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Editorial

Profiling the Popular: A Protean Category

Akshaya Kumar

Indian popular culture has its own thick palimpsestic textuality which no theoretical rubric – whether Indian or Western – can possibly accommodate. The given binary templates – of high versus low, *margi* versus *desi* or folk versus pop, elite versus subaltern – simply fail to account for the dynamic flows that animate everyday Indian life. Neither the pessimistic rhetoric of Frankfurt School nor the optimistic posturing of Birmingham school can offer us even a working idea about the penetration of the popular in the Indian unconscious. The present issue of the *dialog* is a special issue in which a variety of papers navigate various registers of Indian culture, its retrogressive pulls and its progressive urges – in combinations and permutations that defy any modular approach. Folk festivals to commercial cinema, humour to sports, advertisements to people-centric movements of resistance from below – all find their way onto the pages of the special issue. The range of the papers, collectively speaking, brings forth the capacious nature of the category called ‘Indian popular’, its inner productive tensions, its shifting loci and re-inventive ethos.

The first paper takes a close look at the ‘star-text’ of ‘Uttam-Suchitra’ in the context of contemporary Bengali cinema. Siddhartha Sankar Chakraborti argues that how capitalism, religion and regional consciousness work in tandem to generate stars for the consumption of hero-starved societies. At one level larger-than-life icons serve deep anthropological needs of the mythical-minded masses, at another level, they provide an instant spurious gratification to passive audience, distracting them from the possibilities of political engagement. Madhukar Rai’s paper on the pandals of Durga Pooja of Kolkata substantiates how the canonical goddess is re-invented for contemporary spectacular culture of market-extravaganza. While he

admires the versatility of the artists for incorporating various themes from diverse cultures in the designing of the pandals, he also points towards the enigmatic co-presence of ritualistic practices and capitalistic seductions in matters of faith and devotion.

For long, the sports have been a neglected area of ‘serious’ academic study. The present issue carries three papers that hinge around sports and their representation in modern-day media. Kulveen Trehan’s paper foregrounds the sudden resurgence of media-narratives around sports women – a domain which has hitherto been occupied by the male sports-stars. Through a very nuanced study of two popular sports-themed ad-campaigns – *Da Da Ding* by Nike and *#ChangetheRhyme* by Dove, the author shows how the sports women shown in them, break the conventional stereotypes of femininity, sexualisation, vulnerability, and beauty. Parvinder’s paper employs the ‘monomyth’ template provided by Joseph Campbell to underscore the mixing of registers in the writing of the sports autobiographies of two icons – the footballer Pele, and the pugilist Muhammad Ali. The mythical and the autobiographical are combined in the sports life-writing, once again pointing towards the parasitical relationship between the two in the context of popular imagination. Rakesh Ramamoorthy studies a film *Patiala House* to underscore how sports become a possible medium for diasporic subjects to assimilate into the countries of their migration.

Dance has been central to Indian metaphysics and everyday entertainment. Shiva’s cosmic dance – the *tandava* – has undergone many mutations. Using Uday Shankar’s performance of the *tandava* as his critical frame of reference, Shubham studies the appropriation of the classical dance in modern-day reality dance shows. He goes on to delineate how *tandava* in these shows turns out to be performance of mixed styles of yoga, gymnastics, aerobics, hip-hop, salsa, disco and other contemporary forms of dancing. In the heady days of technological delirium, the rising rightist frenzy, and the mad race for TRPs – reality shows tap classical themes to serve multiple interests in one go. Shikha Jhingan’s paper on emergence of ‘ABCD films’ wherein the struggles, aspirations and rage of the youth is shown in spectacular manner through high-octane dance-driven narratives. Digital razmataz, Dolby sound effects, 3D technologies, multiplex

culture – all add to provide pseudo-respite to the aspirational youth. The two papers, put together, underline the need of more research on dance, its economics and sociology in emerging ecology of media-glitz.

Popular is a function of the people. People-centric movements such as the protracted protest of the farmers on the borders of Delhi recently, have invited lot of scholarly attention. The present issue carries two papers on the protest – one is the role of social media in popular movements of unrest, and another one is on the deployment of popular symbols in political protests. Manisha Gangahar's paper traces the inevitable presence of the popular in the political. She goes on to draw the genealogy of 'tractor' in the context of Punjab's agrarian economy, and its subsequent emergence as the dominant symbol in the farmers' movement. Niky Kumari and Pitabas Pradhan argue that the mainstream media does no longer hegemonize the public sphere, rather it is social media that has penetrated deep into the everyday lives of the people. Chats, blogs, Facebook posts and twitter-posts have enabled otherwise passive and isolated individual to participate in the protest movements.

In the age of proliferating media, micronarratives of war are best captured through memoirs of both the victims and the victor on alternative platforms of self-expression. Blogs can be dismissed as personalized entries *sans* historical veracity, but in the absence of credible reporting from the ground by the so-called official media, the blog diaries hold the potential to re-write war. Navdeep Kahlon's paper undertakes a close critical scrutiny of two blog diaries, one by Salam Pax and the other by Riverbend (both pseudonyms) in the backdrop of the US attack on Iraq and its subsequent occupation in 2003. Bindiya Rani's paper also takes us to a war-zone – Indo-Pak zone of perpetual conflict through an Arendtian analysis of the Hindi blockbuster *Uri: The Surgical Strike*. Invoking ideas Hannah Arendt on violence and banality of evil, she questions the legitimacy of violence both the state and non-state-actors. She argues for a pluralistic approach that recognizes the diversity of human life. Rina Ramdev's essay points towards "the interweaving of journalistic ethic" in the story-telling practices of the Garcia Marquez. The merger of the journalistic with the literary suggests that the generic

boundaries between the so-called high-art and low-art are tenuous and unsustainable.

Indian festivals have their own cyclic calendar that keeps the forces of change well-within the conservative grid. Amit Kumar's rather radical paper on Raksha Bandhan questions the power dynamics implicit in the threads of, what he terms as, 'promised protection'. After sketching a history of the festival and its representation in Indian literature and cinema, he holds Raksha Bandhan to be a structural ritual that by "appointing a brother as lifetime bodyguard", tends to control female sexuality. It ends up objectifying the woman as property. Tirtha Pratim Deb finds a fertile space for the re-inscription of disability in the disruptive humour of stand-up comedians. The author through a close study of the performance of disabled stand-up comedians reiterates the possibility of radical dissemination of disability culture through their nonnormative personalized anecdotal humour. Deepthi C and S. Jayalakshmi in their paper use food memoirs or culinary memoirs as their primary texts to suggest how food helps women mould their identity and enable them towards a path of self-realization. The paper tends to overturn the thesis that food or the cooking of the food is oppressive for women.

There are three more papers which cover other dimensions of popular culture. Anjali. A. R's paper posits how the culture of exchanging gifts in the Japanese context is more a matter of invented tradition, than a settled tradition *per se*. Avinash Chander's paper undertakes an interpersonal analysis of advertisements of beauty enhancing products. The focus of the paper is on various linguistic tropes employed by advertisers to allure the prospective buyers of beauty products. Kanika Vasishta's paper explores the rise female-led music bands such as 'Mad Hatter', 'Missing Links', 'Sur Samalaya', 'The Tetseo Sisters' in the context of Riot Grrrl movement— a subcultural feminist movement of punk music that began in Olympia in the 1990s. Women-led bands such as 'Bikini Kill' or "Bratmobile", the author argues, created "unfiltered music" against rape and other forms of gender-violence.

We publish translations in the *dialog* so that the writings in other Indian languages reach to the readers of Indian English audience.

Keeping in view the special focus on ‘popular culture’, we have published a translation of a street-play of Gursharan Singh, a well-known name in the domain of Punjabi progressive theatre. Popular, after all, in one important sense, is or has to be progressive. Harishankar Parsai regaled his Hindi readers with his relentless satirical prose. Everyday situations generate subversive humour in Parsai’s short anecdotal narratives. Vikram Singh Thakur translations retain ironic undertones of the Hindi prose-master. Vandana’s translation of a short story Biruvar Gamcha written by a tribal activist-writer Rose Kerketta also falls within the scope of the dissensual popular. The three translations, put together, offer us a people-centric horizon of the popular.

The issue carries conversations with three contemporary formidable writers of Indian English literature, namely – Sudeep Sen, Mani Rao and Arundhati Roy. The Department hosted Sudeep Sen on the occasion of the launch of his anthology of poems *Converse* published to commemorate 75 years of India’s Independence. The poet-editor in his conversation on-stage unfolded the nuances and challenges of anthologizing Indian English poetry today. In another event, Indian poet and translator Mani Rao was invited to share with the audience her insights on the art and craft of poetry. The poet-scholar also discussed at length her practices of translation. A part of her session was devoted to her latest translation of *Saundarya Lahari*. As she read her poems in English, the students of the Department read the poems in Hindi and Punjabi translations to lend a tri-lingual dimension to the event. The third interview was conducted by the research scholar of the Department during the process of her Ph.D. on the critical reception of the Booker award-winning author and activist Arundhati Roy. The three interviews collectively offer map the contours of contemporary Indian English imagination.

Like any other issue of the *dialog*, this issue too had an unflinching support of editorial assistants who worked cohesively on different aspects of the journals. The role of Advisory Board is very important, and its feedback always motivates us to push the frontiers of the journal. In the history of the journal, we are bringing out for the first time a special issue. Though previous issues too had broad one or two chosen areas to focus on, the present issue right from its

very inception was planned out to be a special issue of 'Indian Popular Culture'. The office staff of the Department of English, Manager Press Mr. Jatinder Moudgil and Mr. Shubham, the typesetter all worked in tandem to ensure a time-bound publication of the issue. We had an overwhelming response to our Call for Papers, due to paucity of space, we could publish only limited number of papers.



Stardust: Cultural Implications of Film Stardom

Siddhartha Sankar Chakraborti

Abstract

This paper intends to understand film-stars as religio-anthropomorphic incarnations embedded in hyperreal simulations allowing capitalism to promote the perception exemplified by economic manipulations. This paper also aims to contribute to the understanding of stardom as a popular culture by suggesting the proposition that both the notion of talent in terms of commanding the attention of the mass and ideology informing the dominant discursive practices share a mutual relationship in incarnating the 'face'/'faces' of the age (Foucault). The purpose is to bring greater precision to the understanding of the process of stardom by examining this system through the star-text of 'Uttam-Suchitra', the most celebrated couple of the film industry of West Bengal till now, which underpins the nature and circulation of fame as the constituent of the cultural meaning of acting rooted in the interdependent nature of the two basic concerns, namely sociological and semiotic.

Keywords: Stardom, Star culture, Religio-anthropomorphic incarnation, Hyperreal

The stars are a reflection in which the public studies and adjusts its own image of itself.

(Durgant 137).

This particular observation of Durgant allows us to navigate stardom through the mutual appropriation of the individual and the society. The constitutionally spectacular nature of stars is continuously informed by the rhizomatic undercurrents of various social forces. There cannot be any single itinerary into this phenomenon. The

difficulty in handling such an unmanageably large topic doubled by its polymorphous orientation speaks volume in favour of this as a popular phenomenon. Francesco Alberoni has opined that a bunch of interesting people “whose institutional power is very limited or non-existent, but whose doings and way of life arouse a considerable and sometimes even a maximum degree of interest” (Alberoni 75). He contends that stars are an elite, privileged group who in spite of no real access to political powers govern over people’s mind. King is of the view that stars shape the “social roles and types and behaviour of the mass” (Dyer 12). Samuel Goldwyn has mentioned: “God makes the stars. It is up to the producers to find them” (Dyer 13). Even I.C. Jarvie comes up with the idea that stars are stars because of their “striking photogenic looks, acting ability, presence on camera, charm and personality, sex appeal, attractive voice and bearing” (Jarvie 149). As mentioned earlier, these definitions are multifaceted and it is extremely difficult to give those multifarious pointers a proper structure. Richard Dyer has observed that “within film-studies reasons for studying the stars have largely come from two rather different concerns that may be broadly categorized as the sociological and the semiotic” (Dyer 01). He asserts that stardom is “a remarkable, and probably influential or symptomatic social phenomenon, as well as an aspect of film’s ‘industrial’ nature” (Dyer 01).

This paper intends to understand film-stars as religio-anthropomorphic incarnations embedded in hyperreal simulations, while allowing capitalism to promote the perception exemplified by economic manipulations and informing the mechanics of production-consumption integral to the dynamics of mass productions that stardom is the consequence of a public acknowledgement of some unique individual qualities existing beyond the collective labour of film-making. This paper also aims to contribute to the understanding of stardom as a popular culture by suggesting the proposition that both the notion of talent in terms of commanding the attention of the mass and ideology informing the dominant discursive practices share a mutual relationship in incarnating the ‘face’/‘faces’ of the age (Foucault). The purpose is to bring greater precision to the understanding of the process of stardom by examining this system through the star-text of ‘Uttam-Suchitra’, the most celebrated couple of the film industry of West Bengal till now, which underpins the

nature and circulation of fame as the constituent of the cultural meaning of acting rooted in the interdependent nature of the two basic concerns, namely sociological and semiotic. The significations of these stars can be properly studied when the specificities of the film-texts are analysed. On the other hand, the sociological analysis of these stars is functionally conditioned by the semiotic analysis of them; to be precise, significations of stars realized as social signs and images (Dyer). With the construction of stardom, the mediation for the sociological concern for stars into that of semiotic and the semiotic concern for stars into sociological, becomes viable. This viability reflects the production consumption dialectic duly informed by the ideological and contextual undercurrents of the society.

For example, Sharmistha Gooptu, in her book, *Bengali Cinema: An Other Nation*, has shown through her historical analysis of Bengali cinema how Bengali cinema contested 'the very prevalence of Hindi language' and 'the ideological construct of a Hindi-nation' by forming a faithful Bengali viewership which exhibited the idea of a cultured Bengaliness. This understanding is indicative of Bengali cinema's endeavour in raising resistance in terms of constructing a definitive discourse of difference with respect to the 'all-India' Hindi film, against the tendency of being subsumed within the more pervasive culture of Bombay cinema. Thus, Bengali cinema though failed to compete with the Bombay cinema in terms of creating an 'all-India market', it certainly resisted the overpowering ideological construction of India as a Hindi nation by creating a space of its own¹. Many scholars, while understanding the emergence of 'Uttam-Suchitra' as a star-text, have already established a theoretical paradigm of the concerned period (the mid-1950s through the 1960s) from the dichotomy of 'regionality' and an 'all-Indian' consensus. This interpretation is implemental in understanding the adopted strategies of Bengal film industry across these three decades in terms of capturing the economic viability within a certain geographical boundary remitting a specific ideological consciousness. This ideological consciousness definitely had its say on the expressions manifested through the films released throughout these decades but it had to accommodate business possibilities accounting for its 'geo-economic' expandability. The presence of this duality found a coexisting consolidation in the emergence of an overwhelming,

overarching 'star-text'; a phenomenon already prevalent in different parts of the world including Bombay. Thus, the industrial context in connection with the sociological, political and economic conditions of contemporary Bengal climaxing into an all-pervading 'star-text' reflected a "definitive discourse of difference". This understanding also emphasises how the 'film-text' of contemporary Bengali cinema could accommodate the magnetic appeal of the duo of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen, magically manifested through their onscreen personas, which led to the construction of them being the most coveted matinee couple of West Bengal till date.

The paper is broadly divided into two segments. The first segment deals with the theoretical framework in connection with the concerned proposition and the second segment includes the examination of the star-text of 'Uttam-Suchitra' incorporated as sample study to substantiate the proposition. Though celebrities do not only mean the film-stars, Monaco's observation in his book, *Celebrity: The Media as Image Maker* regarding the reception of Marlon Brando as a star by the audiences points to the perception that the achievements and exploits of film-stars are understood in contexts very far removed, though formally related, from the perspective of one's expertise on the art of acting (Monaco 11); rather the 'cultural meaning of acting' informing the construction of images determined by the mechanics of production and consumption inherent in media productions has led to the development of film-stars. Monaco observes that the invention of printing presses in the mid-nineteenth century responsible for rapid distribution of printed matters to the newly literate middle classes, the invention of photography in terms of providing relevant visual images to substantiate the narrative story and lastly, the invention of moving pictures ensuring an enormous increase in numbers in terms of audience viewing allowed the stars to be born out of "the rapidly condensing media community" (Monaco 6-7).

Likewise, the advent of other digital and printed media along with the invention of moving pictures, allowing the simulation of heroism, has been instrumental in the construction of stardom due to its intrinsic properties accounting for a hyperreal condition with regards to a seamless merging of physical reality and virtual reality.

As proposed by Jean Baudrillard in matter of hyperreal condition emerging due to the inability of consciousness in differentiating reality from the simulation of reality, the complex ways of the media generate an acceptance of difference with respect to the unattainability of the stars among the viewers by making them surpassingly desirable with their privileged hyperreal existence concerning their endeavour in appropriating reality; ironically making way to the possibility of identification in terms of affective association. Thus, the possibility of stars being relatable in hyperreal terms is instrumental in inflicting on the viewers a relative state of passivity, developed due to them behaving as enforced consumers participating in endless reproductions of hyperreal simulations in place of real emotional engagement, the resultant state of which is a 'dissociative association' manifested as the acceptance of difference relating to perceiving the hyperreal existence of these stars. This relative state of passivity accounting for the inability of the viewers in differentiating experiences generated from the hyperreal sources from that of the real emotional engagement is the breeding ground of the tendency of celebrating actors embodying characters capable of producing a cathartic experience, though momentarily, rather than celebrating their art of acting.

Emile Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence emblemized through 'totem' and employing a feeling of sacredness among the community members can be understood as pre-cultural conditions of star-worshipping. He, in his book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* mentions that while studying the religious practices among 'Arunta' tribe of central Australia he noticed that primitive men, otherwise wanderers without having any consecrated concept of society, experienced emotional security when they occasionally assembled together. Durkheim understood this as a state of collective effervescences emerging out of their association of such feelings not only with one another but also with objects in their environment like animal or plant, eventually leading them creating 'totem', a tangible manifestation representing a sacred power; thus ascribing both human sentiments and supernatural powers to these objects. Even in case of idol-worshipping, though the devotees worship the ideas, beliefs and notions associated with that idol, the idol itself becomes the object of reverence. The ideas, beliefs and

notions are pushed into the background whereas the idol comes to the foreground and becomes 'sacred'. Its emblematic function is replaced by making it become the sacredness itself; to be precise, that very god or goddess informed by those ideas, beliefs and notions. In the same way, the audiences celebrate or even worship the actor instead of the portrayed character manifested through the performance of that actor. Or, in other words, to the audiences the portrayed character and the actor become the same person. They cannot separate the characteristics, emotions and achievements of the character from the actor.

Thus, it can be inferred that totemic representations of these tribal people are equivalent to idol-formation created out of the ideas, beliefs and notions informed by that same feeling of sacredness. Among many other issues that emerged through academic discussions on gods and goddesses, one enquiry has been concerned about finding out the relation between gods and human society. Both in polytheistic and monotheistic cultures, the conceptualization of gods and goddesses revolves around social, political, economic and cultural experiences of a particular community. The gradual evolution in assigning godly attributes to the gods and goddesses has a lot to do with the gradual changes in social living process. Likewise, the growth of these media stars in terms of virtual presence is associated with the social, political, economic and cultural experiences of a certain community. This continuous reconfiguration of images, in matter of regulating 'extra-territorialized spatial distance' embedded in hyperreal conditions from its viewers, is fundamental in assigning an overwhelming sacredness to the public appearances of these stars. Thus, these stars' 'hyperreal condition' accounting for the acceptance of difference from the part of the audiences has its 'precultural conditions' experienced in the feeling of sacredness as postulated by Durkheim.

Now, these stars' exponential growth in terms of virtual presence and consequent transcendence into sacredness happening due to the unique specificities of film-making machinery can be substantiated by Edgar Morin's concept of cinematic vision, which is rooted in the archaic vision of the world where "all metamorphoses are possible and effective within an immense fluid relationship where living or

active things are not enclosed in the prison of objectivity...metamorphosis triumphs over death and becomes renaissance” (Morin, *The Cinema* 53). Now, Morin’s cinematic vision is associated with his idea of photos which seem to be “animated with a life more intense or more profound than reality, and even on the brink of hallucination, in possession of a supernatural life...it is as if in man the need that battles against the erosion of time fixes itself in a privileged manner upon the image” (Morin, *The Cinema* 24). The extra-territorialized spatial distance prevalent among the viewers and the stars experienced in the form of ‘dissociative association’, responsible in providing a feeling of sacredness seem to be annexed with photos as postulated by Morin.

