scheduled Caste *jatis* view their identity as 'Dalits' through the proliferation of Dalit identity and a governing political consciousness of protesting against caste oppression that have created growing readership and forums for distribution.

In the process of tracing the achievements of Dalit pamphlet writing, Hunt also analyses the works of Badri Narayan who has established how Dalit writers have introduced Dalit heroes and heroines into the nationalist historical archive as a means of inserting themselves into the nation's narrative. The significant outcome has been listed as pushing "the beginnings of Indian history" back in time to an age of *Adi* Hindus of the Aryan invasion, reinterpreting *Ramrajya* not as ideal Hindu rule but as an age of misrule, replacing the traditional 1857 heroes with Dalit ones, and finally, by redefining the 'Father of the Nation.'

Citing Stephen Butterfield on the close parallel between Dalit and Black literature, the book thus documents the view: "In black autobiography, the unity of the personal and the mass voice remains a dominant tradition. . . . [T]he complex relationship between the individual protagonist and the larger community is a way both Dalits and American Blacks have used, with autobiography as a means of making a broader political statement." Hunt asserts that the

autobiography has played a vital role in creating a discourse on oppression in the larger literary sphere exposing the continuing caste discrimination and Dalit subjugation in Indian society.

Hindi Dalit Literature is the product of a laboriously worked-out research thesis; though the autobiographical writings of women have not received enough analysis, an interview with Ramanika Gupta gives insight into inter- and intra caste-gendered politics. It primarily provides a space for articulation and participating "in the project of middle-class belonging." Hunt's study defines how this participation "challenges established notions of middle-class modernity" and therein lies the socio-cultural thrust of the work.

SHASHI KHURANA

Of God, Queen, Free Trade, and yes, of Opium

Amitav Ghosh, *Flood of Fire*. Gurgaon: Hamish Hamilton (Penguin), 2015. Pages 616, Rs 799.

Through the odour of dust and dung he recalled the perfumed scents of Mrs Burnham's boudoir. So this was the mud in which such luxuries were rooted. (*Flood of Fire* 271)

Amitav Ghosh's *Flood of Fire*, the third and conclusive title of his *Ibis* trilogy, is all set to go down in literary annals as an epic reconstruction of early colonial history of India, as also an exploration of subterranean connections that linked India to the infamous Anglo-Chinese opium conflict played out in a theatre of war thousands of nautical miles away. Ghosh imagines a sweeping panorama of the seamier side of the nineteenth-century world history by writing a novel that assiduously explores the Indian connection to these wars – a novel teeming with characters who wilfully as well as by quirks of fate get inextricably mired in this web of new cross-connections. Two characteristics that have given a defining edge to Ghosh's oeuvre – the epiphanic discovery of hidden connections between disparate historical events and his endeavour

to view history from the “upside down” end with a finely polished lens of the subaltern perspective – are both luxuriantly pervasive in this final instalment of the trilogy.

Ghosh’s progress with the third title, while being linear and culminating in the Opium Wars (1839-42), is nevertheless viewed from multiple perspectives, and in so doing triggers a plethora of denouements and closures. The book moves like a magnifying glass over a landscape that the trilogy had earlier mapped, building on characters that had barely been introduced in the earlier books, while abandoning some others who had hitherto enjoyed the limelight. At the heart of Ghosh’s strength as a novelist of our times is his ability to tell these stories and breathe life into these characters – from ensconcing them in a socio-cultural perspective with the detailed eye of an anthropologist to endowing them with an idiolect, and imagining their inner landscape fraught with conflicts, struggles, loves and personal tidings. These are not characters one has merely read about but people one has met and known in flesh and blood, spent time with, perhaps aboard a nineteenth century schooner, at a pace that mimics a long distance voyage.