Thus, this religio-anthropomorphic incarnations of stars emerging chiefly from “projection-identification” complex inherent in the affective participation of film-viewing is indicative of the “deep anthropological needs which are expressed at the level of myth and religion” (Morin 141). Thus, these “deep anthropological needs” wanting to “express themselves on the plane of myth and religion” find expressions in the engagements concerned with the “state of collective effervescences” experienced through a “celebratory togetherness”, even when not directly associated with religious or mythical pursuits. The advent of mass culture as a means of engagement to eradicate the loneliness of men in the sixteenth century Europe as cited by Leo Lowenthal, in his book, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society*, to put forward one of his arguments centering on his study of intellectual debates over arts and its popular counterparts, can be understood as an example of the current cultural conditions preceded by the pre-cultural conditions exemplified here through ‘totemic representations’ (Faucault). His interpretations, taking into account the postwar disillusionments and the necessity of finding a moral solution by returning to the differences between popular culture generating spurious gratification and art considered as the source of a genuine experience remonstrate how “from the realm of beauty man walks into the realm of entertainment, which is, in turn, integrated with the necessities of society and denies the right to individual fulfillment” (Lowenthal 6).

In this context, conceptualizing entertainment is central to understanding the differences between ‘spurious gratification’ and ‘genuine experience’; the inability of which is symptomatic to hyperreal conditions leading to a relative state of passivity as mentioned earlier. The term, entertainment is used in such a commonsensical and pervasive way with a sense of finality associated with it, that anything that focuses on the primacy of pleasure can be understood as the source of entertainment. Academic discussions regarding the notion of entertainment have been largely developed from three basic concerns: primacy of pleasure, entertainment as a product functioning under the supervision of an industrial model and a pleasurable distraction from more serious engagements; the combined effect of which defines entertainment as a capitalistic tool that provides pleasurable experiences to its consumers in their leisure hours. Thus, entertainment through ‘star-system’ feeds the desires of the masses by engrafting a kind of pleasure which approximates the feeling of sacredness experienced in the state of collective effervescence in the consciousness of the masses.

The basic insight which we generally associate with stardom relating to the understanding of this system as a capitalistic tool alone does delimit the possibilities of explorations regarding the celebratory nature of stardom. This understanding involves perceptions relating to star-images through media circulations concerning the construction of the desirable version of the star-self in commanding attention from the largest possible audiences, designed on the strategies that assist in excogitating a way to measure the connection between images and the market. The pointers discussed here regarding the celebratory nature of stardom are also applicable to other types of celebrities along with film-stars. Then what are those distinctive features of the film-stars that set them apart from other types of celebrities? Ingrained in this question is the idea that film-stars “enact ways of making sense of the experience of being a person in a particular kind of social production (capitalism) with its particular organization of life into public and private spheres” through engaging in the extraction of performance-based significations of meaning by using his/her body as a performative tool (Dyer, *Stars* 17). Thus, the idea of celebration reflects the social

relationships between the notion of talent in terms of commanding the attention of the mass and ideology informing the dominant discursive practices in incarnating the ‘face’/‘faces’ of the age (Foucault). Different critics are of different opinions regarding the notion of talent of these film-stars mainly in the lines of publicity and talent; with some of them accounting for an individual’s catapultation to a star status without achieving the highest levels of craft accomplishments (Currid, Halket), whereas others favouring the undecipherability of mapping the condition of fame whether emerging from talent or publicity (Kings). Taking cue from Jarvie’s idea of the notion of talent as specific to history and culture, it can also be proposed that contextual ideologies when understood as a formation created out of the dominant discourses among several others, the function of which is rooted in refusing the legitimacy of the alternative discursive practices and fabricating a unitarian consensus conformed and appropriated by the society as a whole play a vital role in attributing a star status to an individual who is designed to perform socially coded roles with specifically defined behaviors (Burns). Now, stars with their unique talents by embodying and dramatizing the flow of informations, promote ‘depoliticized’ modes of attachment in terms of privatization of structural determinants and individualization of collective experience to make the viewers accept the status quo (Kings). Boorstin’s claim in this regard with respect to the development of mass media accounting for a disjuncture between fame achieved through accomplishment and media circulations creating conditions for the same (Boorstin) seems to be articulating the cultural significance of stardom embedded in the proposition that the process of the centralization of the individual containing the power relations within, is connected to the dynamics of the market and the commodification of performance subject to the kind of talent that approximates the conditions informing the archaic feeling of sacredness experienced through togetherness around the totem.

Uttam Kumar, popularly known as the ‘Mahanayak’ (the great hero) of the film industry of West Bengal, appeared in the Bengali film industry when the Bengali cinema was fast losing its ground to Bombay in constituting a faithful viewership even in Bengal due to the lack of possessing a ‘full-fledged star’ who could project its

individuality and difference in terms of a distinctive Bengali sense of self, an all-pervasive ideal existed in the consciousness of Bengal. His was a 'star-text' that articulated the Bengali consensus through a naturalistic acting style, in contrast with the theatrical styles of his predecessors like Durgadas Banerjee, Sishir Bhaduri, even, to some extent, Pramathesh Barua, who though considered an exponent of naturalistic acting style by many critics, did sport a stylized speech and manner. Uttam Kumar's style suited his image of an 'ordinary middle-class man' with the highlights of middle-class morals and values revealed not only through his onscreen persona but also through his much 'talked-about' lifestyle continuously appeared in the contemporary magazines. In the star-text of Uttam Kumar, the producers, by investing in the Bengali film industry, could meet a refundable security deposit with legible chances of receiving it even manifold, the creative minds associated with the industry could witness the desired manifestations of their extreme adherence to a unique Bengaliness constantly supported and intertextually constructed by the reading public of Bengal and the general viewership of Bengal could, at last, experience the tangible embodiment of the ideas of their onscreen idol leading them to an intense emotional identification. "By contrast, Uttam Kumar's stardom was built on his ability to project the middle-class man...Uttam Kumar was the first 'hero' to make his mark through a style that was rooted in the ordinary and idiomatic" (Gooptu, ch. 4).

Gooptu's observation in citing Uttam Kumar's ability to project a domesticated middle class Bengali man as the primary reason behind his stardom in comparison with his predecessors like K.L. Saigal or Durgadas who were thought of being deviant in some sense or other, is significant to understand the emotional identification happening in part of the audiences with their most coveted star. His image as a representative of the middle-class Bengalis was not limited to his onscreen persona; rather the discourses covering his personal life circulated through contemporary film magazines consolidated his image of an ordinary middle-class man appropriating his middle-class values and moralities not only through his onscreen persona but also through his lifestyle. He himself asserted this in his serialized autobiographical account published in *Nabakallol* at the peak of his career with the caption, "Hariye Jaoa Dinguli more" (My Lost Days):

(People are) transporting me from the living world into an imaginary land...that my house is located in the middle of a garden that lights up in the night. The lights change every hour. I have apparently gotten a special clockwork bird from Switzerland which can be made to sing, and apparently I am put to sleep every night by its singing. When I get home from the studio, my car enters the house through a hanging bridge. As if I am a fairytale prince...I imagine that such stories have spread because the audience has become used to seeing me as a hero for a long time now...Believe me, I am no fairytale prince. Just a flesh and blood person like any of you.²

Thus, he took it upon himself to dispel the fairytale ideas spread about him and his lifestyle. Even his domestic photographs with his wife, mother, brother (Tarun Kumar who also happened to be a successful character actor of that time) published in contemporary film magazines like *Nabakallol* bears emblems of a middle-class domesticated life which simply did not feature in the star texts of pre-Uttam era.

In his autobiographical series, Uttam Kumar comes up as a very average Bengali boy who, despite his humble background, came up to the rank of the most celebrated matinee idol by dint of his will force and perseverance and had not forgotten his modest roots. Thus, his onscreen persona of 'man-next-door' image augmented by discourses outside film-texts wove a magic charm on the viewers to establish his star persona in a remarkably complicated way. It was this element of being a middle class domesticated man coupled with his self-proclaimed discourse of 'ordinariness' that produced such strong emotional identification on the part of the Bengali audiences, especially women. This has been very beautifully put by the eminent director, Aurabindo Mukhopadhyay: "At the peak of Uttam's career, it was not simply the girls that were in love with him. Bengali mothers wanted their sons to be like Uttam – that was Uttam's difference...He made the filmstar respectable"³.

Bengal, considered as the hub of Indian film production during the talky era of 1930, started losing its 'all-India' viewership during the second half of 1940s. This transition in matter of Bengal losing its footing from an 'all-India market' was definitely one of the

expressions of Bengal gradually getting marginalized from the mainstream nationalist politics. Joya Chatterjee, in her book, *Bengal Divided* has mentioned that “in the last decade and a half of British rule in India Bengal lost its position of preeminence in all-India politics and was edged out of the nationalist mainstream”⁴. During these years Bengal’s politics turned inwards investing its involvement more on its provincial worries and concerns. Due to this ‘progressive marginalization’, Bengal produced a new style of its politics that contested ‘the idea of the nation’ as noted by Joya Chatterjee in her second book, *The Spoils of Partition*⁵.

Bengal’s progressive relegation to being a regional film industry was definitely accentuated by a host of political and natural events across these decades. If Bengal losing its stronghold in nationalist politics is taken to be the initiation into the process of the Bengal film industry reduced to being a regional one, an unparallel human tragedy manifested in the form of Bengal famine of 1943 definitely accentuated it and finally the partition of Bengal perceived as a ‘dystopic vision’ to the Bengal consciousness destroyed the possibility of Bengal remaining as the hub of Indian film production. However, there are other discourses concerning the presence of a distinctive Bengali sensibility even in those films released in Hindi-Urdu languages and Bengali viewers’ extreme adherence to ‘good story’ which inevitably would end up being a regional industry producing regional Bengali cinema in place of a more uniform Bengali cinema satisfying the tastes of the ‘all-India’ viewers.

At a time, when the glamour of Bombay cinema was to devour the audiences of the Bengali film industry, the Uttam-Suchitra films held the audiences for more than two decades, by creating a group of audiences of their own. At that time, Bengali cinema could not boast of any star “who could be billed at par with Bombay’s top actors of the day” (Goopu, ch. 4). During this time, Bengali audiences witnessed the emergence of the star couple of Uttam-Suchitra by whose aid Bengali film industry could produce a series of star-backed romances.

Directors of this era poured a Bengali sense of self in those romances; manifested in these two iconic figures. The audiences could identify the unfailing, idealized love essayed on screen by the

couple. They manifested the expression of a society passing through post-independent ethical crisis. Even in the throes of transition they could preserve the distinctive identity of their community. Their onscreen personas struck a convenient balance of both permanence and change. These films were more than simple love stories. Their paradigmatic association with romantic love was, to some extent, weighed down by a sense of a unique Bengali self. The core group of the audiences, known as Bengali middle class 'bhadralok', could find an efficacious space of their own; a sense of feel-good Bengaliness inundated with a profound sense of charm and grace.

Kironmoy Raha has cited two reasons behind the rebirth of Bengali cinema in the 1950s. The first reason was "the support of the Bengali middle class with its addiction to incidents and emotions it could believe without much effort" and the second one was "the star phenomenon of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen...Bengali cinema was in fumbling state of unsure direction when it discovered the potentialities of...the pair of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen" (Raha 36). Dipesh Chakrabarty has aptly explained the trauma that accompanied relocated Hindus at that time. Their psychological adaptation due to the relocations from East Bengal to the city of Calcutta created a trauma that was reflected in the onscreen lives of the couple. Hordes of refugees started filling up the vacant places of Calcutta after the exacerbation of communal tensions in 1946-47 (Chakrabarty 115-37). This incident initiated an ethical crisis, deeply rooted in moral anxiety, which led to moral disintegration. These refugees transformed the city "previously a cluster of discrete urban settlements, into a single, gigantic and chaotic megalopolis" (Chatterjee 143). This trope of ethical crises was presented in the films in terms of personal dilemmas which was melodramatically resolved within the romantic world of the couple. Peter Brooks, in his study of melodrama, explained that in melodramas, the social or political dilemmas are dealt with in terms of personal and familial problems and the stories of social transformations are simulated within the stories of individual struggle⁶. So, the on-screen personal world of this romantic couple duly signified by the socio-historical trajectory of post-independent Bengal became the desired space of their niche audiences.

Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen first appeared together in the film, *Sare Chuattar* (Seventy-Four and a half) in 1953 and worked together the last time in *Priyo Bandhobi* (Lady Friend) in 1975. With the films in which they appeared together between 1954 and 1961, like *Agnipariksha* (Trial by Fire, 1954), *Shapmochon* (Reversal of the Curse, 1955), *Sagarika* (1956), *Harano Sur* (The Lost Tune, 1957), *Pothe Holo Deri* (Lost on the Way, 1957), *Indrani* (1958), *Chaoa Paoa* (Desire and Attainment, 1959) and *Saptapadi* (Rituals of the Seven Steps, 1961), Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen redefined romantic love for Bengali men and women through their onscreen chemistry essayed in terms of a reformulated gender relations and a unique Bengali modernity.

In *Sare Chuattor*, they appeared as lovers in a sub-plot with Tulsi Chakraborty and Molina Devi playing the lead couple who tried to rediscover the old flame of their conjugal love after a series of comic blunders. Though, this film did not give this couple the maximum leverage, this couple was perceived as novel prototypes in terms of their screen presence; Uttam Kumar as a man-next-door and Suchitra Sen as a confident modern woman. Here, Romola was shown to be at ease with both the domestic as well as 'outer' space, otherwise inhabited by male members. She managed very gracefully in an uninvited space with her quick-minded modern persona that symbolized the orientation of the women prevalent especially refugee women in post-1947 Bengal. Joya Chatterjee in her book, *The Spoils of Partition* has shown how refugee women sought higher education to support their families which had migrated from East Bengal.

In *Agnipariksha*, the story moved around the journey of a young couple – Kirti and Tapasi; the struggle they went through to attain their love. The story of this film hinted the mythical story of Sita's trial by fire. Tapasi, like Romola in *Sare Chuattor*, was found to manage both the 'domestic' as well as 'outer' space with a feminine ease and grace. This was romantically augmented by her male counterpart, Kirti who also seemed to be a person with a strong sense of ethics and morals. He helped her maintain the balance of tradition and modernity. Thus, their shared anxieties constituted the dramatic flow of the film. The centrality of the couple complementing each other in establishing their love in the face of their loneliness, anxiety

and the hardships they went through to attain their love worked as a symbolic reordering against the backdrop of rapid social changes, especially in terms of transforming gender relations. This trope made for the powerful 'couple space' prevalent in a series of hit films like *Shapmochon*, *Sagarika*, *Harano Sur* and *Pothe Holo Deri*. It is worth mentioning in this context that Moinak Biswas has pointed out the 'feminized quality' of this genre's emotional content and 'the positively feminized quality of its male protagonist' to suggest the emblematic 'couple space' of this genre⁷. However, Gooptu has rightly pointed out that the uniqueness of these hit films was not limited to the portrayal of a 'feminized male protagonist' but how it was romantically complemented by the 'feminine' persona of Suchitra Sen. Both in *Sagarika* and *Harano Sur*, Suchitra Sen's character symbolized woman nurture beyond the familial space. In *Harano Sur*, she played the role of a young psychiatrist who went on to marry her amnesiac patient Alope. Thus, she played the doctor and the wife at the same time. In *Sagarika*, she played a polished, sophisticated character who was assigned with the duty to train the daughter of her uncle in the ways of urban society. In each of these portrayals, she seemed to be a self-assured and modern woman, though respectful to the tradition. She made her feminine presence felt in a space infested with the crisis of masculinity manifested in the films in terms of the anxieties of the male protagonist and other characters representing patriarchal authority. Even the narratives of the films emphasized the centrality of the couple with parental figures either missing or pushed into the periphery. Thus, their endeavour to attain their 'noble love' augmented by powerful emotional content was always encountered with the dialectic of tradition and modernity; ultimately making the couple as makers of their own destiny. The ethical choices they make to attain the fulfillment of their noble love with regard to the legitimization of their 'couple space' are of utmost significance in these hit films. *Saptapadi* (1961) directed by Ajay Kar is considered as the greatest hit of 'Uttam-Suchitra wave'.

Suchitra Sen's successful catapultation to stardom has been appropriately configured by Ashishtaru Mukhopadhyay in his book, *Mahanayika Suchitra*. He found Suchitra Sen's sexuality soothingly mediated by the middle-class moralities of Bengal when compared with the sizzling and passionate appeal of other matinee goddesses

like Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Ingrid Bergman, Sophia Loren and Eva Gardner. Bengali filmmakers did poke the dormant desires of middle-class Bengalis without subverting middle-class values and ethics. They did make the viewers desire Suchitra Sen without any sense of guilt. Thus, Suchitra Sen did stoke the romantic imaginary of Bengal through her onscreen persona without unacknowledging the consciousness of the Bengali sense of self.

So, the paper propagates that understanding stardom posited at the crossroad of multiple discourses discussed here, is to find out how an individual's unique qualities are directed to a system of signification; how an over-arching individual talent manifested through the cultural significations of the medium is continuously reshaping and being reshaped by the discursive practices of a certain community at a certain era even at times across demographic spectrum especially with the advent of web platforms. Thus, multiple perspectives operating as latent forces, like that of the producers looking for making profits, an actor turned to be a star, the relatively passive audiences turned to be fans who consume and participate in the meaning making process, a critic perceiving stardom as a cultural practice which involves a political reading of power structures, are incorporated in this paper to establish the construction of the religio-anthropomorphic incarnations of stars.

End Notes:

1. See Gooptu, Sharmistha. *Bengali Cinema: An Other Nation*. E-book ed. New Delhi: Rolli Books, 2018.
2. "Hariye Jaoa Dinguli More." *Nabakallol* 1st Year, No. 1 1960. Print. p. 103. (qtd. in. Gooptu, ch. 4).
3. See Mukhopadhyay, Aurobindo. Interview by Sharmistha Gooptu. Calcutta, 23 Nov 2007. (qtd. in. Gooptu, ch. 4).
4. See Chatterji, Joya. "Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947." *Cambridge South Asian Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print. p.3.
5. See Chatterji, Joya. "The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967." *Cambridge South Asian Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.
6. For a pronounced understanding of melodrama, see Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. Print.

7. See Biswas, Moinak. "The Couple and their Spaces: Harano Sur as Melodrama Now." *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*. ed. Ravi S. Vasudevan. New Delhi: OUP, 2002. Print. P. 122.

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Visual Spectacle and Urban Heterotopia: Calcutta's Durga Puja as Cultural Carnival

Madhukar Rai

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the artistic and sociological significance of Durga Puja as celebrated across Calcutta and Bengal moving beyond the fundamental binaries of religion and faith to talk about aspects of creativity, innovation and a unique amalgamation of modern ideas and Indian sensibility. From the Vatican City to the fictional Mahishmati Empire, the sacred Kedarnath Temple to the secular Red Fort, from Agra's Taj Mahal to the Malaysian Twin Towers, one can find the replicas of almost every significant structure in the city alone making one ponder over the artistic genius and versatility of those engaged in making these hallowed structures. Every pandal thus has its own narrative to tell and its own potential message to convey to the revellers embracing within itself a saga of diversity and difference. This paper also intends to highlight how Durga Puja emerges as a powerful expression of a unique urban 'spatiality' by influencing the way we as subjects experience urban spaces, as a cultural testimony of soft power based on the aesthetics of shared values and ritualistic practices, a blend of the esoteric and the mundane, the timeless and the temporal.

Keywords: Carnival, Cosmopolitanism, Spatial Transfiguration, Art Festival, Mass Exhibition

Every state of India has its own distinctive culture and rituals, some of which have attracted widespread critical acclaim and public recognition by the sheer magnitude and intensity with which they are celebrated. Calcutta's Durga Puja comes as an unparalleled aesthetic experience in itself with the entire city transformed into an art gallery and even the narrowest alleys lit up in the most opulent way involving

ten days of fast, feast and worship of all that is 'inexplicable a moment' to define. Walking through the lanes of Calcutta during the Durga Puja festival is a magical experience in itself characterised by a mystifying ambience that eludes our senses making us marvel at the sheer magnanimity and colossal grandeur of the city all decked up like a bride beaming in the effulgence of its own beauty transformed into a cultural hotspot for millions of its residents as well as those innumerable visitors and expatriate group of people who return back to the city to witness the exuberance and be a part of the exquisite regalia and festive fervour that the festival accompanies with it.

One of the most publicised and extravagant events in the city's calendar Durga Puja is celebrated in the months of Ashwin (September-October) and commemorates the homecoming of Goddess Durga with her cohort of deities Kartik, Ganesh, Lakshmi, Saraswati and the vanquishing of the demon Mahishasura. To trace the mythological genesis of this festival one has to look through the pages of Markanda Puran which states that it was King Surath who is believed to have performed the first ever Durga Puja in spring after getting instructions from Sage Medha. The legend in Markanda Puran states that King Surath had lost his kingdom and was wandering through the forest where he met Samadhi Vaishya who too had lost his kingdom. In the jungle they met Medha Muni who in response to their fervent supplications to help them regain their kingdoms suggested them to perform Basanti Durga Puja. Both of them thus performed the festival and got back their kingdoms. This initiated the ritual of performing Basanti Durga Puja in Basant season or Chaitra month of the Hindu calendar. However, the present form of the festival known as Sharodiya Durga Puja owes its origin to Lord Rama's invocation of the Goddess before going to war with the demon Ravana in the month of Sharad or the autumn season. It is from there that Durga Puja became a widely popular celebration and thus became a household ritual in Bengal.