Ghosh fleshes up the otherwise marginal characters of Kesri, Shireen Bai, Capt Mee and Raju, and casts others like Mrs Burnham in a light so new that it is difficult to recognise her from her earlier *avatar* of a *pucca memsahib*. But the near abandonment of Paulette is most heartbreaking. The reader would have liked the feisty, resourceful botanist to make important personal and professional strides but herein she lurks no more than a shadow of her former self. Many a tale that had hung in balance, many a spark that had been lit in the earlier books, is explored fully and brought to fruition by Ghosh in this final instalment: the disgraced raja Neel Rattan Halder’s heart-wrenching reunion with his son Raju in far-off China, Shireen’s acceptance of her late husband Bahram Modi’s secret marriage to a Chinese boat woman (symbolic of several such illegitimate marriages that were secretly solemnized overseas), her subsequent and final reconciliation with Bahram’s bastard child Ah-Fatt, her coming to terms with her desire for Mr Karabedian, the meeting of the one-time lovers – Capt Mee and Mrs Burnham –

culminating in their tragic end, and the troubled relationship of Paulette and the mulatto American shipper Zachary who evolves from a reclusive budgerow repairman into a scheming opium trader.

And similarly, the many machinations within the lobby of influential traders led by the wily Mr Burnham that build up to the Anglo-Chinese Opium wars are explored by Ghosh on a gargantuan scale. Ghosh showcases the numerous naval and infantry insurrections that collectively culminated in the brute show of force to browbeat China into accepting not only the use of opium but also, ironically, in inflicting all of this in the name of glorious entities like God, Church, Queen and free trade. By exposing the underbelly of nineteenth-century commerce, Burnham is a symbol of the "respectable" trader class which had begun to orchestrate the national politics of England as also the terms of international conflict.

Mrs Burnham is the abettor, the "tip-top" Victorian *memsahib*, whose assiduousness in keeping her sprawling house in order mimics the larger "order" her husband imposes on colonial trade practices in India. However, the many skeletons in her dainty mahogany closet come tumbling out and reveal her to be as utterly fallible as it is possible for mortals to be. Even though by the end Zachary evolves into a little version of Mr Burnham himself, his adulterous relationship with Mrs Burnham based solely on a primeval physical desire that they both cannot deny has an elemental pull to it and comes wrapped in Victorian double speak. Her refrain to Zachary in her boudoir that "a plain old fashioned stew can always be improved by an occasional chutney," and "Oh Mr Reid, Mr Reid! You have made a jellybee of your poor Mrs Burnham," definitely have connotations other than culinary. The Victorian double entendre is just one display of the masterful reconstruction of a veritable carnival of historical language registers, dialects and pidgins that Ghosh masterfully displays. He effortlessly navigates between Kesri Singh's Bhojpuri and Mrs Burnham's hobson-jobson, from Baboo Nob Kissin's comic Babu English to Ah-Fatt's Cantonese cadence and Shireen Bai's Gujrati-Parsi phraseology, to playfully capture the fascinating effect colonial and cultural encounters had on languages.

The heroes of the book are undeniably the subaltern soldiers of Bengal Native Infantry: the sepoys, the pipers and the fifiers, the lascars, the banjee boys and the camp followers. Further, the regimented standards applied to these motley groups of men drawn from the Indian hinterland was the colonial way of dealing with the many complex strands of Indian society – casteism, regionalism and varied belief systems. The British attempted to hold all “waywardness” in place by imposing giant metal clips of discipline, the violation of which could lead to punitive measures such as court martial and also execution Ghosh constructs the structural ecology that sustained these regiments when they went out to battle in hostile conditions overseas. The British fought many a battle on the strength of soldiers drawn from the lands of their colonial conquests. In the midst of this theatre of war there is the absurd realization that the Anglo-Chinese Opium war on both sides was being fought not by the Chinese and the British respectively but by a majority of Indian soldiers – the “black aliens.” One owes it to Ghosh to highlight these brutal intricacies of war and what was an instance of one of the earliest known professional military organizations.

In the *Ibis* trilogy, written over a span of seven years, Ghosh has painstakingly but ambitiously reconstructed a lesser known aspect of world history from a perspective that has been traditionally silenced. He has not relied on readymade research; instead he has convincingly recreated a “brave new world” by using the wherewithal of authentic and diligent exploration absorbed into the tapestry of the novel. In this, he has taken a lot on his novelist shoulders and stands acquitted. Ghosh’s luxuriant *tour-de-force* provides one an indulgence akin to a seven-course meal, making most contemporary writing look like fast food.