Folklores say that the first grand worship of Goddess Durga in recorded history is said to have been performed in the late 1500s by the zamindars of Dinajpur and Malda. From then onwards it was mostly the privileged elite Hindu Bengali class which used to

celebrate Durga Puja and it was only attended by high caste and affluent people believed to have a refined taste and inclination towards grand religious ceremonies. It was only in the beginning of the 20th century that the festival of Durga Puja truly became a community affair involving large numbers of people, financial contribution and mass participation. Initiating its journey from there, this festival had no looking back as it grew bigger and bigger in size attracting huge attention and community level participation with the passage of time and the professional engagement of a host of artisans, including potters, drummers, priests, florists as well as people engaged in art, decoration, pandal making and lightning. In the late 1980s and early 90s started the trend of 'theme pujas' that completely transformed the festive tradition opening up new vistas of artistic creation and paved way for the emergence of a new urban culture of celebrating Durga Puja as a grand large scale communitarian event, a mega consumerist carnival defining the modern contours of a so called art festival transcending barriers of class, creed and religion. As the city evolved, so did the Pujas striving to keep in tune with the modern times while at the same time trying to sustain the cultural expressions and actions of the Hindu Bengali community.

For Calcutta, Durga Puja is not a mere annual festival commemorating the nine forms of Maa Durga but a cultural ensemble, a unique amalgamation of western ideas and Indian ethos, a kind of auterial enterprise which thrives with the involvement of established artists, corporate sponsors, mega advertising and an open acceptance and experimentation with new artistic forms and techniques that renders an intangible experience through the tangible aspects of human expressions in art, architecture and interior designing. The huge temporary canopies held by a framework of bamboo poles and draped with a collage of colourful fabric and structural protrusions called the pandals thus manifest a spatial configuration, an 'optical manifestation' of social infrastructure, a concept elaborated by famous city space historian Swati Chattopadhyay. If one visits the city a few weeks before the official commencement of the festival one can see the gradual changes taking place on the city roads and public places, Durga idols taking shape

under the expert hands of the idol makers at Kumartuli famously known as the ‘potter locality’ of northern Calcutta. The entire process of creation of the idols from the collection of clay to the final ornamentation is a holy process, supervised by rites and rituals. On the pious day of Akshaya Tritiya when the Rath Yatra is held, clay for the idols is collected from the banks of the Hooghly River that runs through the city and with acute finesse and careful craftsmanship the idols are given their final shape before being loaded on trucks with great pomp and thrill to be installed in their respective pandals. The Durga Puja festival therefore does not remain confined within the sacrosanct precincts of a religious observance, a kind of annual ritual of the Hindu community but emerges as a distinct interplay of artistic creation, mutual cooperation and healthy competition between each pandal and its artwork challenging social hierarchy and cultural fixities ingrained in our consciousness by presenting us with alternative forms of popular art and modes of perceiving the world in general. The active involvement of multiple players beginning from the organizers, producers, owners, artists, structural engineers, event managers and even media professionals thus imparts a sense of collective endeavour and shared responsibilities to pull off such a grand mega carnival keeping in mind the high expectations of the crowd. Durga Puja is thus all about being a ‘public exhibition’ marked by devotion and ostentatious display which forms the twin aspects of the festivities with Maa Durga being at the epicentre of all the vivid magniloquence and festive extravaganza. This is where the Goddess with the festivity and merriment that surrounds her meets the metropolis adding a texture of sociality along with a metaphysical enunciation of the sacred. Officially it is from the day of Mahalaya itself that one can perceive the infectious vibe and energetic aura of the city and its incredible populace all set to welcome and relish one of the most awaited events of the year. For Bengalis, Mahalaya is not just an ordinary day, but cherished tradition and oodles of nostalgia gushing with a fabulous blend of devotion, culture and the sight of happy faces all around.

In most Bengali households waking up to tune in to the plangent rendition of Birendra Krishna Bhadra’s eulogising the triumph of

Goddess Durga over the evil forces of Mahishasura, being live broadcasted on All India Radio is like a soothing initiation into that spirit of festivity and religious reverence that dawns as a form of natural routine of almost every Bengali family ready to welcome their daughter with open hearts and folded arms. Everywhere the air is thick with the beating of drums, the chanting of the Vedic verses and hymns, the misty vapours of the incense as it rises upwards in the air bequeathing a tranquil aroma and the uplifting serenade of Rabindra-Sangeet that signifies how Tagore remains an intrinsic part of the refined Bengali sensibility impacting almost every facet of their social and cultural life. Tapati Guha Thakurta, professor at Centre for Social Sciences, Calcutta in her book *In the Name of the Goddess: The Durga Pujas of Contemporary Kolkata* observes that what gives a distinct status to the Calcutta puja is its cosmopolitanism and inclusive nature, as people belonging to different castes, classes, linguistic affiliations come together to participate in the fun and gaiety that the festival is all about.

This year is more special as UNESCO has included Calcutta's Durga Puja in its list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity acknowledging the profound artistic excellence and the potential message of inclusivity and goodwill that it fosters among fellow individuals. UNESCO defines Intangible Cultural Heritage as 'unique oral traditions, performing arts and rituals that hold immense relevance for communities to the point where they become part of a nation's collective heritage'. The UNESCO inscription reads that 'During the event the divides of class, religion and ethnicities collapse as crowds of spectators walk around to admire the installations'. From matchsticks to chalk pencils, metal mesh to ice cream sticks, scrap products to coins, dried leaves to cigarette packets and from ply blocks to foam rubber the dexterous bricolage of the puja artists is sure to stupefy the normative architectural sensibilities of any viewer when confronted with such a fine display of original art and craftsmanship with each idol and pandal emerging as semblances of stellar autorial enterprise. The unique blending of tradition, folk art and crafts with fine art in modernist forms began around the late 90s and early 2000s bringing in a series of

paradigmatic shifts in the way the festival is perceived by the common masses. What followed is an explicit metamorphosis of the festival from a low to a high culture community extravaganza with new experiments in ethnic preferences and artistic identities coming into being of a taste culture richly augmented by the participation of electronic and print media and a steady infusion of corporate capital and tremendous branding. Tapati Guha Thakurta explains this interplay between the material and the metaphoric by referring to city space historian Swati Chattopadhyay's concept of 'fungibility' meaning both the principle of how an everyday space or structure can become interchangeable with some fabricated site from some distant past or remote corner of the globe and in the process indicate how one single site can trigger multiple transfigurations and interpretive possibilities. The familiar city spaces thus become a kind of 'magical heterotopia' with every street and locality adorned with bright illuminated panels made by the artists of Chandanagore, an erstwhile French colony famous for its lightning industry. From multi-coloured LED bulbs to serially arranged twinkling wire clusters the city resembles a visual spectrum with moving images of animals, flowers, people, vehicles and even fire spitting dragons rendering the quotidian city spaces to something of an idealised demonstration and trenchant conceptualisation of the sacred and the social. These are however not unreal, imagined spaces but real places of a special kind, a site where the real is at once represented, inverted and challenged, a concept which Foucault called 'heterotopia'. The city thus becomes a liminal space in which the edifice created, arouses a sense of awe at the intricacies of the construction especially with ordinary objects.

With catchy themes and concepts often imbibing within itself profound socio-political overtones Kolkata pandals are magnificent relics of a meticulous blending of art and faith. The first in that order is the Sreebhumii Sporting Club which is highly popular for its exquisite pandals and magnificent decoration. In fact, Sreebhumii Sporting Club entered the Guinness Book of World Records in 2018 for being the biggest crowd puller among all the Pujas held in Calcutta with more than 1000 people visiting the pandal every five minutes. From building the replica of Jagannath Temple of Orissa in

2016 to the fictional Mahismati fort as shown in the Bahubali film, recreating the Kedarnath Temple in 2020 to this year's (2022) majestic St Peter's Basilica Church, Sreebhumi puja organizers are well known for conceptualizing stunning marvels in art imparting ideas of peace, goodwill and harmony. The popularity of the club lies not only in its praiseworthy Durga Puja organising capacity but also in its participation and commitments in its social orbit. The Club takes utmost care to provide for the needy and under-privileged, takes part in charity cricket matches and spends money on a lot of welfare projects. The frenzy of the pandal hoppers who swarm the roads in their attempt to have a glimpse of the divine pratima of Maa Durga resemble nothing less than a grand public spectacle in motion circumscribing aspects of vernacular modernity with such a huge multitude of visitors enthused to witness the 'fabular utopias' of popular craftsmanship and artistic pedagogy. The Sree Bhumi pandal this year also seemed to evoke ideas of collective amity and an open acceptance of religious diversity when the most revered deity of the Hindu pantheon was installed in a giant structure that was designed on the most auspicious space of the Christian community, that of Vatican City's St Peter's Basilica Church. Taking cue from Tapati Guha's observations we can infer that more than a religious ritual the festival has become a site of creative and cultural appropriation of the sacred and thus in its bid creating an alternative dimension of popular iconography and expressive art defying the epistemological categorisations of the sacramental. The role of the artist thus acquires a critical distinction because they need to continually reinvent themselves and seek new distinctions from their other professional counterparts. What follows as a result is an incredible variation with new forms and patterns of public taste making it an essential aspect of research and thorough engagement with new techniques and unconventional approaches churning up an array of overwhelming sensations in the minds of the viewers.

In Kumartuli locality of old Kolkata, the potters, sculptors, painters and craftsmen have truly outclassed their own brilliant and incredible inheritance when it comes to the making of the Goddess this year. Amit Sengupta, a correspondent for the Federal states,

‘There is no pandal here. It is like a gigantic art installation ... Surprisingly there is no Mahishasur with the Goddess here, nor is there a lion out to ravage the asura, accompanying her. She is looking beyond the horizon almost detached from the world’. Just like Sreebhumi, Kumartuli Sarbojan in Durga Puja Committee too boasts of a rich legacy of creating iconographic pandals using them as forceful motifs to espouse pertinent ideas and lofty themes. It was Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, who, in the 1930s took an important role in the evolution of this puja. One of the oldest Pujas of North Calcutta, Kumartuli organizers this year chose to pay a heartfelt tribute to their artisans and workers without whom Durga Puja cannot be even thought of. To attribute a mark of respect, the pandal had a collage of names of artisans written in Bengali on its walls. Debashish Bhattacharya, executive committee member of Kumartuli Durgotsav Committee states, “Durga Puja would be incomplete without idol makers and this year we have decided to salute these unsung heroes...Names of popular artists of the present day and the past will all find mention. We are going to experiment with colors, fonts and styles, all over the pandal. (*The Telegraph*, 21.09.22)

Santosh Mitra Square Puja pandal is considered to be another remarkable crowd puller in the city with their amazing craftsmanship and erudite panel of organizers known for their innovative puja themes and opulent decorations. However, the committee unlike its usual artistic tradition of coming up with impressive themes chose to do something different this year keeping in mind the 75th year of the country’s independence. This year puja committee members chose ‘*Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav*’ as their pandal theme where the visitors would be able to get glimpses of India Gate, Red Fort as well as the Parliament House within the sacrosanct premises of the pandal itself. Accompanied by laser light and sound show the pandal was one of the most enthralling experiences the city public witnessed in recent memory.

Chetla Agrani and Hindustan Club of South Kolkata are two other significant Durgotsav committees who come up with refreshingly new and distinctive Durga Puja pandals every year mesmerizing the crowds with their exotic decor and lightning. With

a unique theme titled '*Sholo Kolay Purno*' the Chetla Agrani pandal this year was dedicated to spread awareness and revive the endangered art of working on banana tea fiber. The entire pandal was decked with adornments made out of banana fiber and the process of extracting fiber from the stems and sculpting them into installations. Hindustan Park chose as its puja theme this year '*Jonaki Theke Agnisikha*' celebrating the skills and craftsmanship of the countless local tailors and karigars who transform our sartorial dreams into reality. Acknowledging a profession and a section of workers that remains largely invisible and quintessentially peripheral, the club organizers gave a befitting tribute to the sons of the soil. Designed with boards that resemble signage's of neighborhood tailoring shops, the pandal was innovatively decorated with hangers, scraps of discarded clothes and similar other tool kits that can be usually seen in a tailors shop. The voice over of dialogues playing in the background echoed their hard work and ordeals they undertake to work incessantly in miserable conditions.

Not only delineating abstract social causes and architectural symbolism, but a few puja committees and their organizers were also attracted by paintings and themes as lofty as microcosmic representations of life on earth in the form of a planetarium. The ones that need to be mentioned in this regard are the Bakulbagan Sarbojon in Puja Pandal and the famed Suruchi Sangha pandal of New Alipore, one of the major crowd pullers this year. Bakulbagan pandal was modelled along the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh's world class painting *Starry Night's* as its theme using it as a background to decorate the interiors. The organizers also seemed to highlight the possibility of Gogh's painting ever assuming a concrete shape in the form of a grand architectural edifice rather than just being confined to a fine piece of visual imagination. On a strikingly different note, Suruchi Sangha in New Alipore churned out a unique theme depicting a world free from the effects of Covid through its theme "*Prithbi Abar Santo Hobe*" (Peace will again prevail in the world). The pandal was designed in the form of a planetarium and with technological effects, imageries of a Covid free world was displayed inside the pandal. The pandal hoppers were enamored with a surreal

feeling upon entering the pandal as moving images signifying day and night, chirping birds, sunrise and sunset, the murmuring waves of the sea, moving clouds and changing seasons reflected humanity's gradual return to a state of normalcy after being battered by the morbid spell of the pandemic.

Other prominent city pandals like Tridhara Sammilani, Jodhpur Park, 25 Pally, Mudiali Club etc. too did not leave any stone unturned in bringing up splendid architectural creations imparting powerful ideas and messages to the city revellers. From reflecting upon themes based on human life and quest for survival to creating awareness about the use of solar power and sustainable development each pandal emerged as a compelling vista of human imagination and felicity. Thus, from sensitizing the masses about the hazardous impact of pollution to human trafficking and child labour, highlighting the plight of migrant labourers in the wake of Covid-19, rising inflation, farmers protests, citizenship amendment act, uses and abuses of technology, domestic abuse and women empowerment, population explosion and energy crisis, or heralding the virtue of social cohesion and religious harmony, nothing can come closer to the efficacious appeal of the city pandals when it comes to disseminating substantial ideas that resonates well with the contemporary reality and common temperament of the masses. In fact, the artistry of the pandals is not only restricted to conveying socially relevant ideas and themes but also involves picturesque and strikingly synonymous architectural imitations of famous monuments and renowned artworks and paintings ranging from Vincent Van Gogh to Raja Ravi Verma, Abanindranath Tagore to Leonardo Da Vinci and many more. The city thus becomes an art museum where one can see artificial yet vivifying structural replicas starting from Delhi's India Gate and Red Fort to Dubai's Burj Khalifa and Vatican City's St Peter's Basilica Church, Uttarakhand's Kedarnath Temple to London's Clock Tower enthralling the pandal hoppers to such a delightful show of animated things rarely attempted anywhere in such a grand manner. Timothy Mitchell considered this play of the real and replica as cardinal to modernity, referring to it as the world as exhibition creating an

exclusive phenomenon of celebrating, experiencing and exploring life in its myriad manifestations.

Apart from the festive aspect of the Durga Puja we also need to look into the religious part of it and understand how Goddess Durga epitomises those much-needed values and principles that modern humanity is in desperate need of. Goddess Durga stands for both primal strength and intimate domestic bliss and thus her symbolic relevance needs to be viewed from two different perspectives with all her nine forms representing different shades of her divine personage both as a nurturer and protective mother looking after the goodwill and well-being of all her children while at the same time she also stands for raw energy and brute power annihilating all the evil forces which lures mankind on the path of avarice and guile. Maa Durga thus becomes an interesting dichotomy that the society approves and ascribes to-celebrating both femininity and womanhood while at the same time resisting all that is unjust, exploitative and evil in nature, a metaphor for the modern woman who is not dependent on the shallow validations from the society but capable and competent enough to distinguish herself in all spheres of life. In a society that perennially puts mother's through unequal parenting burdens, deprives them agency in family spaces, invisibilises their unpaid care work, devalues their reproductive freedom, conditions them to deprioritise professional commitments and guilt trips them for not making sacrifices enough, Maa Durga emerges as a solemn figure hinting at the possibility of revisiting and reconsidering our latent biases against the feminine gender. Maa Durga shatters these cultural binaries and has a significant influence in changing the way women are perceived in society, as strong and self-reliant individuals who are no less in merit than the menfolk.

As the destroyer of demon Mahishasura, Durga through all her nine forms encompasses the essence of salvation, sacrifice and righteous conduct. She is the mother of bounty and wealth, knowledge and enlightenment as well as the source of supreme consciousness and dynamic energy. Worship of Goddess Durga signifies the process by which the divine potential within every being removes its layers of ignorance and achieves a state of self-

realisation. She is thus the guardian of dharma or cosmic order pervading the Universe in both its forms - as material and thought, the ultimate representation of infinite power, purity and strength of purpose which resides within the divine essence of every being, restoring calm and order to the chaos. Maa Durga also typifies the cultural sobriety of the Bengali community at large and the love and warmth, respect and regard that they exhibit towards the feminine gender. Such is the narratological virtue of the Goddess that she easily becomes a part of the ordinary Bengali life and also a metaphor for home and loss, roots and exile. Thakurta in her book observes that Calcutta's image has become synonymous with this grand autumnal festival of the Goddess with the city becoming a giant factory of secular mass identity. It's an event that shatters the narrow boundaries of dogma and religious differences, culture and class with the entire city dressed up in new attire spending these ten days in socialising, amusement, friendly and familial reunions and sumptuous feasting. In fact the city never sleeps during the last five days of the festivities with the roads jam packed with huge crowds who are out to bask in the splendour and dazzling resplendence of the city, something which cannot be experienced at other times of the year.

Durga Puja apart from being a much-awaited annual ritual in Bengalis also an economic enterprise in itself which provides for and sustains the livelihoods of a large number of people who are directly involved in the festive celebrations ranging from small and marginal workers, hawkers, stall owners, shopkeepers, dhakis, priests, idol makers, craftsmen, electricians and civic volunteers. As per the latest newspaper reports 2022, Durga Puja in West Bengal is a grand economic affair involving a budget of almost 40 thousand crores creating employment opportunities for lakhs of people across the state. With the advent of corporate sponsorships organisers are no longer dependent on contributions from local residents. If the budget of small Puja committees is around 15 lac, that for the big ones can touch an estimated figure of one crore rupees depending on the location, theme and corporate funding which goes into it. In an article published in The Business Insider (Oct 3, 2022), FFD President

(Forum for Durgotsab) Kajal Sarkar states that not only the core Durga Puja activities but also fashion, textiles, footwear, cosmetics and retail sectors get a massive boost by the buying spree of people while literature and publishing, tour and travel, hotel and restaurants, bars and cafes, film and entertainment businesses enjoy a sudden bump in sales during the five day festival. Durga Puja committees were also awarded a grant of 60,000 each by the incumbent dispensation to support them, so that they keep up with their good work with renewed hope and motivation. Despite the setback brought by Covid-19 pandemic West Bengal's Durga puja this year witnessed a sharp upswing with an estimated value of the festive transactions exceeding rupees 45 thousand crore mark. All stakeholders ranging from retailers to hoteliers and big brand owners reported sales "more than expectations" while puja organisers were ecstatic with the festive spirit among people. WB GST Commissioner Khalid Anwar said "The state's Goods and Services Tax revenue has been steadily increasing and we expect that the festive months will provide even more momentum. The cumulative growth in the current fiscal year is expected to be over 20 percent" (*Economic Times*, 10 Oct)

E-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra, Snapdeal etc. too see a huge spurt in online sales and as part of their brand endorsements leave no stone unturned to attract their customers by employing various tactics in the form of Flash Deals, Great Indian Festival sales, Big Billion Day sales with lucrative offers and huge discounts ranging from electronic appliances to household items, apparel to jewellery with low EMIs and enticing cashbacks. Exclusive branding has become the U.S.P of the city pujas these days with even big celebrities, sports stars and politicians being invited by the organisers to promote their high profile puja pandals. Durga Puja has thus become an important forum for different political parties to propagate their ideologies to reach out to the crowds and rope in new supporters. With big political leaders inaugurating the pandals to arranging their book stalls, Durga puja pandals serve as a cultural and religious pretext to dispense their agenda of tokenism and identity politics by presenting themselves as true emissaries and ambassadors of Bengali pride and culture, as the legitimate successors of the

legacy of Tagore and Bankim, Aurobindo and Vidyasagar etc. Be it the incumbent ruling party led by Mamata Banerjee or the BJP which has slowly started to make political inroads in the state post the 2021 legislative assembly elections, the parties leave no stone unturned to use these hallowed platforms to share their views and woo the crowds in their favour presenting themselves as messengers of cultural inclusivity and social harmony. In a way Durga Puja becomes the perfect time and space for political parties to exercise a kind of soft power by appealing to the collective cultural conscience of the crowds and channelize mass consensus into a vote bank politics.