SAKOON N. SINGH

Presenting Tagore to the World

Mohammad A. Quayum, ed. & trans. *Rabindranath Tagore: The Ruined Nest and Other Stories*. Kuala Lumpur: Silverfish, 2014. Pages 256, price unstated.

Although poetry dominates Tagore's oeuvre, he has left behind ninety-five short stories that exude fecund imagination and an impressive range of social concerns. The twenty short stories translated from Bengali into English in this anthology represent the quality and variety of Tagore's short stories. In Quayum's textual transmission of Tagore, we are assured of the collaboration of a native speaker of Bengali with a secure hold on English. Further, a biographical essay on Tagore and a comprehensive introduction offer a well-researched account of Tagore's personal and literary journey with its salient features and signposts. Fifteen stories of Quayum's collection were originally written during the immensely productive period of Tagore's life – the 'Shelidah period' – and are representative of Tagore's abiding themes, such as his espousal of women's education, the peasant's intolerable situation and the complexities of human relationship as well as his secular outlook and liberal stance on public issues. They also evoke the milieu of the Bengal Renaissance influenced by bilingual cultural collision.

The opening story, "The Postmaster" (first published in 1891), one of Tagore's widely acknowledged short masterpieces with multiple translations, is an embodiment of the writer's empathy for a poor, illiterate, young country girl, Ratan, who is faced with the creeping shadow of loneliness after the departure of a postmaster whose job brings him from urban Kolkata to Ulapur, an ordinary village. The stirrings of colonial modernity in the form of an indigo factory and a post office set the stage for the urban-rural encounter in this story. The Indian Post Office was established on 1 October 1837; by 1861 (the year Tagore was born), a total of 889 post offices had come up. The story unobtrusively suggests that the postal service in British India was part of the imperial rule.

Tagore's passionate realism in the story is punctuated by poignant scenes of raw emotion when Ratan hears from the postmaster that he has been transferred to Kolkata. To see how Quayum's version of the Bengali original stands in relation to another translation of this story into English, a passage from Krishna Dutta and Mary Lago may be cited:

After the postmaster had eaten his meal the small girl asked abruptly, 'Dada Babu, will you take me home with you?' The postmaster laughed, 'What a notion!' He did not consider it necessary to explain to the child why the proposal was so absurd. All night long, sleeping and waking, the orphan girl was haunted by the laughing reply, 'What a notion!' (1991: 30)

The same passage is rendered by Quayum thus:

On completion of his evening meal, Ratan asked the postmaster, "Dada Babu, Will you take me with you?" "How could I do that?" said the postmaster with a laugh. He never bothered to explain to the girl why it was not possible. Throughout the night, in her dream and wakefulness, the girl heard the cackling laugh of the postmaster and his curt reply, "How could I do that?" (56)

In Quayum's notion of the verbal function and equivalence, the paradigm of Tagore's mind for delineating the emotionally deficient man needs to be scanned, and hence his use of 'cackling' and 'curt' in the postmaster's response to the pre-adolescent girl's innocent expectation. On the other hand, in their discreetly purveyed version, Dutta and Lago have eschewed creative deviation.

The eponymous story in this collection, more like a novella entitled “The Ruined Nest” (*Nastanirh* 1901), also deals with a sensitive woman’s feelings of abandonment and unrequited love. Satyajit Ray’s favourite 1964 feature film, *Charulata* [“The Lonely Wife”] is based on this story. The narrative revolves around Charulata, an intelligent and gifted woman left to fend for herself because her husband, Bhupati, is addicted to his profession as the editor and publisher of his own English-language newspaper. Charulata enlists the intellectual companionship of Amal, Bhupati’s young cousin. Their mutual spell develops into a tender bond. However, Charulata’s fragile nest of happiness breaks when Amal gets married and leaves for London. Due to financial reasons, Bhupati’s newspaper business folds and, with his wife emotionally distraught in Amal’s absence, the ruined nest is devoid of even contrived reconciliation. The story is a moving portrayal of the emerging modern woman in upper-class Indian families and the piquant triangle formed by Bhupati, Charu and Amal is without any trace of prurience.