Thakurta, the academic and historian who paved the way for the inclusion of Kolkata's Durga Puja on UNESCO list of Intangible Heritage Tags in her 2015 book which contains her personal experiences and extensive research over the past 20 years states that what excited and prompted her to undertake this study was the gradual evolution of the puja as it entered the urban space opening up a vast spectrum of tantalizing experiments in art and cultural aesthetics and started gaining a concrete foundation in the city. This geographical shift from the rural to the urban city space paved way for a demographic change as well with the Pujas becoming more dynamic and vibrant underlined by a kind of syncretic cultural bonding, reconstituting neighbourhoods and community involvement.

Ananya Borgohra in in her article *Durga Puja: Iconic or Consumerist* published in *The Pioneer* (18th Oct, 2015) observes how Durga Puja with the passage of time has metamorphosed into a template for all other festivals encapsulating the vivid traditions and cultural practices, merging ritual with religion almost defining the pulse of the city as a glorious carnival.. Guha Thakurta studies the shift in Durga Puja from an emotional, mythical and ritualistic refinement to a more materialistically illustrative montage. She writes- 'To bring modern stylistic idioms to work within a clay model image of the goddess meant an inevitable recourse to a vernacular aesthetic. The vernacular becomes the all-important term to think within this new genre of 'modern art Durgas' with the Bakulbagan artists' puja setting the trail for the present. We see how the

vernacular would set the parameters of the modern within this field of work but could never be modernist'. Thus in the wake of urbanisation, Durga Puja became a glocal phenomenon representing an arcadia of vivid art forms and stylistic genres, performing arts and latest technological evolutions, a platform to engage people with specialised skills and sensibilities both from India and abroad, providing an interface for cross cultural linkages and collaboration while at the same time, keeping its own legacy and heritage intact. In one of her tweets before taking part in a colourful rally as a gesture of gratitude towards UNESCO for the precious Intangible tag C.M. Mamata Banerjee writes that Durga Puja is an emotion that rises over parochial barriers and brings people together. It unites the magnificence of art with spirituality. We thank UNESCO for recognising Durga Puja as an intangible cultural heritage and honouring the labour of love of everyone involved.

Durga Puja emerges as a powerful token of religious liberty and creative endeavour that defies any singular and monotheistic worldview creating an interface where one both unlearns and re-engages with its reality. The city thus emerges as an 'urban text' with its splendid cultural cartography that expands its metaphysical boundaries beyond its spatial realms creating an 'affective space' for its readers/ residents to experience it's multicultural and multifarious dimensions as they happen to encounter it's ever-changing nature and appeal divided in its myriad manifestations all equally compelling and vivacious in their appeal. Unlike other cultural practices and art forms which have been attributed an intangible heritage tag by UNESCO because of their classical value and gradual extinction from the avenues of social life, Calcutta's Durga Puja is a different case altogether. Let alone being endangered or losing its cultural currency over the passage of time, Durga Puja is a perennially thriving and ever expanding phenomena and with the UNESCO tag this year it has officially entered into the category of a public art gallery, making it an arts festival as much as a religious one. The air is thumping with energy - there is music and bustle, people dressed up in new outfits, bright lights on the city's skyline and everyone determined to make the most of one week of celebrations. Kolkata is

a city known for its plurality and secularism. These values shine brighter during Durga Puja festivities. While the rituals and prayers are Hindu it is not uncommon to see people of other faiths visiting pandals, relishing *bhog*, or participating in the devotional *dhunuchi naach*.

The notion that the spaces we inhabit affect us in their own abstract ways, has now been accepted across disciplines paving way to understand the subtle dialectical relationship that the subject shares with his immediate surroundings and vice-versa. In fact, the geographical spaces we are a part of plays a very intrinsic role in the way we look at the world based on the development of our creative and cognitive faculties. One who has never been a part of the Durga Puja celebrations or witnessed its glory in person can never imagine the enigmatic appeal and phantasmagoria that it conjures in its myriad physical manifestations. Given the expansive sway of the festival it would not be an exaggeration to admit that the city becomes a kind of ‘cultural pilgrimage’ where the self converges with the divine in its infinite halo. With an overabundance of artistic creativity at display the city casts an intangible spell on its residents who forget their anxieties and troubles for those ten days of the year and try to make the most of it by basking in little joys with their children and family. The Puja thus comes as an embalming experience for everyone, an opportunity for self enhancement and rejuvenation, a sort of soothing break from the humdrum and mechanical aspects of life, work and office, a kind of mental de-conditioning, spending some quality time with their near and dear ones and living life to the full. Even those who profess no religion take great interest in pandal hopping and observing the sacred rituals with unflinching devotion and gusto. The city in its myriad hues thus resembles a site of holistic interplay of science and religion, a bridge between the timeless and the temporal, reality and illusion for its subjects, stirring the heartstrings of their consciousness and celebrating the cult of humanism and collective strength.

To sum up, Calcutta’s Durga Puja is an invaluable cultural repository, a colourful blend of the folk and the modern, a powerful expression of artistic genius and versatility, a cultural testimony of

soft power based on the aesthetics of shared values and ritualistic practices, a juxtaposition of the esoteric and the mundane, an exotic tapestry of art forms and an occasion for unrestrained merriment, conviviality and pageantry bestowing a new meaning and cultural context regarding the way in which we comprehend reality and folk art in the spate of massive technological changes and the evolving dynamics of religious ceremonies. It is a quest for beauty, symmetry and everything that is positive, uplifting and sophisticated. It is a celebration of diversity and difference, embracing both the centre and the periphery, a harmonious confluence of the spiritual and the material. At the same time, the affective space that the puja creates becomes a fundamental part of Kolkata's collective memory making it difficult for anyone to convey those ennobling sensations in words. Given its vast canvas, uncontrolled frenzy and aural appeal it would thus not be an overemphasis to term it as an 'Oriental extravaganza' carrying within itself an ardour of mysticism and exotic charm about it. To quote the prominent television journalist Vir Sanghvi – "The essence of Durga Puja is that all passions of Bengal converge: emotion, culture, the love of life, the warmth of being together, the joy of celebration, the pride in artistic expression and yes, the cult of the Goddess. It may be about religion. But is about much more than just worship."

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Sports-themed Campaigns (Re)framing Women in India: A Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

The paper explores construction of female gender in sports themed campaigns to understand predominant media frames used to present women in Indian sports. Semiotic analysis of two popular campaigns *Da Da Ding* by Nike and *#ChangetheRhyme* by Dove shows breaking some of the normative practices in visual and verbal framing of women in the media texts. There is a clear-cut intent to break the beauty, body and profession-based stereotypes that reinforce the traditional frames for women in media especially sports advertising. Conventional frames such as femininity, sexualisation, vulnerability, and beauty, often reported in sports media are not found. That sports are a male bastion is challenged as women were reframed in the sports themed campaigns. It is however noted that cultural signifiers like national identity in sports advertising remained the same.

Keywords: Sports Advertising, Gender, Media Framing, Hegemonic Masculinity, Semiotic Analysis, Qualitative Approach

Introduction

Popular media such as advertising in India have found a new a story to tell, that of Indian sports women. Not that brands alone are conceptualizing around girls/women in sports, but the media and entertainment industry as a whole is exploring this subject in their narratives. The much-acclaimed Hindi film *Dangal* (2016) was the story of two young female wrestlers Geeta Phogat and Babita Phogat who won Gold medals in International Competitions in a high endurance sport. The film presented the context of patriarchal society in North Indian state of Haryana and its reflections. Biopics in Hindi cinema are not new, but biopics on female players are few. Mary Kom (2015), the biopic of a world champion from North East India based on trials and tribulations of the boxer in a society apathetic

towards sports was made from the point of view of the female athlete. Indian General Entertainment Television (GEC) too is telling stories of young girls aspiring to play competitive sport in daily serials like *Udaan* 2014; *Tammana*, 2016; *Meri Beti Durga* 2016. In these fictional dramas, the story revolves around sport as the dream of a young lower/middle class girl; her socio-cultural realities and how she battles the rigid code of norms with respect to gender identity, sex roles, matrimony versus her love for professional sport. Female athletes as the central protagonist in sports media may be due to the rising tally of medals won by Indian women in recent international sports events. On ground, 2016 was the year of Indian sportswomen. PV Sindhu (Badminton), Sakshi Mallik (Wrestling), Deepa Karmarkar (Gymnastics) and Aditi Ashok (Golf) emerged as the winners/achievers at Rio Olympics forcing the mainstream media to take note. In cricket, Team India (women's) lifted the Asia Cup 2016. Captain Mithali Raj became the new 'Captain Cool' in the twitter world. If films and television centered their content around women's sports, advertising was not far behind. Ever Since, several brands have rolled out TV and digital campaigns featuring female athletes or women's sports. These campaigns became news because they constructed new images of women & sport in Indian advertising otherwise infamous for both its absence of women sport as a theme and for perpetuating the gender stereotypes (Jhally, 2010).

Sports, Society and Women: The Indian Story

Though Indian women have participated in competitive sports since 1930, efforts were largely made to encourage the boys in sports through clubs, tournaments in educational institutions and professional sports bodies emphasizing the "image of physical culture as a masculine activity" in India (Prakash, 1990; WS-22). M.K. Singh (Mithlesh Kumari) in her book "Indian Women and Sports" establishes how women and sports in India could never forge natural bonds because of our social grounding in sexism which connotes that female body is not compatible with athleticism, hence sports is inherently male. Menstruation is often used to dissuade girls from entering sports. Prakash records the myth: "menstruation saps woman's strength and makes her unfit, emotionally and physically for competition" (WS-25) in an attempt to debunk biological issues

as a defense to stop women from pursuing professional sports. Also, it propagates Boutilier's mutational binaries: masculine sports and femininity games even though 'Women's sport is an expression of the right to equality and the freedom of all women to take control of their bodies and participate in sports publicly, regardless of nationality, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion'. Amateur athletes from a very tender age are subjected to the misogynistic views of the authoritative paternalism due to which they have to forego the opportunity to succeed further in the sport. Furthermore, Dalit and tribal women face racial vilification for wanting to participate, as sports are used as a tool to create the myth of superiority of race, caste and class or religion (WS-22).

Construction of Women in Sports by Media: The Conventional Frames

Women's sport has faced representational crisis in the media ever since its entry in the assumed male arena. Smith in her paper 'the less you say' argues that femininity as a trait is not associated with sport or athleticism (quoted by Billings, 2014). Media portrayal of women sports has consistently reported devaluation of female sportspersons w.r.t physical strength, attributes, abilities and skills compared to their counterparts (Sabu & Jenson & Messer; Duncan & Jenson, 1988-1993). Clasen pointed out that since sports have evolved to be a masculine space, women athletes are represented more for their feminine attributes than game-skills and athletic abilities. Visibility, personification, visual imagery and intertextuality (Goddard, A., *The Language of Advertising*, 2002) in media messages direct towards the theory of hegemonic masculinity, where the males are framed as the dominant group where aggressiveness, drive, ambition, strength in and self-reliance is appreciated in males but not in females (Connell, 2005 as quoted by Smith in *Sports Media* ed. Billings, 2014). Hegemonic masculinity exerts its presence the most in sports across the world. Hans Schmidt in his conversations with University students in USA noted, "that female sports were marginalized because of the prevalence of a dominant culture encouraging hegemonic masculinity and male authority in societies" (2015, 60). Critical exploration of media sport has found gender marking, infantilizing, differential framing, and ambivalence, focusing on

femininity and heterosexuality, and different production techniques as strategic ways to frame female athletes as opposed to their male counterparts (Fink, 2014). Radhika Parmeshwaran contends that femininity in Indian advertising includes fairness, slimness, youthfulness, light skin, long legs and big eyes finalising the definition of contemporary Indian beauty. A longstanding colour prejudice is further highlighted in Hunter's expostulation that Indian women see lighter skin colour as a social capital. (Hunter, 2002 quoted by Parmeshwaram & Kavitha 2009)

The New Indian Woman Identity

As societies evolve, questions of equality and identity find more voice. In the postmodern times, normalization of patriarchy is questioned leading to constructions of gender identity that is inherently non-conformist. While advocacy campaigns like #happytoleed¹, #whyloiter² and #Iain'tnocindrell³ completely reject the patriarchal code in India and assert a female identity that is young, aggressive, rebels or protests against unequal gender practices, "the new Indian woman" is a combination of tradition/modernity; femininity/feminism; conformity/liberation (Basu 2001; Munshi 1998, as quoted by Parmeshram & Caldoza, 2009) in line with Rosalind Gill's observations of current neoliberal feminism in which young women should be beautiful but sexy and always up for it. In films or television drama this new India woman finds form, whereas the young aggressive, badass female is a frame more visible in recent advertising and advocacy campaigns. These media frames in congruence with psycho-demographic profile of the cross-viewing TV and Web audience in India makes digital advertising campaigns, a potent site of inquiry. Also, adolescent girls use popular media to construct self-identities (Butler & Zazlow, 2002) based on representations of women in books, advertising and films. As mediascape expands to include interactive spaces, transmedia conversations on representation subsequent discourse on framing of gender and sport in Indian media needs to be explored afresh. Recent studies highlight the role of new media w.r.t women sports (Creedon , 2014 & 1994; Tang & Cooper 2012; Schmidt, 2015). New media is changing the space for women sports by making the combination of

internet, mobile and Television potent for media sport especially women (Vann,2004).

Survey of Literature

Eastman & Billings (2001) reported symbolic annihilation as the most visible framing technique used to marginalize women's sports in the coverage of mega sporting events, including Olympics. Bernstein (2002) in her one of most cited work states that sexualization of female athletes as a media frame, where their appearance and attractiveness is emphasized robbing them of their athletic excellence or skill. According to the Women's Media Centre's report *Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2013*, "Coverage of women Olympians [in mainstream media] struggles between portrayals of athleticism versus sexualised stereotyping". Kane & Maxwell (2011) presented six categories of representation of sportswomen in media namely athletic competence, ambivalence, girl next door, hyper heterosexual, sexy babe and soft pornography while analyzing the response of sports audiences. Kennedy and Hills (2009) in a case study '*Meaning between the Gaps – Humour and Identity in Rugby advertisements*' underline the use of national stereotypic signifiers, hierarchy of identities and the translation of meaning system of heterosexual masculinity and national identity onto the brand advertised.

Rosalind Gill (2008) examines three recognizable 'figures': the young, heterosexually desiring 'midriff', the vengeful woman set on punishing her partner or ex-partner for his transgressions, and the 'hot lesbian', almost always entwined with her beautiful Other or double. Katherine A Mannion (2016) while analyzing the relationship between media representation of female athletes and the public opinion of female athletes found that female athletes are more likely to be sexualized than male athletes and are therefore delegitimized in their skill. A corpus-assisted analysis of sports reporting of the tennis athlete Maria Sharapova English and Italian press by Diane Ponterotto on representation of female athleticism reveals the presence of discursive frame which tends to trivialize the body of female athletes. Stacy Nicely (2007) analyzed the texts within three popular sports magazines (*ESPN Magazine*, *Sporting News*, and *Sports Illustrated*) found celebrity as an emergent theme commonly

applied to women in sports besides mental weakness, male reference, motherhood and sisterhood.

Limited research however exists on advertising campaigns that aim to break the gender stereotypes especially in Indian sports. A textual analysis by Arend (2015) on women directed advertisements by Nike in the context of US sports revealed how sports advertising is including feminist values in commodity form and that their agency is being exercised by female athletes in recent times.

Research Questions

Following questions are raised after analyzing existing studies in the light of new campaigns:

RQ1: What was the patterned sign system in these new advertisements?

RQ2: Are these advertisements framing athleticism and aspiration as the dominant value opposed to sexualization and vulnerability in women?

RQ3: How are sporting and non-sporting signs employed to break away from intertwined use of hegemonic masculinity and sports in India?

Methodology

A qualitative study was done to gain deeper insights into the verbal (aural and written) and visual content of the selected campaigns representing new signification on women and sports. Semiotic analysis of the campaigns will reveal patterns of signs, meanings and their ideological simulations.

Sample Selection

Two digital advertisements Da Da Ding by Nike and #ChangeTheRhyme by Blush & Dove released just before the Rio Olympics 2016 served as the media texts for representation of sportswomen in Indian advertising. These two campaigns were

selected as units because they grossed 2-3 million viewers* on Youtube on the first day of their release.

Table 1: Sample description Barbara Stern's model of advertising in communication (Stern, 1994)

	Da Da Ding		#ChangeTheRhyme	
	Description	Creative & Media Strategy	Description	Creative & Media Strategy
Source		Duration:		Duration:
Sponsor	Nike India	3:90 sec	Dove India & Blush	3.09 sec
Author	Weiden & Kennedy (agency); Rapper Gizzle (music) Franscois Rousselet (Director) Genera8ion (Producer)	It was released on TV and web. It is a musical vignette wherein famous Indian women athletes, a celebrity actor and women playing sports bring forth their love, passion, commitment to the game(s) in the most unabashed celebration of equal status to women in	Mindshare (Agency); Culture Machine (a digital content producer),	It was released as digital video on You tube and was later shared on social sites like Facebook and Twitter. It is a musical vignette that uses popular nursery rhyme "Chubby Cheeks, Dimple Chin, Rosy Lips Teeth with, in, Curly
Personna	1 film star + 10 Indian female athletes from the field of Hockey, Football, Cricket, basketball, squash, badminton, athletics		Six female athletes playing hockey, gymnastics, shotput, wrestling.	

		sports. With the advertising copy in form of a rap song 'Da Da Ding' the campaign aims to create a new narrative regarding women sports in India		Hair..." as a visual metaphor to present how female athletes and young sport aspirants re-evaluate beauty stereotypes.
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Note: Three Dimensions of the source considered

Semiotic Analysis and Research Procedure

Semiotic analysis deeply explores the content and form of various elements, how they combine to make meanings besides associations with dominant ideological standpoints of cultural theories and rhetorical schools. (Lee, 2015, 383).

In the present study, signifiers were identified and signification affixed based on Kennedy and Hills step by step guide to analysing media sport (Sports, Media and Society, 29-32). Various signs (signifiers-signified) in relation to binary oppositions in sport were analyzed in the advertisements to find the structured pattern of signs in Nike's *Da Da Ding* and Dove's *Change the Rhyme* (Table1).

Derrida's deconstruction⁴ and Barthes 'blissful reading'⁵ (as quoted by W. Lee, 2015) guides the analysis. Post-structural critique forms the theoretical foundation of semiotics in the present study. Post-structuralism argues that that 'the orchestration and manipulation of signifiers' (sound, words, images etc.) will determine the quality and the nature of the signified, hence inverting the relationship between them unlike proposed in linguistic structuralism (Lee, 2015).

**Table 2: Selected Binary Oppositions for the Semiotic Analysis
Da Da Ding and ChangetheRhyme advertisements**

SNO	Binary Opposition	Description	Source
1.	Masculinity: Femininity	Masculinity is associated with power, hard endurance, skill physical strength and dominance	Gramsci Hegemonic Masculinity Theory ; Parmeshram, 2005
2.	Athleticism : Sexualisation	Athleticism is possession of athletic ability and skill. Sexualisation is presenting women as sex objects and person trying to be beautiful for men	Bernstein Brandt & Carstens,2005; Tony Bruce (2012);
3.	Aspirational: Vulnerable		Kane & Maxwell (2011)
4.	Competitive: Casual	Having or displaying a strong desire to be more successful than others. Antonym (Casual)	Oxford Dictionary

5.	Celebrity: Ordinary	Celebrity is a respectable personality in their field who gets significant media attention	Klimes,1981& Boortein,1992).
6.	Beautiful: Ugly	Concept of Colourism where white /light or fair is considered beautiful and dark is ugly	Parmeshwaram & Cardoza, 2009

Source: Self Constructed

Findings & Analysis

The patterned sign system created by camera shots, angles, spoken copy (rap) and background music present how signifiers in the ads invested with meanings that frame women sports in a novel way were analyzed as per the identified themes (Table 2)

I Masculinity: Femininity

Digital campaigns break the convention to identify women with sports

The hegemony of male in sports is reversed in Nike's Da Da Ding advertisement as the female is both the message and the persona. Repeated use of wide-angle shots of women athletes running towards the camera thrice in the final sequence establishes the ownership of women in sports, which has been gender marked until now. In effect, it teases the viewer to prompt the identity of the athlete and their game reneging that sports are essentially masculine. Use of female athletes from different sports represents the generic intent to present sportswomen as the central protagonist. Presence of many female

athletes and absence of male is to negate the existing frames of symbolic annihilation and marginalization in mediated sport. Most sports themed advertising has fed the age-old binaries of masculinity and femininity with a pole advantage given to the masculine identity vis-a-vis gender in sports. In contrast, Da Da Ding equalizes the two binary oppositions. Conventional notions of Indian femininity are broken. Two such scenes illustrate the signification. In one scene where players jump cars, climb poles and continue to play their sport is a break the stereotype moment.