The original Bengali title, “*Nastanirh*” has been rendered by most English translators as “The Broken Nest”, but Quayum’s preference for the term “ruined” instead of “broken” or “fouled” ensures equipollence rather than bare equivalence between the source and the target texts. “Ruined” seems to be the closest English word to express what happens to the matrimonial relationship between Charu and Bhupati after the husband discovers the gravity of the secret relationship between Charu and Amal. The story has a parallel with Tagore’s personal life in which Charu’s counterpart, Kadambari Devi committed suicide (Bhattacharya 2011: 72). Clinton B. Silly, a Tagore critic, is of the view that “The Ruined Nest” could be read “as a *histoire a clef*, a translation from real life, a story keyed into real-life events.”

Tagore did not subscribe to photographic realism or just copying the actual events. The palpable data of social facts is lavishly leavened with imagination. Crucially, in addition, there is an ethical dimension to his realism in these short stories in that the plebeian elements of society are sympathetically portrayed. While the

complexity of human nature and human relationships forms the mainstay of these stories, Tagore also delineates the socio-economic concerns of his time that resonate even today in some of his short stories namely, “Kabuliwala”, “Punishment”, “Imprudence” and “Purification”: the evils of child marriage and dowry practice, religious bigotry and caste rigidity, as well as narrow conformity to the age-worn subordination of women. In “Balai”, Tagore’s deep and abiding bond with nature is underlined just as “The Editor” explores the deleterious effects of hatred, bitterness and spiteful obsession in human nature. In “The Professor”, the enormous arrogance of the egotistical protagonist is exposed and mocked.

In response to the growing international demand for his works fuelled by the Nobel Prize, Tagore rendered some of his works – mostly poetry – into English, but he realized that he was doing grave injustice to their inherent magic in Bengali, and so he did not translate his short stories into English. Quayum has ensured quality in his attempt not just by a formal devoir to render Tagore’s Bengali into customary structures of English but by making the stories eminently accessible to those who cannot read the original. A measure of genuine creative interfusion – a prime requisite of competent translation – is evident in the book.

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MURARI PRASAD

Rebel without a Pause

Rakhshanda Jalil, *A Rebel and Her Cause: The Life and Work of Rashid Jahan*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2014. Pages 248, Rs. 395.

The late nineteenth century had been an age of extensive women's reform. The educated elite, in particular, enthusiastically participated in this campaign. Their fervent efforts not only led to the opening of schools and colleges but also legislations against practices of sati and child marriage and the legalization of widow remarriage. By the twentieth century however, these efforts seemed to have slowed down; despite the philanthropic enthusiasm of the reformers, the nationalist agenda overshadowed all their efforts (Chatterjee 2005). While concrete plans to uplift the social status of women were on the decline, print media emerged as a space in which intellectuals engaged in discussions and mirrored the unseen realm of the contemporary women's world.

Rashid Jahan is an exceptional name to reckon with in this regard. Though literary critics may have reduced the courageous trailblazer to a footnote, a generation of women writers – Ismat Chughtai, Attia Hosain, Razia Sajjad Zaheer and Sadiqa Begum Soharvi – have acknowledged her as an inspiration and a pioneering

voice in Urdu literature. With a profound understanding of her convictions, Rakhshanda Jalil traces an evidently well researched account of the life and times of Jahan and brings to the reader a selected collection of her works.

Using the backdrop of educational reforms for women, Jalil begins the biographical section with an account of the pioneering efforts of Jahan's parents, the course of events of their struggle, and their eventual success in the form of Aligarh Zenana Madarsa, an educational institute for women. With the ease of an insider, Jalil weaves an anecdotal narrative of Rashid's childhood and the intellectual interactions that moulded her young mind. Rashid's intellectual metamorphosis at the Isabella Thoburn College and Lady Hardinge Medical College has also been elaborately narrated. Jalil, in particular, captures Jahan's growing sensitivity towards social ills, her involvement with the Communist Party of India, and her experiences as a practicing medical officer that reinforced her misgivings regarding the marginalization of women.