Indian cinema is littered with scenes of men chasing on the streets, young male adults playing on the streets is common in many advertisements, but women playing their sport on busy streets of bustling city urges the audience to redefine femininity. The female personas in the advertisement challenge the established gender order by defying the conventional code of femininity. More importantly, the male becomes the spectator (shots of boys looking at the girls playing on the streets) reversing the stereotype. It is a marked attempt to reset the characteristics that a society delineates as masculine or feminine. In another scene, female players sing and dance in a more masculine space, i.e., in front of trucks (truck driving, transport services is essentially masculine in India). The kinesio-linguistic shots of the girls present an aggressive, edgy and non-conformist persona. Use of rap song throughout, instead of a song again pricks at femininity once described. Furthermore, its spoken copy (rap): *'Let's go hard and show the world that, anything they can do we can do better...'* epitomizes how an ambition to be better than others is not inherently male but vital for any sportsperson regardless of gender identity. Here the female sports person is determined to make sports equal for men and women.

II. Athleticism: Sexualisation

Athleticism, instead of Sexualisation is the preferred media frame

Athleticism is signified in both these campaigns. Shots of players training rigorously, gyming, practicing, playing the matches with the spoken copy *"Let's Go"* convey the 'making of an athlete' in *Da Da Ding*. In this ad in the second shot the camera zooms in to a music system then quickly cuts to a loudspeaker on the street brings in the

freedom of choice and happiness associated with training to become an athlete. Later, in an intertextual reference to a scene in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, biopic of Indian runner Milkha Singh where he is shown preparing for a major sporting event, there is a sequence in Nike's ad in which a female athlete is running on the field with heavy weight tied to her ending with a long shot of the woman running hard towards the camera, emerging out of the dust and grime signifying athleticism depicted in rigorous training. Intertextuality here negates framing sportswomen as sexualized images. Her identity as an athlete is predominant. This sign is intentionally chosen to challenge 'the preferred meaning of these discourses that reinforce hegemonic gender order' in mediated sport (Lee, 2017, 387). In #ChangeTheRhyme advertisement, the camera repeatedly focuses on the face of the player, or the player in action (tight close up of the Archer ready to pull the string and release the arrow) instead of a body part for the male gaze and therefore keeping sexualisation away from imagery. That athleticism includes skill is categorically depicted in the tight close up of the archer's face as she bids her aim.

III Competitive: Casual

Inclusion of competitiveness reflecting the New Identity

The copy in the rap '*Out run the runners, Out shoot the shooters*' in *Da Da Ding* describes her seriousness to compete and excel at the sport. Playing sports in India is not a virtue for an Indian girl, but Da Da Ding creates a signification of pride with competitive sport.

In the ad, a visual clip shows mid shot of a female posing in the front of a shelf full of trophies full of trophies symbolizes that women sports are competitive to the core, where the sportsman aims to achieve recognition and awards framed by the copy or the rap song:

*Look in the mirror like
"Aye girl let's do this"
My only competition is myself
That's why I keep some trophies on my shelf*

The first two sentences provoke the audience to reinvent the meanings embedded in 'looking at the mirror'. Mirror is now invested with fresh symbolism of self-identity as a woman who can extend herself. The copy brings to the fore excellence as the prime motive of the players. To excel or be superlative in performance is the central idea of the message illustrating the competitiveness within the female sportspersons. Use of words and phrases *like* goals set the starting point, "quits in your vocab" is laced with relentless pursuit, the intensity of ambition is evident is "I want this so bad" and the determination to win is epitomized in "will not give up" is an expression of inner resolve to emerge a victorious in the end in Da Da Ding rap copy. In both Da Da Ding & #ChangeTheRhyme use of personal pronouns like "I" and "we" in the spoken copy signifies active state of ambition and success. Victory is a frame used for men, yet in these ads, female personas make no bones about their chase for victory or that they are in to win. Use of action verbs like 'got', 'won't', 'don't', 'cannot', 'will not' express a combination of ability, grit and desire to win and not just play the game.

IV Celebrity: Ordinary

Celebrity continue to find prominence, though others too gain visibility

The patterns of the signs in the two ads encode celebrities as leaders, role models and inspiring icons. Both the campaigns are musical vignettes (signifier) that reinforce celebratisation of sports. In these ads, the female characters are professional sports persons. Their selection as faces of the campaign lies in their ability to get audience and media attention. Important to note is inclusion of Deepika Padukone in the *Da Da Ding* ad. She is a movie star, not having played a competitive sport at the international level. The hierarchy within the celebratisation is also visible since, despite not being in sports, point of view shots of the movie star Deepika in the studio and long frames of the celebrity actress practicing emphasize her place her above the real sportspersons. Even in the last scene, the camera glides from the celebrities towards the young school girls creating a

direct relationship between the inspiration and the inspired. This ad signals that the focal point is the celebrity in the sporting world.

V Aspirational: Vulnerable

Un-stereotyping in Sports Themed Communication evident, as Vulnerability as a virtue is discarded

In the campaigns, signifiers like frontal close ups of the female athletes were an attempt to create direct contact between the player and the viewer. In a way, it was to reduce the distance (from public to social) between the persona in the ad and the viewer. Long shots establishing action and movement of the players signified aspirational women instead of pornographic or vulnerable. Sports grounds, basketball court and nets formed the backdrop in the long frames creating an ambience of aspiration and goal driven young women. These subjective interpolations of the players in the ad were clearly underlining the extra value of goals in the life of girls. In #ChangeTheRhyme, shots of women are practicing in broad daylight and in floodlit nights underscore the burning aspiration in the athletes.

VI Beautiful: Ugly

Reframing beauty as new definitions of female beauty are assigned

Ugly is acceptable but not beautiful in the conventional sense signify the advertisements. Descriptions of beauty in Indian women include new attributes. In the final shot in #ChangeTheRhyme advertisement of Dove, the bruised athlete looks straight at the audience with blood on her face says 'No It's not me' responding to the one question 'Is that you?' asked at the end of the famous nursery rhyme "Chubby cheeks, dimple Chin...Is that you?" that forms the copy of the advertisement. Tight close ups of athletes describe female beauty breaking away from the convention of fairness, fragile features, non-muscular shapeliness and long hair at several points in this campaign. When the rhyme as spoken copy plays curly hair, very fair, frontal close of a brown young girl with crew haircut and sweat running

down their face comes up on screen. The final shot (where the frame freezes) is an extreme close up of a female player with bloody nose and bruised face in #Changethe Rhyme ad where she says 'No, It's not me' breaks the beauty stereotype and signifies the new normal of beauty in women.

Da Da Ding also, through the scene when an athlete is shown training, lifting weight with hands under bright Sun, all smeared in dirt, sweat and tanned, questions the convention of beauty and embraces its binary opposition ugly as the new normal. Alongside, the spoken copy hits hard at colourism.

*Play hard 'cause I ain't worried about getting a tan
I'm still just as beautiful, man!*

It rejects the colour prejudice inherent in defining woman's beauty in India. Paradigmatic understanding of pattern of signs present that the use of "man" in the end is not merely a universal expression in language, but contains meanings that reject the demands of female beauty constructed for the male gaze. Self-assessment of looking value of a woman is ideologically challenging the gender stereotype of the male gaze. Athletes (for example: mid-shot of archer Mridula P., back showing her Indian Jersey in #Changethe Rhyme ad) are seen their training gear or national sports uniform underscoring their identity as an athlete.

We see that the signifiers used break some hierarchical binary oppositions on critical points where Femininity, Aspiration and Ugly are the new normal. The privilege accorded to male, masculinity and beauty in mediated sports texts is being reversed. The very name 'Change the Rhyme' is a call to act against the notion of beauty taught to small children in nursery rhymes like chubby cheeks. Every time the rhyme is repeated, its pitch and the tempo increases hinting at the shift from acceptance in the rhyme to anger, then agitation and finally action to reject the normality of beauty as constructed in Chubby Cheeks. New frames for women in sports were found: Aspiration, Athleticism, and Competitiveness. Deconstructing the campaigns brings forth the new found subjective positions gained by the conventionally weak (female, femininity and ugly) idiom in the

binary categorization openly challenging the naturalization of the dominant idea that sports is male, for male and of male. It contests the existing notion that when females play, they are merely attractive objects on ground, showcasing their sexualized images and not predominantly their sport.

Instead of creating continuity in the storyline, the thematic montage was effective in creating a balance between different sports. The two ads reflected of diversity in female sporting world in India. The advertisements did not discriminate between cricketer and non-cricket players. It placed the individual and the team, the popular and the elite all together at the same level. Creation of this level playing field also destroyed the hegemony of cricket in India sports. Importantly these ads are neither about cricket, nor about men, two dominant themes in Indian sports media. It is about girls who chose to play sports and that choice became their identity. Their identity merged with national identity as their aspirations find form and success.

An interesting facet of the Nike advertisement is the dance sequence. While the entire commercial revolves around sports training, determined athletes, practice and performance, this sequence breaks the semi-autobiographical storyline and depicts how these female players are making unconventional moves and dancing to challenge the accepted code of conduct for women. Badass dance moves described a strong feminist expression of rejecting the social identity of a 'new Indian woman'. While on one hand it is a rejection of the notion of a conventional good woman, the costumes and the hip-hop dance movements shown in the sequence embrace the globalized image of the females in the neo-liberal era.

Sporting (sports jerseys, football etc.) and non-sporting signs (streets, background music) are juxtaposition to break the masculine hegemony. The campaign interestingly uses intertextuality to invert the paradigm of gender in Indian sports. The scene where the female players crisscross the narrow lanes of the city to chase their goals through the various games they play on the streets is an imagery transferred from many Bollywood films where the Hero and his buddies play entre-stage to stamp authority on the streets. Streets

have clearly been marked as male spaces in Indian cinema, Da Da Ding introduces the new occupants of the streets in a metropolitan city –women and that too sports women. In fact, in the Nike advertisement, the 11 players occupy territories/spaces which were conventionally not theirs. It is in that sense, a call to free the public spaces from the labels of gender. The final scene hints at a new social order where the young girls are uninhibited in expressing their love for sports and thereby their choice. As they move from the inside of the school to the open grounds to play, the acceptability of sports in a female world is conjured up. Admittedly, it is marked by an absence of the rural landscape, from where most players in India come from. However, the target audience is urban therefore they must confront it first. Significant to note is the absence of reaction shots in both the ads. It is a construction of a new female identity not dependent on other's approval or applause, ironically the essence of fandom in sports.

Conclusion

The way women are reflected in popular sports campaigns not only influence culture of sports viewing but also how we view sports in relation to women. Semiotic analysis performed on the two campaigns highlights how new sign relations create meanings that revise the construction of gender, especially women. Even though it uses the composite arguments of Derrida and Barthes, the outcomes of the patterned sign relationship present either new frames or reverse the old frames used for sportswomen. The authors of the campaigns refrained from using bust shots, close up of long legs or bare midriff and used frontal shots of female faces, long shots of athletes training to change the narrative from vulnerable to aspirational. The ads are a first-person narrative of women athletes, pointing out that young women in India know their mind, are capable of making choices on their own, set their targets and equip themselves, understand what it takes to achieve what they set out for. While questions remain on the selection of the female athletes, since all in the campaign are thin and fit (Table 2), the larger objective is to create associations between girls and sports in a society where sports is still very male. It is also a rejection of the New Indian Woman caught up in the duality of feminism. Fathers or male colleagues/relatives are not part of their

stories freeing the female gender from the patriarchal crutches of support or submission. That these ads can change discourse cannot be ascertained, but representations like these can lead to a bandwagon effect, quite common in advertising. Also, since ads create a unique perceptual space for a brand, this new pattern of signs may encourage the marketing innovations that create themes to bridge the differences and not to specify them. It will be interesting to explore the marketability of femvertising, advertising that promote women's equality in sports in future researches.

Endnotes

1. Happy to bleed is an online advocacy campaign to secure temple rights for menstruating women in India
2. Why Loiter is an online campaign to reclaim freedom to be at public places for women at any time
3. Ain't no cindrella is a campaign against sexual harassment on streets
4. Deconstruction, adds to poststructuralist objection to binary oppositions by critical inquiry into the ideological practice of subjectivity in communication through naturalization and objectivity of culturally moderated binary oppositions in society.
5. Roland Barthes in 'The Pleasure of Text', 1976 describes blissful reading as 'writerly', wherein the reader is active and engages with the text while reading creating new meanings of the text and quashing the authors' hegemony over text and subsequently social discourse.

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Between the Mythical and the Human: Matrices of Writing the Sports-Heroes

Parvinder

Abstract:

The present paper is an attempt to foreground how mythologies intervene in the writing of sports autobiography. The autobiographical accounts of athletes are not limited to their personal lives. These narratives rather transgress the ‘biographical’/‘historical’ and develop in the form of myth(s). In the course of mythologizing, athletes at times emerge as quasi-divine figures executing miraculous feats. Thriving on mythical allusions, these accounts endow sportspersons with heroic virtues and traits. Autobiographies of athletes however highlight the ‘glorious’ but do not completely evade the mortal limits of sportspersons. The affirmed heroes conspicuously emerge as mere humans, subject to mortal constraints. The paper, in this light, aims to trace the convergence of mythological and human/biographical constituents in the autobiographies of American boxer Muhammad Ali and Brazilian footballer Edson Arantes do Nascimento (Pelé).

Keywords: Myth, Autobiography, Heroic, Monomyth, Popular Culture

I

In the modern times, traditional heroes are hard to come by; nonetheless, the domain of sports frequently claims to purvey the heroes of mythical proportions. Representations of sports are immersed in “a constant reenacting of the heroic” (Whannel 46). In a similar vein, autobiographies of sportspersons are imbued with mythical elements or legendary substance. These life stories catapult sportspersons into heroic realm and reshape their on-field achievements into mythical designs. In the times when ‘celebrity’ overtakes the ‘hero’, these narratives imply that sportspersons still evince some degree of traditional greatness.¹ The life stories of

sportspersons employ mythical tropes and allusions to exhibit superhuman characteristics. In some instances, sports autobiography unfolds as a heroic tale where the autobiographical subject undertakes an odyssey and returns home triumphant overcoming all adversities. Displaying the acts of remarkable audacity and unflinching spirit, these narratives seek to ensure a place for athletes among the larger pantheon of archetypal heroes.

The genre however attempts to gratify the common urge for heroic; it does not intend to efface the human facet of athlete. It is generally argued that “no identity can exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives and contradictions” (Archetti 154). Consolidating this assertion, sports autobiography candidly encapsulates frailties, excesses and promiscuous conduct of the autobiographical subject. The heroic ideals are juxtaposed with aberrations which render sportspersons human and fallible. They are often found susceptible to poverty, injury and other humbling forces. Underscoring the human side of sportspersons, autobiographical narratives spell out their on-field struggles, defeats and failures. Moreover, the elevated persona of an athlete is subdued due to the references made to his gaudy lifestyle or material possessions. In this sense, sports autobiography presents a confluence of the mythical and the human. Entailing this duality, the life stories of athletes reinscribe the Janus symbol, the Roman god “with faces on both sides of his head”, symbolizing “one thing and its opposite at the same time” (Pipkin 15).

II

Muhammad Ali’s heroic stature is undisputed in the public eye. Dennis O’Neil and Neal Adam’s comic book *Superman versus Muhammad Ali* (1978) displayed the two popular icons on the front cover, donning their boxing gloves and ready to face each other in the ring in the presence of other superheroes, celebrity figures and common spectators. The contest between the two icons was described as the “Man of Steel” against “the Greatest of All Time” (Nama 260). The image confirmed Muhammad Ali’s status as a superhero in the popular domain. In a similar manner, writer and athlete George Plimpton glorified Muhammad Ali as “electrifying bronzed god”

who produced exceptional powers (Dorinson 129). The statement tends to divinize the pugilist considering him a possessor of supreme gifts. Ali's autobiography *The Greatest: My Own Story* reaffirms his heroic standing. The use of 'superlative' in the title itself suggests that the autobiographical subject belongs to "a different order of being" or a distinct "ontological category" (Dyer 43). It elevates the protagonist beyond the level of mere mortals. The heroic culture is "inherently inflationary" as the impetus always remains on the magnificent and extraordinary (Rojek 97). Ali's autobiography is permeated with superlatives as the protagonist announces himself to be 'the greatest', 'the smartest', 'the strongest', 'the prettiest', 'the fastest', 'invincible', 'unbeatable', 'unconquerable', 'unmatchable' and what not. Even his fights are presented in superlative terms as "The Biggest Heavyweight Title Match in Boxing History" (98), "The Greatest Grudge Fight" (110), "the rarest event in sports history" (342) or "the most destructive" fight (354).

In the biographical terms, *The Greatest: My Own Story* relates the personal account of a black-American pugilist, Cassius Clay, who appears on the national scene with a gold medal in the Rome Olympics in 1960. Perturbed at his slave identity and mistreated by the fellow white-Americans, he renounces his slave name and converts to Islam. He adopts an Islamic name, Muhammad Ali and becomes a spokesperson of the people of his race. Owing to his new identity, the boxer is treated as a traitor by the white world. His boxing career is threatened when he refuses to join U.S. Army during the Vietnam War citing his religious beliefs. Ali unabashedly exposes the hypocrisy of white-America on the racial issues. He undergoes several hardships but the boxer confronts the adversities with resilience and determination. Muhammad Ali eventually claims back his World Heavyweight Title after being forced out of boxing for many years. In this way, the personal narrative recounts a tale of individual will against the backdrop of racism, religion and Vietnam War and thus entails the clear constituents of history. In the act of narrative-building, the autobiography however transgresses the 'historical' and enters the domain of 'mythic'.²

Call to Adventure

Muhammad Ali's life story is modeled upon Joseph Campbell's idea of 'monomyth'. Campbell, in his book *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, argues that all heroes embody 'monomyth' which is defined as the mythological adventure of the hero who "ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (28). Muhammad Ali's life story encompasses the essential rites of a 'monomyth' i.e. adventure motif, initiation motif and return motif (Campbell 28). The protagonist receives the 'call to adventure' after his return from the Rome Olympics. Having won the Gold Medal in the games, the pugilist rightfully expects a hero's welcome: "To me, the Gold Medal was more than a symbol of what I had achieved for myself and my country; there was something I expected the medal to achieve for me" (Ali & Durham 59). Ironically, Ali endures the opposite of what he deserves for his glorious accomplishment. Following his Olympic success, he and his friend Ronnie visit a restaurant meant only for the whites. The white waitress whispers to him, "We can't serve you here" (64). Ali nevertheless believes that his Olympic medal "would be a solution to the whole thing" but the restaurant owner firmly refuses to serve the "niggers!" (64). Feeling "shamed" and "shocked" (65), Ali and Ronnie leave the restaurant. The pugilist realizes: "Whatever illusions I'd built up in Rome as the All-American Boy were gone. My Olympic honeymoon was over" (68). Christopher P. Jones, in his book *New Heroes in Antiquity: From Achilles to Antinoos*, asserts that "an Olympic victor must necessarily enjoy divine favor, and that to dishonor him is to run the risk of retribution" (39).³ Humiliated by the disrespect, Muhammad Ali throws his medal in the deep waters of the Ohio River and decides to take on the White America. The moment Ali resolves to undertake this quest, he acknowledges the divine 'call to adventure'.⁴

The Quest

The 'initiation' of quest makes the hero withstand a "succession of trials" which he must survive during his expedition (Campbell 89). Overcoming the ordeals is a prerequisite of the mythical enterprise.

Following the mistreatment at the restaurant, Muhammad Ali (then Cassius Clay) becomes disillusioned with Christianity and subsequently converts to Islam. His action draws animosity from the white sections of American society. Immediately after the religious conversion, his first heavyweight fight which he reckons as his 'First Coming' is jeopardized by the promoters.⁵ They advise Ali to resort back to Christianity and stay away from the black Muslims in the Nation of Islam: "Your conversion is only a few months old. Allah will understand" (Ali & Durham 101). The promoters also lure him in the name of money; nevertheless Muhammad Ali, exhibiting the heroic spirit, conquers the mercenary temptations and settles without the fight. He emerges as a selfless hero who remains true to his mission i.e. "to live the kind of life that can make contribution to freedom, justice and equality for the black man in America" (x). In sacrificing the world heavyweight fight, the boxer symptomatically elevates himself to a legendary level. In the world of mythical adventure, the hero's center of existence undergoes a transformation and "what formerly was meaningful may become strangely emptied of value" (Campbell 51). For Ali, the quest of uplifting his people takes precedence over his boxing ambitions. Even when he returns to the ring, the outcome of his fight holds little 'value' in itself but inevitably caters to his quest: "I ain't been beaten ... I've been chastised. Allah gave me a little chastising ... to wake me up and remind me of what my mission is" (Ali & Durham 27-28).

Supernatural Aid

Throughout his precarious adventure, Muhammad Ali makes unconventional choices that defy mortal inhibitions. These choices are largely driven by the hero's moral virtues and character; however, amidst adversities, he is also "covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper" or he discovers that "there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage" (Campbell 89). The presence of a divine help in the life of pugilist is confirmed in the chapter titled 'Shorty is Watching'. 'Shorty' here is a religion-neutral name for 'God' who watches over the life of Muhammad Ali as a benevolent protector. The autobiography is replete with references such as "Shorty's in your corner," "Shorty had to be with you" (106), "Shorty put a motor

in his body” or “he’s like Shorty wanted him to be” (278). This supernatural aid sails the hero through the most stringent of his ordeals. When the draft board intends to recruit Ali in the Army for the Vietnam War, he seeks an exemption stating: “[To] bear arms or kill is against my religion. And I conscientiously object to any combat military service that involves the participation in any war in which the lives of human beings are being taken” (157). The Colonel astutely proposes some concessions; Ali notwithstanding deflates the manipulative moves. Under moral dilemma, the words of the Prophet comes to his rescue: “If you feel what you have decided to do is right, then be a man and stand up for it ... Declare the truth and die for it” (168). His refusal to be a part of Vietnam War, “a holy, patriotic crusade,” lends him in severe strife (141). As a result, the pugilist is temporarily jailed, his title is invalidated and he is debarred from boxing.

Hero’s Exile and the Trickster Archetype

The mythological journey eventually leads the hero into an arena of wilderness. It shifts his “spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown” (Campbell 53). Ali’s exile from boxing lands him into a similar unaccustomed territory. The ban unfolds as an absolute impasse that requires immediate solution given the transience of boxing prowess. He is forced into an exile “that will eat up what boxing experts regard ‘the best years of a fighter’s life’” (Ali & Durham 172). Predicting his fate, the journalists almost devalorize him: “Cassius is totally indifferent to whether he’ll fight anymore ... He’s content to wait until the Courts decide” (264). ‘Waiting’ does not contribute to the general sense of heroic; a hero must act when the situation beckons him. Under the circumstances, Ali however undertakes the legal course on his ban but simultaneously resorts to affirmative action. The pugilist embraces the means of ‘villainy’ to break the deadlock. Like an avenging-demon, he “wreaks vengeance” on his rivals, however not in the strictest sense of the term (Fontenrose 85).⁶ He rather employs provocative tactics to engage his fellow-fighters, promoters and common masses in a dialogue. Ali brags about his skills, challenges his opponents, taunts them and writes defamatory poems about them:

“I don’t need no Coliseum,
I’m whippin’ Joe in his own gym!
Come one, come all
See Frazier fall!” (Ali & Durham 251)

In exhibiting a sham-hostility, Muhammad Ali evinces the traits of a trickster archetype.⁷ His entire campaign to get back to ring thrives on mischief and trickery. He hoaxes a “bloody street fight” with Joe Frazier that amplifies his case for a genuine combat (256). Considering the public response and the promoters’ interest, the Georgia State Senator assures him of getting a license to fight in Atlanta. Like a seasoned trickster, he beguiles the establishments into his maneuverings and eventually ‘returns’ to the ring.

The Hero’s Return

Staying out of boxing due to a forced exile is perceived as a symbolic ‘death’ of the boxer and hence his ‘return’ after a long lay-off reenacts the resurrection myths. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes elucidates that myth is derived from “a semiological chain that existed before it: it is a *second-order semiological system*” (113). Myth is a speech which is “stolen and restored” (124). He further adds that the “mythical signification ... is never arbitrary; it is always in part motivated, and unavoidably contains some analogy” (124). *The Greatest: My Own Story*, in this sense, is a mythical allegory, both structurally and thematically. It explicitly thrives on the established biblical cycle of Jesus Christ’s birth, crucifixion and rebirth. The chapter titled ‘The First Coming’ introduces the pugilist in the world of heavyweight fighting; whereas the chapter entitled ‘Rumblings from the Grave’ metaphorically traces his renewed attempts to emancipate himself from his exile/‘death’. The hero’s ‘return’ to boxing is illustrated allegorically in the chapters named ‘Resurrection’ and ‘The Second Coming’. The life narrative thus structurally deploys the biographical content in the mythical framework. It offers a range of figurative tropes that establish apparent similarities between Christ’s resurrection and Ali’s comeback: “He’s bein’ born again” (275), “coming out of the womb” (276), “bringin’ you back to life” (277). As Ali braces himself for his return fight, his teammate Bundini impatiently remarks: “Champ, not even Jesus Christ would tarry like you on *His* Second coming. He

wouldn't keep *His* goddamn disciples waiting like you doing. Hurry up. Shorty don't give nobody no Third Coming" (282). Similarly, the spectacle around his fights is reproduced in other-worldly terms. The spectators/'disciples' eulogise the hero with larger than life significations: "Good Lord A'mighty, the Lamb's come back" (283),⁸ "You can't beat God's son" (401). During the bouts, the followers see him "come to life" (404) and "rise from the dead" (402). With an abundance of such expressions, the narrative evokes an element of 'surreality' that surpasses the veridical and furnishes the allegorical.

The recounting of hero's ultimate fight for the World Heavyweight Title is imbued with similar mythical charge. The fight is professed as "the greatest miracle since the Resurrection of Jesus Christ" (381). The underdog Muhammad Ali is pit against the reigning Heavyweight Champion, George Foreman and hence it claims to offer a spectacle identical to David and Goliath.⁹ Across three continents, fourteen nations propose to host the titanic clash, "the Fight of the Century" (382). Italian government bids to stage the grand event in an old Coliseum in Rome "where the gladiators fought" (366). The fight is eventually contested in Zaire, "in the heart of Africa" and hence the hero returns to his "ancestral homeland" to accomplish his quest (366). His rival George Foreman is also of African descent but, fighting Muhammad Ali, he represents the Christianity and the Great White Hope.¹⁰ As the hero enters the ring and raises his hand to salute the people he was fighting for, they respond as if "we've been rehearsing together all our lives" (394). In this mutual gesture, the hero stands "simultaneously above and with the people" (Hughson 97). He is 'with' them considering their shared ancestry and experiences; but, at the same time, the pugilist stands 'above' them as their possible redeemer. Going into the fight, these brethren infuse him with a belief, a "charge of electricity", while some "disbelievers" expect his mighty opponent to lynch him (403). The word 'disbeliever' has theological connotations and therefore the hero emerges as a "quasi-religious" figure (Rollin 93). During the combat, he performs "all kinds of miracles" and finally wins the sacred battle (Ali & Durham 409). His victory completes his mythological adventure. The hero is crowned with the World

Heavyweight Title which serves as the required elixir for the revival of his community (Campbell 182).¹¹

Not a Universal Hero

However, Muhammad Ali apparently exhibits the traits of a mythical hero; his heroism is still in some measures subject to scrutiny. The idea of heroism calls for a certain “degree of homogenisation in audience response” (Whannel 45). The public response is generally “fragmented” and an element of “consensuality” has to be produced in the process of narrativisation (45). Given the nature of Ali’s quest, *The Greatest: My Own Story* does not attempt to lend an aura of universal hero to the autobiographical subject. The life narrative acknowledges Muhammad Ali’s global recognition but refrains from establishing him as a classless icon. Except a few instances of racial reconciliation, the narrative primarily relates the conflict between the blacks and the whites wherein the autobiographical subject unapologetically asserts himself as a champion of his race. His followers, mainly non-white, perceive him as an embodiment of exceptional prowess and semi-divine possibilities. Conversely, for the white Americans, he is a bad nigger who deserves to be tamed. During his fights, they express their disdain for the ‘villain’ without restraint: “When it was over, I had won ... the audience threw everything they had in their hands into the ring – cups, bottles, peanuts, even a switchblade. And they booed me all the way to the dressing room and clutched at my robe. I had just made more enemies” (Ali & Durham 107). Far from his mythical aura, the white people identify the pugilist in villainous terms.¹² They employ metaphors that reduce him to be a non-human. Ali is sporadically referred as a “black rat” (121), “Frankenstein” (127), “cannibal” (130), “jungle animal” (56), and “monster-in-exile” (246). These descriptions dehumanize the autobiographical subject and imperil his mythical status to a certain extent. Hence, Muhammad Ali rises to “myth heaven, albeit half-way” (Dorinson 130).

III

Brazilian footballer Edson Arantes do Nascimento, famously known as Pelé, recounts his experiences on-and-off-the-field in his life story *Pelé: The Autobiography*. Like Muhammad Ali, Pelé holds a

legendary status and his autobiography augments the same. Chronicling the tale of three times world cup winner, the life narrative unveils the making of the Pelé myth. In his personal account, the autobiographer acknowledges that Edson, the boy from Bauru, represents a different identity from what Pelé has become. Describing the Edson-Pelé dichotomy, he ruminates that “both identities are separate and both are parts of me. They are the two sides of what I am” (Nascimento 287). He further reflects that Edson signifies “simple things” (286) whereas Pelé is a “mythical figure” (285). In other words, Pelé is a mythologised rendition of an otherwise this-worldly Edson.¹³ *Pelé: The Autobiography* takes this duality into account and coalesces the mundane and the magnificent. It presents the biographical journey of the football player and his eventual rise to mythical greatness.

Legend-building

Pelé: The Autobiography delves into the act of legend-building by relating local legends and suburban myths about the autobiographer’s birth and childhood (Parry 10). The first chapter sets the tone for mythical interpretation, particularly in the descriptions of the footballer’s birth. The autobiographer recounts that he was born in a village named Três Corações which bears religious significance for having a chapel of the sacred hearts. Três Corações, literally meaning the three hearts, refers to the holy trinity of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Establishing an allegorical correlation with the divine figures, the footballer claims: “[I]t feels completely natural to me, it makes complete sense, that I should have been born in a place called ‘three hearts’ ... Três Corações has always been an important signpost for me ... The places where I was born, where I grew up and where I played football – they have given me three hearts too” (Nascimento 12-13). The description lends a mythical value to the autobiographer’s existence from the very moment of his birth. It seems to reinforce that “a special manifestation of the immanent divine principle has become incarnate in the world” (Campbell 296). The description, moreover, underlines the ‘natural’ concordance of the hero’s sacred birth with his future deeds. The autobiographer here ascribes his birth to his subsequent ascent as a champion footballer.

The claims of his unique embodiment are consolidated further by his father who, examining his son's "scrawny legs", prophetically declares: "This one will be a great footballer" (Nascimento 13). The birth thus serves as a prelude to the autobiographer's imminent heroics on the football field. His father's prediction, in a way, underscores the belief that "heroism is predestined, rather than simply achieved" (Campbell 294). Owing to his mythical standing, the hero's birth-place is deemed with equal sanctity and devoutness. The autobiographer proudly shares: "I'm honoured that the street has been named after me and there's even a plaque on that house saying that's where I was born" (Nascimento 13). The 'plaque' on the house and naming of the street serve more than the memorials of historical relevance. They rather signify the deification of the footballer and enshrinement of his birth-place. Similarly, the stories behind autobiographer's naming carry metaphoric and hagiographic implications. His father named him Edson after the inventor of electric light, Thomas Edison. Like his namesake scientist, Edson, the footballer, would eventually 'lighten' up the lives of Brazilians albeit somewhat differently. As in the case of numerous saintly figures, many local legends circulate about the genesis of his (nick)name. He validates that there have been "lots of stories" and "different versions" to his being called Pelé (43). The 'mystery' around the origin of his nickname is so precarious that the autobiographer himself is uncertain and he could only relate "the most probable version" of how he came to be known as Pelé (43).¹⁴

Magical Pelé

Joseph Campbell argues that the deeds of the hero correspond to the depth of his birth (296). Considering his 'sacred' birth, what Pelé displays on the football field is 'magic' and not merely a 'skill'. The mythologizing process includes "the attribution of magical powers or superhuman qualities" to the sporting figure (Whannel 122). Pelé himself refers to his "extra vision" and "sixth sense" that allow him to take control of the game (Nascimento 53). He claims to possess "an ability to anticipate what was going to happen, slightly before everyone else" (53). Among his other superhuman endowments, his talent to make a bicycle-kick – kicking the ball over the head while being in the air – partially empowers him to defy the laws of gravity.

His charisma reflects not only in his marvellous hold on the game but also in the aesthetic finesse that produces moments of epiphany on the field:

I picked up the ball outside our own penalty area and started running with it towards the Fluminense goal. One player came at me to tackle, then another, then a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth ... I just danced around them all before beating the goalkeeper as well. The São Paulo paper *O Esporte* heralded it as 'the most beautiful goal' ever scored in the Maracanã ... the paper had a bronze plaque cast which was mounted at the entrance to the stadium. The goal is known as '*gol de placa*' – the goal of the plaque – and whenever people in the Brazil describe goals now as a '*gol de placa*' they are comparing them to the perfection that I attained that day. (119)

The reference to Pelé's 'perfection' hints at something more than sheer sporting excellence. It does not even allude to some mathematical accuracy. It rather focuses on the transcendental effects the goal generates in order to be 'the most beautiful goal ever'. The 'perfection' here indicates that the performer is in "harmony with the greater forces" of divinity (Carroll 92). At many instances in his life narrative, the autobiographer avows: "I was on song" (94), "I was the Pelé I wanted to be" (94), "no one could stop me" (131), and "God had his eye on me" (73). The footballer thus furnishes several moments throughout his career when he seems to be guided by some "intangible inspiration" (Carroll 97). Under heavenly grace, the statistics that Pelé achieves appear "unreal" even to him (Nascimento 120). He transforms into a "footballing machine", an automation executing some divine will (203).¹⁵ Pelé ultimately accomplishes the rare feat of scoring more than one thousand goals that renders him 'immortal'.

Hero's Feat: A Religious Rite

Allen Guttman, in his seminal work *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*, contends that sports today are characterized by "the almost inevitable tendency to transform every athletic feat into one that can be quantified and measured" (47). He

further adds that the emphasis on ‘record’ endorses an “empirical, experimental, [and] mathematical” world-view in sports (85). Pelé’s distinction of one thousand goals, however, transgresses numerical quantification and unfolds as a feat that brings the ‘ritual’ and the ‘record’ together. A mythology is created around the moment of reaching the elusive landmark. In the course of narration, Pelé’s milestone is approximated with the ceremonial performance of a religious rite. John Carroll describes a rite as “an activity full of sacred resonances, with an elaborate mythology, celebrated on a grand scale ... approached with faithful seriousness, anticipated and prepared for weeks in advance, talked about incessantly, and providing a common attraction for a population” (92). Like a holy rite, the ‘preparations’ for Pelé’s marvellous feat commence in ‘advance’ as the hero crosses the 990 goal mark and gets “within kicking distance of the milestone” (Nascimento 167). The waiting ‘populace’ devotes “all the attention” to the impending occasion and seems to “talk about nothing else” (167). The celebratory atmosphere around the event can be imagined through the expressions such as “the scenes were incredible”, “crowd erupted in euphoria”, “fans were ecstatic” (168), “[t]here were parades in the streets”, “[t]here were flags and banners and drummers”, “a huge, contagious environment” (169), “[i]t was surreal”, (170) and “stadium was erupting with firecrackers” (171). Lending an element of sacredness to the event, “a special Thanksgiving Mass” is also arranged (169). Pelé’s deed thus elicits festive overtones with these moments of jubilation and public engagement. The ‘magic figure’ of a thousand goals is eventually achieved on Brazil’s National Flag Day, a “good day for commemorations” (170). Moreover, the monumental goal is scored at the Maracanã, the “biggest stadium in the world” (170). With this unity of ‘time’ and ‘space’, Pelé’s accomplishment is reproduced in a mythic form.¹⁶

Hero-worship

Pelé: The Autobiography presents numerous instances of fans’ devotion that draw “inescapable parallels with religious worship” (Rojek 53). The fans perceive the footballer in hallowed terms and obsessively attempt to possess him. They manifest what Chris Rojek terms the ‘St. Thomas Effect’.¹⁷ The term refers to a compulsive

desire to validate an object by 'touching' it (62). When Pelé and his teammates return home with their first World Cup trophy, the Brazilian followers endeavour to "embrace" them to authenticate their mystical presence (Nascimento 104). Pelé's charisma does not remain limited to his native fans; he rather transcends the 'local' and evinces a 'transnational' heroism. After an injury lay off, he makes a heroic comeback for his club team in Basel, Switzerland scoring five out of eight goals. In awe and wonder, the Swiss fans storm the field "intending to carry our players aloft, me and Coutinho especially" (120). Similarly, the football lovers in Africa welcome Pelé and his teammates with devotional eyes: "It was an experience that changed not just my view of the world, but of how the world viewed me. The interest in the team and in me was extraordinary ... everyone in Africa, it seemed, wanted to see us, touch us, almost as if they wanted to make sure we were real" (159).

The vehement veneration for Pelé reflects in the sense that the fans preserve his belongings in the form of relics.¹⁸ During the 1970 World Cup, some ardent followers break into his room and run away with the ten team shirts allocated to him for the tournament (299). The autobiography offers many similar anecdotes where the fan behaviour parallels religious worship and even fanaticism. In a match against Colombian Olympic team, the referee sends Pelé off for his protest against an undue goal given to the opponents. As a result, the referee becomes an enemy to the crowd for his 'blasphemous' act of sending their 'god' off. Security and police personnel ultimately protect him from the crowd "baying for his blood" (164). The norms of the sport seem irrelevant to the fanatic 'devotees' as they bring Pelé back to the field and the referee is unprecedentedly sent off. In another instance, a referee, in amazement of Pelé's magical performance, infringes expected neutrality and awards him "a goal that wasn't really a goal" (120). His mythical appeal subdues political tension during the civil war of Nigeria as the country witnesses "a forty-eight hour ceasefire" and the followers throng the streets with white flags and posters saying "there would be peace just to see Pelé play" (166). Thus, Pelé emerges as a messianic-figure drawing reverence of religious proportions from his earnest fans.

Fallible Human

However, the life narrative illustrates Pelé's heroic endowment; it does not obscure his failures, fallibilities and limitations as a mortal. The autobiographer intermittently descends his mythical pedestal and undergoes public probe and ignominy. He recognizes that his "compatriots love Pelé, but they are tough with him too" (281). The footballer is often "accused of being a demagogue" for his general opinions and press statements (283). His decision to join American football club Cosmos also invites public criticism, particularly after refusing to play for Brazil in the 1974 World Cup. The life story does not attempt to establish Pelé as an epitome of virtue; it rather candidly unveils his sexual trespasses that lead to his divorce with the first wife. Under trials and tribulations, the football star acknowledges his human limits: "[W]e are not always in control of our own destinies" (285). Pelé's entire campaign of the 1962 World Cup is marred due to injury. His consequent predicament reflects in the use of expressions such as "watched ... from the stands", "the devastation I felt", "I cried so much", "It seemed so unfair", "I was sidelined" (128), "I was inconsolable", "I suffered a lot", "plagued with doubts" (129) and "the problems I faced" (130). Despite his global name and fame, Pelé seems to be outplayed by certain realities of his life. The autobiography records his misadventures in business and financial matters which relegate him to the verge of bankruptcy. Pelé endures his severest suffering when his son is imprisoned for drug trafficking. Having been vocal against drugs his entire sporting career, the situation renders him extremely vulnerable: "I felt shame, fear, doubt, sadness and hatred, and had crazy thoughts, wishing I had the superpowers of a Spiderman or a Superman to change the course of his awful story" (270). Here, the agonizing Pelé casts off his 'heroic' identity and admits his 'human' fate.

IV

Life narratives of sports achievers are thus shaped in an allegorical mode. These autobiographies capitalize on the already established archetypes and conversely cater to the mythical domain by providing heroes of grand proportions. The life stories project athletes as creatures who are subject "not only to the law of history but also to the law of eternity" (Pipkin 96). In these accounts, the sports

performers exhibit seeming similarities with the traditional heroic figures. Muhammad Ali's life narrative is traced in the form of a mythical adventure. Drawing allusions from the Bible, his autobiography attempts to establish him as a semi-divine being. His heroic stature is however compromised due to his Afro-American identity and thus he emerges as a 'racial' hero. Brazilian footballer Pelé's persona is no less mythical and easily fits into the superhuman template. His life story consolidates the Pelé legend endowing the footballer with celestial genius. The autobiography, at the same time, relates several instances where the footballer is subjected to powerful forces of destiny as well as public criticism. The life accounts of sportspersons therefore bring together the ambivalent elements that go into the making of a convincing sports hero.