The portrayal of Indian Muslim women in the historical context of colonialism has, for the most part, been one in which women have remained invisible and mute objects. Narratives regarding Muslim households have frequently depicted women in *purdah* (veil), confined to the secluded realm of the *zenana* (women's quarters) with little understanding of public life, and rarely as people having a mind of their own. Jalil's narration of Jahan's story, therefore, is a de-stereotyping endeavour. A predominant feature of Jalil's account is that it gives an insight into the lives of Indian Muslims, defying the conventional outlook around which the normative historical truth regarding Muslim traditions has been created. Jalil introduces her readers to the reformative *sharif* household of the late nineteenth century whose members were not only mindful of the importance of women's education and social reform, but were active participants in the movement.

In addition to presenting a de-stereotyped Muslim household, Jalil's great contribution lies in reviving the legacy of an indomitable woman who was ahead of her times in many ways. When women had just begun writing for women's periodicals, and most of their

writings were imitations of contemporary male writers, Jahan was writing stories that unveil the hidden oppression of Indian society with a unique freshness of her own. Even as the preceding patriarchal programmes of economic, social and religious reform revolved essentially around controlling women's behaviour and public expression, Jahan as a writer voiced the desolation, melancholy and agony of the early twentieth-century women and exuded a strong denunciation of the orthodox mindset of society in general, and Muslim conservatism in particular.

It is pertinent to note that the strength of Jalil's work lies in the complementary nature of the two sections of her book: Jahan's biography and her stories. They appear as a palimpsest that brings together the rebellious and suppressed female tendencies of the women of Jahan's times. In contrast to the stories, wherein the characters appear helplessly silenced and subdued by socio-religious and cultural norms, the biographical narrative delineates a voice that fills these silences with fearless, and at times outrageous, self-expression. It would not be an exaggeration to state that such a juxtaposition and mutual superimposition of fiction and reality contributes much towards the rewriting of history, especially, in terms of gender relations in nineteenth-century India.

A coalesced reading of Jahan's life and her exploration of the unrepresented, multi-dimensional, yet claustrophobic world of Indian women, adds much to the understanding of the inter-relationship between female and male sexuality of the times. The constructions of sexuality and reproduction have always remained sites of power and struggle, and have been pivotal in shaping the subjectivity of both men and women. Jahan portrays female experiences that range from anxious mothers, mute daughters and matrimonial proposals to agonizing childbirths and instances when women are reduced to nothing more than agents of reproduction. And despite her allegiance to the feminist crusade, she does not hesitate to show women turned against women – women in all their greed, malevolence, deepest hatred and ignorance. Consequently, as much as Jahan's stories serve as reflections of women's lives, they also seem to draw women out of their seclusion and unveil their minds to a new world of

possibilities. Simultaneously, they may also be seen as covert explorations of the construction of a new Indian patriarchy that was shaping itself under the imperial influence.

Jalil's compilation of Jahan's life and works is thus, not only a reminder of the latter's rebellion – and her intense commitment towards social causes, especially, those concerning women – but also serves as a tool in reconstructing history. The work testifies that Jahan understood the working of a society in which transformation was a dynamic and interactive process at the individual as well as collective level. It is also clear that by framing the conflict within her stories as a rebuttal between opposing ideologies, Jahan not only allows space for differing perspectives, but also demonstrates the possibility of the transformational effect of one ideology over the other. Regardless of the occasional structural inconsistencies, these stories are unquestionably instilled with a sense of empathy for women and are effective enough to awaken sentiments of solidarity among the female readers.

Jahan was fearless in her word and action. Her undaunted engagement as a communist, writer and doctor in the debates of her times, and her challenge to the long assumed superiority of men, reflected her commitment towards social causes and aptly earned her the title 'rebel'. Despite the fact that a hundred years have passed since Jahan's birth, her writings remain fresh due to their deeply ingrained desire for change, sense of justice and ability to act as a mirror to the overt as well as obscured hypocrisies of society.

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Anamika teaches English literature at Delhi University and is author of six national award-winning poetry collections and four biomythographic novels. In her own words, “My poetry aims at spreading a mat where the highbrow and the lowly, the classical and the popular, the cosmic and the commonplace, the humorous and the serious sit together chatting like eternal *sakhis*.” Her inspiration comes from the folk and the metaphysical strain of the rebel *bhakta* poets. Currently she is a UGC Fellow at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

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