Endnotes

1. Daniel J. Boorstin, in his book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, claims that our thinking about human greatness has altered with the course of history. Historically, hero was supposed to be a man who was "admired for his courage, nobility, or exploits" (46) and people "looked for God's purpose in him" (45). The war hero was the "prototype" of greatness as the battle provided opportunities for "daring deeds" (46). Boorstin opines that the Graphic Revolution provided the means of fabricating 'fame' and changed our understanding about human greatness (47). Differentiating between a hero and a celebrity, he explains that hero was a "Big Man" while the celebrity is a "Big Name" (47).
2. Garry Whannel, in his book *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities*, explains two rather contrary techniques of sports narrativisation i.e. 'mythologisation' and 'reinscription' (56). 'Mythologisation' involves "the attribution of magical powers or superhuman qualities" to the athlete; whereas 'reinscription' is the interpretation of a sportsperson's life "according to dominant concerns at the time of writing" (56).
3. Christopher P. Jones cites several accounts of mistreatment towards Olympic winners in antiquity. The fellow-citizens of these athletes suffered eventually through natural calamities such as famines, plague and bad harvests (39-41).
4. Joseph Campbell explains that the 'call to adventure' is a time zone when the "familiar life horizon has outgrown" and "the passing of a threshold" is required on the part of the hero (47). In myths and popular tales, the 'call' is generally answered by the heroic subject. The

- heavenly summons, if at all, are refused or remain unanswered, the adventure turns into negative and the subject “loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved” (54).
5. Burgeoning on the Biblical reference, the chapter four of the autobiography is titled ‘The First Coming’. It includes the build-up to Muhammad Ali’s first heavyweight fight.
 6. The element of revenge is a core theme of mythical tales. The disgraced hero-athlete seeks revenge and turns out to be “a rationalized and historicized version of the avenging demon” (Fontenrose 85). The demonic image of the athlete manifests in the tales of classical athletes such as Kleomedes, Euthykles, Oibotas, and Theagenes (page 83 onwards).
 7. In his path-breaking essay “The Structural Study of Myth”, Claude Levi-Strauss explains that a trickster is “an ambiguous and equivocal character” who retains a certain kind of “duality” (441).
 8. Lamb of God is a title used for Jesus Christ.
 9. The expression ‘David and Goliath’ is popularly used to describe an underdog situation where a relatively weak aspirant (David) fights against a mighty adversary (Goliath). The expression is frequently used in sports narration. David-Goliath story features in the Hebrew Bible.
 10. The term ‘Great White Hope’ was used for any white boxer who was expected to defeat heavyweight champion Jack Johnson, an invincible black pugilist in the early decades of twentieth century. In his autobiography, Muhammad Ali extends the use of term even for his fellow black athletes like Ken Norton and George Foreman as the white Americans expect them to beat the rebel Ali (21).
 11. Joseph Campbell’s ‘monomyth’ narrative demands the adventurer to return with a boon or a “life-transmuting trophy” which may aid to the renewal of the world (179). It completes the full round of his adventure.
 12. Keith D. Parry argues that heroisation is a dynamic process wherein “it is possible for a subject to move between hero and villain types” (14). He illustrates that Robin Hood heroes are recurrently “associated with villainous behaviour” and this behaviour is permissible provided “it is aimed at social and physical oppressors” (11). Muhammad Ali, in this sense, evinces certain traits of a Robin Hood archetype as well.
 13. The autobiographical subject is consciously aware of his mythical stature as he elucidates the Pelé phenomenon: “I have to ‘raise up’ Edson in order to ‘bring down’ Pelé ... But Pelé had taken on a new life of his own; he overtook everything. Everybody in the football world wanted to keep him around. And so I carried on being Pelé ... I’m proud Pelé is still here. After all, Pelé the footballer went to many places, scored many goals, won many trophies ... I have been honoured in

- hundreds of different ways in different countries around the world and the more you receive, the stronger the mythology becomes (285-86)”
14. The autobiographer narrates that the goalkeeper in his father’s team was known as Bilé. As an infant, he wasn’t been able to speak even after attaining an age of two years. Some witch-doctor rituals were performed for weeks and one day the boy miraculously shouted ‘Bilé’, which eventually became his nickname. Twenty years later, Pelé (then Edson)’s father would take him along to his training sessions where the three-year-old Edson emulated the goalkeeper Bilé. He relates: “I was only young and I somehow distorted the nickname and said that when I grew up I wanted to be a goalie like ‘Pilé’. When we moved to Bauru, this ‘Pilé’ became ‘Pelé’” (44).
 15. James W. Pipkin argues that many sportspersons in their autobiographical accounts perceive their body as a machine which carries out the commands given by the mind (53-54).
 16. Time and space are considered to be significant constituents for the creation of a sporting myth. Time refers to “the moment when the golden memory was created” (Whannel 52). These golden moments (such as Pelé’s thousandth goal) become “immortal in the space of memory” and are thus “laden with great mythic force” (53). Likewise, some sporting spaces evince a unique mythical “resonance and aura” (53).
 17. As per the Biblical story, St. Thomas doubted the presence of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. The ‘doubting’ Thomas authenticated it by ‘touching’ the wounds of crucifixion on Christ’s body (Rojek 62).
 18. Rojek opines that in secular society, the obsessive followers “build their own reliquaries of celebrity culture” which include objects such as chewed gums, tissues, lipsticks, cigarette butts and other belongings used by the celebrities (58).

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“My Son Won’t Play Cricket for England”: Cricket, Patriarchy, and Diasporic Subjectivity in *Patiala House*

Rakesh Ramamoorthy

Abstract

The Hindi movie *Patiala House* (2011) deals with the question of the (sporting) allegiance of diasporic subjects. In the movie, a prodigiously talented British Asian cricketer’s sporting career is curtailed by his father’s unwillingness to let his son play for England. This paper examines the ways in which the text negotiates the ‘homeland vs adopted land’ dichotomy, a clichéd binary that continues to be pervasive in discourses on the allegiance of diasporic subjects. Informed by the assumption that neither of these positions are empowering or regressive in themselves and that there is a need to explore the contingent cultural politics of particular diasporic subjectivities, this paper argues that the narrative of *Patiala House* undercuts the (contingent) progressive potential of both poles of this dichotomy. The movie’s suggestion that England has entered a post-racial era makes it complicit with what Bonilla-Silva terms “color-blind racism”. Such a negation of racism undercuts the critical potential of the South Asian immigrants’ identification with their country of origin as a means of combatting the exclusionary overtones of the mainstream British culture. Furthermore, the movie’s eventual portrayal of a seemingly acceptable means of assimilation into the adopted land — a British Asian cricketer’s playing for the England team while adhering to certain Indian cultural norms — is regressive on account of its endorsement of patriarchal hierarchies.

Keywords: Cricket, *Patiala House*, Color-Blind Racism, Diaspora

The sport of cricket has been a key site of the negotiations of British Asian subjectivities. The scholarship on the subject attests to the heterogeneous nature of South Asian diaspora’s engagements with British cricketing cultures. The immigrants have been cast as racial and cultural Others in these (sporting) cultures, and often critiqued for refusing to assimilate into the mainstream English culture (Burdsey “If I Ever Play Football” 17, Fletcher 613-6, 620-21). This has resulted in many immigrants identifying themselves with ‘home’

teams as a means of battling such every day racisms. In many cases, this identification is cultural, and does not amount to a rejection of English national identity in favour of their country of origin (Burdsey “If I Ever Play Football” 17,21; Raman 222, 225; Fletcher 621-4). There have also been instances of (tenuous) inclusion into purportedly multicultural mainstream cricketing cultures, as evidenced by the stardom of English cricketer Monty Panesar (Burdsey “Monty Panesar” 553-5). This paper explores the ways in which *Patiala House* — a movie whose plot revolves around the unwillingness of an aged first-generation Sikh immigrant to allow his son to play cricket for England — negotiates the pervasive, albeit clichéd, ‘homeland vs adopted land’ dichotomy.

This study is informed by Elizabeth Mavroudi’s (2007) call for dynamic and contingent conceptualizations of diaspora. She argues that it is problematic to adhere to binaristic notions of diasporas wherein they are seen as either bounded (which involves an affiliation with an allegedly static homeland) or unbounded (wherein diasporic identities are seen as nomadic and fluid). While bounded conceptions, with the idealised notion of a cultural unity that transcends national boundaries, can reinforce progressive political projects, they can be exclusionary for those subjects who do not adhere to the said cultural norms (470-1). Unbounded conceptions, with their notions of ever-changing postmodern subjects, not only capture the ambivalence that diasporic subjects often feel towards the notion of a stable identity, but also questions the power relations inherent in the policing of cultural and political boundaries (472-3). Mavroudi maintains that these two perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive and argues that the negotiations of diasporic identities as a process, wherein

. . . those in diaspora may be seen as dynamic, ‘on the move’ and multiple but also subject to power relations, tensions, disconnections and the specific, situated processes that enable (or force) the constructions of shared (and often politicised) notions of belonging, identity and community”(476).

This paper argues that the movie *Patiala House* detracts from the progressive potential of both the bounded and the unbounded

perspectives of diasporic subjects. It makes a twofold argument: The movie's contention that contemporary England has become a post-racial society — which undercuts the counterhegemonic potential of a bounded diasporic subject who identifies with the country of origin — makes it complicit with the discourses of “color-blind racism” (Bonnilla-Silva's term, cited in Burdsey “Monty Panesar” 552-3). Furthermore, though the movie seemingly endorses the notion of an unbounded diasporic subject — a British Asian cricketer who chooses to play for the English cricket team —, that subjectivity's implicit critique of bounded subjectivities is diluted by the movie's endorsement of the stereotypical notion of a patriarchal extended South Asian family.

England, a Post-Racial Utopia?

Gurtej Singh Kahlon, addressed as “Bauji” by his family, is the patriarch of a large Sikh family domiciled in Southall, London. He has fought against racial discrimination as a first-generation immigrant in the 1970s, and is a leader of the local Sikh community. Smarting from bitter memories of racist abuse and violence, he is unwavering in his dislike of the mainstream White British population, and perceives them as the Other. He curtails his family members' freedom in negotiating their subjectivities as second-generation immigrants, and insists that they conform to stereotypical life choices that are in line with regressive conceptualizations of Indian culture. For instance, a nephew who wants to be a chef specializing in western cuisine is forced to fry jalebis, and a niece who wants to be a rapper has to restrict herself to singing bhajans. Bauji's eldest son Parghat Singh Kahlon (known as “Gattu”) is a prodigiously gifted fast bowler who was called up to the England national cricket team at the age of seventeen. However, Bauji could not accept the notion of his son playing for England and prevents him from accepting the offer. The movie presents Gattu as a thirty-four-year-old man leading a listless existence managing a convenience store and venting his frustration by furtively bowling in the nets in the middle of the night. The members of the family do acknowledge the hegemonic nature of Bauji's patriarchal authority, and Gattu's voice over at the opening of the movie states, “My name is Parghat Singh Kahlon. . . And I am living the life my father chose for me” (00:10:47-00:10:58; *my trans.*)

The central conflict played out in the movie, stemming from the younger generation's rebellion to Bauji's authority, is premised upon a problematic misrecognition: rather than critiquing the feudal patriarchy that Bauji embodies, the movie attributes his sins to his failure to recognize the allegedly post-racial nature of the present-day England. When Gattu receives an improbable second chance to play for England (a selector of Indian origin convinces the committee that the talented Gattu can turn around the national team's fortunes), he refuses to pursue the opportunity. The younger members of the family — Gattu's cousins, brother, and sister-in-law — convince him that he can play without Bauji's knowledge. They beg him to fulfil his dreams just once so that they can convince Bauji that racist discrimination against British Asians are a thing of the past. Her sister-in-law says,

Achieve your dreams just once...prove that you are a winner...then Bauji will realize that he has achieved the rights that he fought for...the Whites consider us as equal and you are proof of this...everything has changed...now all that remains is for him to change...only then will Patiala House be able to face Bauji with heads held high and reclaim their lives. (00:58:07-00:58:3; *my trans.*)

As Aparajita De points out in her reading of the movie, Bauji's world view is binaristic (289). One can go a step further and say that it is blatantly Occidentalistic, marked by the Orientalist subject's hate for everything Western. The scene discussed above, a crucial scene on which the rest of the plot hinges, reveals that rather than critiquing Bauji's essentialist thinking via an unbounded perspective of the diaspora (wherein identities are seen as fluid and always-already hybrid), the movie alleges that England has become a post-racial society. This glib claim is as politically regressive as it is ahistorical, as evidenced by the work of numerous scholars working on British Asian societies, often through the prism of sporting cultures.

The diasporic subjectivity that the movie attributes to Bauji — and one which it denigrates — is one which has considerable critical potential in the everyday cultures of British Asians. Soumya Bhattacharya's cricket fan memoir, *You Must Like Cricket? Memoirs of an Indian Cricket Fan* (2006) recounts how, while his parents were

working in England in 1974, they had hoped in vain that the visiting Indian cricket team would triumph on the field and thus redeem their pride. Bhattacharya notes that their smug self-confidence was shattered by the team's abysmal performance. He writes,

They came from a country which had none of Britain's creature comforts and affluence. Here, they were as poor relations in every sense. And they were often faced — despite the best and kindly efforts of many of the English friends they had made — with contempt and condescension. Cricket would help them to get level. (47)

In an article that is evocatively titled, “‘If I Ever Play Football, Dad, Can I Play for England or India?’ British Asians, Sport and Diasporic National Identities”, Daniel Burdsey has argued that while young British Asians often support international cricket teams hailing from their ‘home land’, in the case of football their allegiance tends to be with the English team. He argues that the difference in the attitudes towards these two sports can be understood in terms of cricket's potential to empower the immigrants. Unlike in the case of football, subcontinental teams have had superlative success in the cricket field and celebrating the success of ‘home’ team against England has functioned as a form of postcolonial resistance for the immigrants. Moreover, British Asian fans' performance of South Asian modes of cricket fandom at international cricket matches can be seen as an implicit critique of the exclusion of such codes of behaviour in the cultures of domestic cricket in England (20-1). In her study of immigrants from India and Pakistan, Parvati Raman has noted that, “[f]or many South Asians, cricket has become a repository for emotional attachments to ‘home’, through migrant narratives of vindication and empowerment, which are simultaneously a critique of a British polity, which, they feel, continues to racialise and exclude its migrant ‘others’” (217). She cites the responses of second-generation British Asians who attest to being subject to overt racism as well as subtle exclusionary attitudes, and some of them assert that refusing to support the English cricket team is a conscious act of resistance (225-6).

Patiala House attributes Bauji's attitudes towards the British to the racist violence inflicted upon the Sikh community of Southall in

the 1970s. The flashback sequences at the beginning of the movie reveal that his political awakening was triggered by a traumatic incident wherein a beloved leader of the Sikh community was murdered by skinheads and justice was denied as the police were in cohorts with the perpetrators. He subsequently took the lead in transforming Southall into a “mini-Punjab”, a self-contained safe haven for the Sikhs in London. As the anecdotal and scholarly writings discussed above indicate, a bounded subjectivity such as that of Bauji has considerable counterhegemonic potential. In *Patiala House*, however, this subjectivity is delegitimized by the assertion that Bauji’s anti-racist stance is no longer necessary in a purportedly post-racial England. This problematic perspective is presented at another instance in the movie when a routine altercation breaks out between Bauji and the local authorities, and Gurdial Sira, the Member of Parliament for Southall is forced to intervene on behalf of Bauji. Afterwards, the MP tells Bebe (Bauji’s wife), “Please speak to Gurtej. What is the need of all this in the present scenario? The same drama everyday! Everything has changed now” (00:20:51-00:20:58). Bebe responds sharply that things did not change by themselves and that Bauji brought about all the change. She reminds him that there was a time when their children couldn’t go to school and that now a Sikh man has become the MP for Southall, all due to her husband’s efforts (00:20:59-00:21:13). This whole conversation reiterates the problematic idea that racial parity has been achieved and thus delegitimizes the struggle for equality that continues to be a part of the everyday life of many non-White immigrants in England.

The implicit contention of the movie, voiced through the family members’ criticism of Bauji’s refusal to allow Gattu to play for England, is that a British Asian cricketer’s playing for the English national team is acceptable because such citizens have been accepted as a part of the mainstream British society. This perspective should be read in conjunction with Daniel Burdsey’s reading of the celebrity image of Monty Panesar, the British Asian cricketer whose career as an England spinner is believed to have inspired the character of Gattu in *Patiala House* (“Monty Panesar ‘inspires’ Akshay’s Character”). While Burdsey acknowledges the significance of Panesar’s celebrity status, he argues that the cultural politics of his fame is ambivalent and that it cannot be simplistically read as an instance of progressive

multiculturalism. He has been subject to patronizing representations, with his relative ineptness at fielding and his cohabitation with his parents — typical in South Asian cultures — being mocked at. Panesar himself has noted that he often feels that the fans are waiting for opportunities to mock his fielding errors rather than supporting him. Moreover, the Barmy Army's (the collective of English cricket fans noted for their boisterous presence in the stands) wearing of clip-on beards as a sign of being Panesar fans is deeply problematic: The beard, which is a significant element of the Sikh religious practice is being treated with a problematic irreverence ("Monty Panesar" 553-6). Burdsey further speculates, "Is Monty's beard perceived as an acceptable and available form of cultural appropriation because it is clearly — if not visually, then certainly symbolically — not Islamic?" ("Monty Panesar" 556). This reading of Panesar forms a crucial frame of reference for the cricketing discourse in *Patiala House*, for it challenges the simplistic notion that the English cricket fan's acceptance of a British Asian cricketer can be seen as evidence of England having become a post-racial utopia.

Burdsey goes on to argue that English cricketing cultures are shaped by a hegemonic discourse of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva terms "color-blind racism". Bonilla-Silva's formulation, developed with reference to contemporary America, refers to the "the superficial extension of the principles of liberalism to racial matters that results in "raceless" explanations for all sort of race-related affairs" and identifies "minimization of racism" as one of the key themes of such discourses (7). Burdsey argues that color-blind racism is pervasive in British sport and explains the minimization of racism as follows:

This frame posits that prejudicial views and behavior are no longer a major factor affecting the life chances of minorities, it also views discrimination as synonymous with blatant, full-on racist instances, and by doing so "eliminates the bulk of racially motivated actions by individual whites and institutions by fiat" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006: 30). This perception serves to obscure the existence and extent of prejudice and discrimination, and the fact that minority ethnic groups' inclusion in English cricket remains partial and contingent. More specifically, it allows the numerical representation of British Asian players to be often correlated

mistakenly with a belief that they are unequivocally included and accepted within the structures and cultures of the game. (552-3)

Through its portrayal of Bauji as an obstinate old man who fails to realize the putatively post-racial character of contemporary Britain, *Patiala House* is complicit in sustaining the discourse of color-blind racism, thereby denying the continued prevalence of racist othering of British Asians. Such discourses of color-blind racism serve to devalue Bauji's principled struggle against the everyday racisms experienced by British Asians.

Bowling for England and Batting for India

The movie offers a happy ending that is typical of family dramas in Indian popular cinema and in the process, reaffirms both the discourses of color-blind racism and that of hegemonic patriarchy. Aparajita De's reading of the discourses of gender in the text has focused on the domestication, so to speak, of Gattu's girlfriend Simran. Gattu's girlfriend Simran, borne of an English mother and Sikh father, plays an instrumental role in encouraging him to take up the opportunity to make a belated debut for England. De points out that while she is initially cast as a "nonconforming, resistant subject" the movie ends with a dance number in which Simran is dressed in traditional garb, indicating her conforming to the traditional Indian culture that Bauji seeks to replicate in his family structures (292). De presumably has this transformation of Simran in mind when she writes, "Although the film celebrates cricket as a site which helps identify, coalesce, and claim a coherent hybrid cultural identity for the members of the young British Asian diaspora, it ultimately affirms a patriarchal nationalistic model of identity" (293). However, there is another significant way in which the movie endorses a patriarchal notion of Indian identity: through Gattu's discursive and performative linking of his cricketing triumph, and the alleged mainstreaming of British Asians, to Bauji's defiant anti-racist perspective.

For the bulk of the movie, Gattu embodies a subservient masculinity wherein he subjugates himself to the authority of his father. The family members' conspiracy to enable Gattu to play for

England is rather tame. In a plot element that challenges credulity, they conspire to cut off the cable connection in the whole of Southhall so that the cricket mad Bauji has to resort to follow the game through radio commentary. Furthermore, Gattu adopts the rather insensitive pseudonym of “Kaali” so as to prevent his father from learning the secret. When Bauji eventually finds out that Gattu had been playing for England without his knowledge, he is enraged and is hospitalized due to a cardiac incident brought on by the shock. He severs all ties with Gattu, and a heartbroken Gattu decides to quite cricket. This news makes newspaper headlines and the English cricket fans are dismayed by the loss of their new cricketing hero on the eve of the upcoming final match. Bauji remains steadfast in his denunciation of Gattu and denies him his position of the eldest son, a privileged position within a conservative patriarchal family. He prevents him from performing a ritual customarily performed by the eldest son at his sister’s wedding. This provokes Gattu to explicitly question his father’s hegemonic patriarchy, “Bauji, I had forgotten that only you have the right to live. The rest of us only have the permission to breath. Nobody here has the courage to live their lives the way they want to” (01:52:50-01:53:07). When a furious Bauji demands of the rest of the family whether they feel that he has ruined their lives, the very people who had instigated Gattu to take the lead in challenging Bauji’s dominance do not have the courage to speak up. Gattu further says,

The mistake is mine, Bauji. You are right. But this time round, my mistake is not that I played cricket, but that I was about to quit it. Bauji, if I don’t go to the stadium tomorrow, twenty more Gattus will be born in this house, who have dreams in their hearts but lack the courage to express them. Bauji, I will play cricket. I will play for myself and for my dreams. I will play for all their dreams. I will play for Patiala House. But Bauji, I will definitely play. (01:53:59-01:54:50, *my trans.*)

With these words, Gattu walks out of the house. While preparing to play in the match, Gattu’s thoughts, conveyed through voice over, declares that he has come out of his father’s shadow for the first time in his life and has decided to take decisions for himself. These words and actions constitute an individualistic counter discourse to a

hegemonic patriarchy. It can be seen as an instance of a second-generation diasporic subject assuming agency upon himself and choosing to identify himself with the adopted homeland, thereby challenging the traditional authority wielded by the patriarch of a South Asian (Sikh) family.

However, this challenging of patriarchy from an individualist perspective and the agential adoption of a fluid conception of identity is undercut by the resolution of the familial dispute, which is achieved through Gattu's reaffirmation of both his father's patriarchal authority and the problematic discourse of color-blind racism. Bebe forces Bauji to watch the match on the television and he sees Gattu say at a pre-match interview that his success is an outcome of his father's quest for acceptance and respect,

He had heard all this noise [the applause and cheers of the crowd] before I did. Frankly, whenever I play cricket, I don't see the stadium or the pitch or batsman or the wicket. I only see my Bauji's dream, which I have now fulfilled. He would always say, "Son, one day the abuses will be drowned out by the noise of the applause." (02:01:24-02:01:50; *my trans.*)

This refiguring of Gattu's success as the realization of his father's dreams undercuts Gattu's challenge of his patriarchal authority. It dilutes his agency in affiliating himself with England and suggests that his cricket is merely the outcome of the patriarch's fight against racism. It is not just through words that Gattu remakes his subjectivity and his cricketing performance in his father's image. In the crunch situation in the climactic match, Gattu bowls the last delivery with a different run-up. He mimics the fabled action of Lala Amarnath in which he uses a shortened run up. Lala is not only a legendary Punjabi cricketer of the pre-Independence era; he is also Bauji's hero. The bowling action Gattu uses is one that Bauji often waxes eloquent about. While such an embodied cricketing practice in itself can be read as a positive sign of Indian cricketing styles infiltrating English cricket and as a marker of hybridity, in the context of the movie, it works as a reaffirmation of Bauji's patriarchal dominance as well as of the prescriptive adherence to 'home' culture. Furthermore, Gattu's assertion that his cricketing success is a result of his father's quest for respect also works within the symbolic

economy of color-blind racism. For Gattu's comments at the pre-match interview suggest that Bauji's dream of racial equality has already been realized. The sequences featuring White English fans cheering for Kaali — the unsubtle racial overtones of the pseudonym is significant here — serve to suggest that the English have accepted non-White immigrants as being part of the Self. Such a depiction does not factor in any of the ambivalences identified by Burdsey in his discussion of Monty Panesar's stardom. The climactic sequences show the rest of the family members obtaining Bauji's 'permission' to pursue 'Western' careers and in one case of one daughter, to marry her White boyfriend. The symbolic tenor of the resolution of the familial conflict is complex and deeply problematic: On the one hand, Bauji has forsaken his agential, if binaristic, view of the racial issue in multicultural Britain in favor of a disempowering discourse of a color-blind society. On the other hand, he still retains his patriarchal authority over the family: though he *permits* his daughter to marry a White man, as Aparijita De has pointed out, his soon-to-be daughter-in-law, the biracial Simran is indigenized through a typical song and sequence in which she wears ethnic costumes (292).

Conclusion

In concluding this discussion, it would be useful to place *Patiala House* vis-à-vis two discursive trends in popular Hindi cinema: its engagement with popular cricketing nationalisms and with conservative patriarchal family values. *Patiala House* is an atypical Bollywood cricket movie, given the tendency of popular cinema to reiterate the notion that cricket is a 'natural' vehicle for Indian nationalism. Whereas a movie like *Lagaan* endorses a majoritarian, homogenous notion of Indian cricketing nationalism (Mannathukkaren), *Patiala House* advocates for a fluid, hybrid conception of diasporic subjectivity, implicitly challenging both the allegedly intrinsic link between cricket and Indian nationalism as well as the problematic notion that the Indian-origin subject has to affiliate oneself such a national(ist) imaginary. The counterhegemonic potential for such an unbounded subjectivity is, however, negated because rather than portraying British Asians as identifying with Britain despite the everyday racisms that they have to negotiate, it denies the very existence of racism in contemporary

England. Furthermore, the movie fails to endorse the dilution of feudal and/or patriarchal notions of authority that such an unbounded subjectivity affords, and as is typical of Bollywood NRI films, presents a regressive cultural nationalism that seeks to preserve the traditional power hierarchies. Whereas the movie initially presents Bauji as a repressive patriarch, it ultimately suggests that he embodies a figure that Malhotra and Alagh identify as being crucial to the gender politics of post-1990s Hindi cinema: a benevolent patriarch who acts out of a genuine, if misguided, love for the family (28-31). So the loosening of Bauji's grip over the extended family, enabling people to choose their careers and pursue interracial romantic relationships, also creates an acceptable form of patriarchy, leaving the fundamental gender hierarchies intact. In other words, *Patiala House* brings together the worst of the worlds that it engages with, merging contemporary West's "color-blind racism" with the patriarchal discourses that permeates both the technologized, globalized India and Bollywood, one of its key sites of popular culture.

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Appropriation of *Tandava* in Dance Reality Shows: A Critical Study

Shubham

Abstract:

The *tandava* of Lord Shiva is considered as the mythical fountainhead of all the subsequent Indian classical dance forms. Over the time, the *tandava* moved from funeral grounds to the precincts of temples and witnessed the heyday under royal patronage replacing the divine one, however, during the colonial period it suffered setbacks at the hands of colonial masters and missionaries allied with Indian elites. In contemporary times, *tandava* ceases to be a pure dance, embracing elements from folk and foreign traditions of dance as well as yoga and gymnastics. The hybridised version of *tandava* is created across traditional boundaries through digital technologies, without harming the sanctity of classical constituents. Classical dance movements and mudras are used not only as decorative and technical elements but also as a communicative component. The employment of basic structures and concept of classical dance with movements and mudras suggest that the secular space is appropriated to facilitate the dissemination of sacred themes in the name of entertainment. The present paper seeks to examine the re-enactment of Shiva *tandava* in the reality dance shows, namely *Entertainment Ke Liye Kuch Bhi Karega*, *Uggram Ujjavalam*, and *Dance India Dance (Doubles)*.

Keywords: Cosmic Dance, Mudras, Uday Shankar, Reality Dance Shows, Digital Technology

Introduction

Tandava, the eternal dance of Shiva is embellished with 108 *karanas* (synchronized movement of hands and feet) and the 32

anghaharas (graceful combination of *karanas*. The *karanas* fall under the category of *nrtta* that is defined as “pure dance” for their emphasis on movement formations. The *karana* literally translates as ‘doing, producing, or effecting” (Williams 254) and relates to a religious performance. The *karana* is not a static posture but “a small movement formation that has an initial, intermediate, and final position” (Vatsyayan 194). The *karana* is constituted of the movements like the *cari* (movement with a single leg/foot), the *hasta* (hand gestures) and *angaharas* (dance postures). In this way, *tandava* is specific and appropriate combination of *karanas* (movements), postures and hand gestures. Specifically, the *Natyasastra* describes the *karana* as simultaneous movement of hands and feet while dancing. *Karanas* are not merely technical expositions of dance as often considered; rather they can also be used as narrative and communicative devices. Specific and appropriate combinations of *karanas* constitute larger formations that enrich the repertoire of movement. This aspect of dance, according to the *Natyasastra*, is called *tandava*. In a particular way, the *karanas*, namely *asamyuta* (single-handed), *samyuta* (double-handed) and feet (*padas*) movement are the source of all dance movements.

Evolution of Shiva’s Dance

As the origin of *tandava* is ascribed to Lord Shiva, it was performed by the deity alone in fierce and awesome mood on the cremation or funeral grounds. From the cemeteries *tandava* undertook journey to the precincts of temples, assuming the religious role in place of the divine one. In modern times, under the influence of the European Orientalists and native nationalists, philosophers, poets and thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore, Krishna Iyer, Valathol Narayan Menon, Rukmani Arundale, Uday Shankar, the dancer *par excellence*, revolutionized the domain of Indian dance in both form and content. Shankar globalized the regional stylized Indian temple dance, recreating it in a new style named as ‘Hi-Dance’ and re-named as ‘Creative Dance’ which fuses European modern theatrical techniques and Indian classical dance with indigenous cultures and traditions. Shankar moved

away from the traditional use of *mudras* and facial expressions to body expression as, to him, beauty of dance lies in simplicity and naturalness than in the excessive use of *mudras* and intricate footwork. Shankar created concise, compact, clear and shortened dance performances, dropping repetition of words, phrases, emotions, gestures and poses. Khokar writes, “Though Shankar well learned the hasta-mudras, he had little fascination for them.” Shankar himself stated that he tried to avoid *mudras* as much as possible to make a statement such as ‘I feel angry!’ He felt that the same statement could be shown using the entire body in motion (qtd. in Paine 49). In Shankar’s compositions, movements were chosen for their aesthetic and expressive quality, rather than from a given geometrical (regular) motif. His motto about presentation was, “Give the audience what they want before they know what they want.” as he realized that the audience is an integral participant in any performance. “Short dances in quick succession with costume changes and distinctive melodies. This is what kept the audiences’ attention” (Erdman 80). Anthropologist Joan L. Erdman suggests that Uday Shankar’s performances had universal appeal and even creative hybridization. Presentation of his cultural art to another culture’s audience is not a “circus of the exotic” or a variety show, which offers excitement or allure” (80)

In contemporary times, *tandava*, embracing elements from folk and foreign traditions of dance as well *yoga* and gymnastics, ceases to be a pure dance, taking on secular and universal dimensions, and this new form befits the new technologies in its creation and circulation beyond the traditional boundaries. The hybridized version of *tandava* dance can profitably be created through the digital technologies, without harming the sanctity of classical constituents. It is only through the new media the genre of *tandava* is assuming new formats and functions, from the sacred to the secular, involving masses and money, transcending the classical range and purpose. The images of mythological figures and mythological locales such as cosmic mountain or *Kailash* Mountain, abode of Shiva, can be created in a short while, using new technologies. Traditional musical instruments like *sitar*,

sarod, *tambura*, *sahnai*, and *sarangi* are easily replaced by the creations of new media without harming the beauty of the performance. Moreover, the new media help introduce the audience with legendary dancers both alive and dead, through computer generated images as source of motivation and guidance for the budding dancers.

In the recent times, in the field of television/entertainment, producers are under acute pressure to create something new and saleable. Television reality shows display “the lives of ordinary people engaged in sometimes extraordinary events” (Jagodzinski 320). *Tandava* becomes the favorite subject of reality shows due to its primitive association with divinity. The cult of masculinity is also propagated through the image of Shiva. Even the larger number of female performers and audience desirous of emulating the cult of masculinity to be strong and sturdy constitute the audience. The present study analyzes the re-enactment of Shiva *tandava* in dance reality shows, namely *Entertainment Ke Liye Kuch Bhi Karega*, *Uggram Ujjavalam* and *Dance Indian Dance (Doubles)*, using the dance-dramas of Uday Shankar as critical baseline. In these dance performances, blend of a wide range of folk, semi-classical, classical, martial art, acrobatics, yoga, theatrical contemporary and western styles caters to the taste of spectators/audience from diverse cultural backgrounds. These shows are cultural platforms where not only male participants but also female performers, irrespective of class and colour, region and religion, are provided with equal space and opportunity to showcase their talent and technique. Contrary to the classical costume, the costume in these shows varies from dance to dance, episode to episode in harmony with the intended colour effect, flouting the conventional code of costume where female dancers were restricted to *saree* with fan-shaped pleats and male to *dhoti*. The traditional costume is replaced with skirt/ short and *sherwani* respectively in harmony with the contemporary cultural fads not only to facilitate the dance movements but also to illustrate the overriding theme. Classical dance movements and *mudras* are

used in the shows not only as decorative and technical element but also communicative component. The employment of basic structure and concept of classical dance with movements and *mudras*; gestures and postures suggests that the secular stage is appropriated to facilitate the dissemination of sacred themes in the name of entertainment.

Entertainment Ke Liye Kuch Bhi Karega (Season 3):

The show was created by Wizcrafts and an American derivative of the show 30 Seconds of Fame, hosted by Craig Jackson and aired on Sony TV started from August 2010. In the show, nine dancers unfold dance performance, with one in the lead, and the rest in the background. The act depicts their experiment with a new style and genre by using glowing costumes and interactive projections to transport viewers into a fantastical world, thereby making it a live technological performance in the line of Uday Shankar who under the influence of *Kathakali* dance used bright and bulky costume in harmony with the concept of Indianness to create colour effect even at the cost of comfort of the performer.

The pictorial representation of multiple-armed Shiva depicts his indulgence in battle with cosmic forces and expresses his multiple qualities through various *mudras*. Shiva in *jnana mudra*, in which the index fingers are folded in a way that they touch the inside root of thumbs and straightening the remaining three fingers of each hand in a way they are slightly apart and relaxed, followed by appearance of eighteen arms with unfolding of two arms at a time. These arms are contrary to the four or sixteen or twenty arms making *abhaya mudra* possessed by Goddess Durga, Lord Ganesha and other Hindu deities. The deity takes a step forward and sits in *murumandi* position, spreading his knees apart while sitting low as possible. His heels are in an elevated position with his toes pointing in opposite directions and the other performers making shapes of mountains (*Kailash Parvat*) using their hands.



Fig. 1. A girl as Shiva doing *chakra asana* (Photo: Screenshot taken by the author)



Fig. 2. Shiva standing in *nataraja mudra* and the other performers in *anjali mudra* (Photo: Screenshot taken by the author)

Shiva begins *tandava* style with rapid movements of *bharatanatyam adavus* steps, taking proper care of *sthanakas*, *mandalas*, *charis* postures and finishing the step with Shiva in *vriksasana vi* posture while the other performers are visibly raising their arms in the background. The floating arms of Shiva and other performers with the back towards the viewers make shapes of *damru* on the right and *trishul* (trident) on the left suggests the importance of the audience instead of the deity. The move is finished with doing *chakra asana*, in Fig.1 in the front direction while the other performers arrange themselves behind Shiva in the form of a mountains or *Kailash parvat*. With the next beat, Shiva kneels down, partially forming the *virasana vii*, and starts spinning with to and fro movement of his body from left to right. Shiva rotates thrice and stands in a position with his right leg raised and his both arms open with one hand pointing downwards and the other pointing upwards, followed by a freestyle dancing and rotating his body twice in a squat position. In the next moment, Shiva is seen rotating sixteen times in anticlockwise direction and ends with upright and firm standing in *Nataraja* posture, in fig. 2, with his right hand in *abhaya hasta viii* position and the left hand in *danda hasta* position, stretched across his body and pointing towards upraised left foot in *kuncita pada* position. Meanwhile, the other group members arrange themselves, behind Shiva, in *anjali mudra*, with their palms joined above the head in *namaste* position.

The dance performance accomplished in complete darkness is undoubtedly unimaginable but the deity chooses evening for dance and darkness is lit up by His ornaments such as the moon on his crest and the bright rays of light emerging from the gems on the hoods of snakes. The act begins with projection of Shiva in neon blue light against the dark background of the stage, using the neon choreography to demonstrate *tandava*. Movements of the limbs through the light take body as the central tenet in the tune with Uday Shankar's emphasis on the body itself, not on parts and movements. The light helps the performers experiment with various new genres and styles of light while performing *tandava*.

Each glowing costume has its own complex multichannel light system managed by unique wireless 12 controllers. The perfect synchronization of light and sound is controlled by a special application on P.C. Additionally, the Touqueer group unveils the presence of neocolonial Western dance in the performance, while deploying the neon dance technique, the performers move out from the traditional movement vocabulary and reach out to the urban, religious-neutral and modern dance. The performance is a compilation of steps and patterns emerging from neon light. The dance conceals the forceful movements and essence of the underlying *bhava* of the performer responsible for conveying the meaning through facial expressions or words. The pre-requisite, for a classical dancer performing *tandava*, is to master the nuances of *bhava* to convey its true aesthetic appeal is missing in the performance. Besides, the performance also lacks the beginning invocation and ending salutation prevalent in the traditional spiritual choreography but it is replaced it with the Bollywood dance and music, however, the performers are putting in efforts to represent and reinvent the dance form while retaining the original movement vocabulary.

The masculine version of *tandava* as merged with neon lights is performed by female performers with hand and leg movements in tandem with the body, taking the energy to a whole new dimension in the lines of Uday Shankar who emphasized the importance of body itself in his dance performances. Performance of Shiva *tandava* by women suggests the realization of vision of liberated women who have fully realized their potential. Selecting all female performers to perform *tandava*, the choreographer intends to celebrate “the powerful conceptualizations of the feminine creative spirit.” The whole group of female performers powerfully align themselves in various patterns to indicate different icons and weapons of Shiva through blue colored neon lights. This dance production gave the women an opportunity to assume non-traditional roles in the way Uday Shankar’s performances did in the 1930s when he took women to the stage as in the ballet “Shiva-Parvati.” With advent of modernization, an

expansion of occupational opportunities for women leads to the development of gender consciousness and refutes the order of gender inequality. While performing *tandava*, female performers challenge the male leadership order which “constantly challenged the historicity of her existence and the progressive demands of her art” (Mitra 68). The lead performer signifies Shiva’s benevolent and mild character at one time, and malevolent and fierce at the other. The performer not only reflects life giving and nurturing processes but also reproduces the related processes of death and decay analogous to that of the deity.

At the end of the performance, the choreographer, being a Muslim boy, states that he faced flak from Islamic clerics for taking up Hindu dance forms. Subsequently, the choreographer was banned from pursuing his passion to teach dance for fourteen years. Anu Malik, one of the jury members on the show, encourages him by putting emphasis more on talent than religion. The performance is not just an example of cultural synthesis or syncretism but evidence of a successful plural society. The choreographer, following the precedent set by Uday Shankar to secularize Indian dance, transcending the regional and religious boundaries, is trying to secularize performance traditions. Touqueer uses real phenomena of blue colored neon lights, performers shaping themselves into a *trishul* (trident), *damru*, *shivalinga* and mountains, girls performing the aggressive *rudra tandava*, to celebrate diversity as well as individuality among Hindus and Muslims. In the present times, the idea of choreography is highly influenced by the ticketed performances, corporate and government support, and TRPs rather than spirituality. The jury’s response to Touqueer’s verbalized story not only helps in selling the dance narrative but makes the audience respond emotionally to it.



Fig. 3. Prince Dance Group members standing in *Virbhadrasana III* (Photo: Screenshot taken by the author)

Uggram Ujjavalam Uggram Ujjavalam begins in a conventional way with a group of dancers in the *anjali mudra*, raising both their hands in a conventional way in praise of the deity, bringing the body in a position with their upper body bent horizontally forwards. Secondly, the dance is regulated by the gong played in the background to signal to start the dance. The way the gong is employed in the background suggests that the contemporary dance is still based on the dictates of the conventional dance tradition. Movements and *mudras* such as *bhujangatrasa mudra*, right hand *abhaya mudra* and the left hand bent slightly downwards in *gajahasta mudra* to get into *nataraja mudra*, rotation in anti-clockwise direction while maintaining the same *nataraja mudra*, *sarpashirsha mudra*, *anjali mudra*, *pataka mudra*, etc. suggest the continuity of classical conventions.

With the strike of gong, the performers stand grounded on one leg and at the same time lift the other leg and stretch it backwards in a horizontal position and tilt the torso forward with the head, pelvis and lifted leg to form a straight line to get into *virabhadrasana III* or warrior pose III as in fig. 3. The dancers fasten up their moves with the music being played in fast motion and start rotating arms in anti-clockwise direction along with

jumps towards the left of the stage, and the same step is repeated but with jumps towards right in the opposite direction with their arms waving in clockwise direction. While performing the next move, with their face towards the left of the stage they start throwing their arms first in the front direction and then lifting them upwards, and repeat the same move facing the right side of the stage. The performers then start hopping with their arms bent inwards in L-shape and resting the other arm on it in *pataka mudra* where the finger tips are bent forward to form a hollowed palm and make *sarpashirsha mudra*. The similar *mudra* is attained by the actor Vrajeshvar Hirjee in the movie *Golmaal Returns*, directed by Rohit Shetty, when Hirjee is caught by Ajay Devgn, Tushar Kapoor, and Shreyas Talpade, in Ajay Devgn's house. The *mudra* also resembles *baba ji ka thullu* posture which is made popular by the comedy artist Kapil Sharma in the show "Comedy Nights with Kapil." With these performers grooving in front, the other five dancers along with Shiva, who is hidden behind the dancers, slide onto the stage from the left and place themselves at the centre. Amit as Shiva steps forward with other performers making a trail behind the former whereas the latter stand at the end of the queue in *anjali mudra* in *namaste* position and half of them tilted the body towards the left and the other half towards the right.



Fig. 4. Prince dance group performing *Nataraja* act (Photo: Screenshot taken by the author)

In fig. 4. Amit as Shiva stands at the centre of the stage with six performers each on the either side with their arms touching each other making an arm wave. Shiva starts waving his upper limbs in *sarpashirsha mudra* with his fingertips bent forward to form a hollowed palm and the fellow performers imitate him twice, moving to the front of the stage. He starts waving again in *sarpashirsha mudra* but with a slight variation with one arm bent inwards in L-shape and resting the other arm on it in *pataka mudra*. Shiva lifts both his arms alternately thrice which is followed by other performers. Furthermore, the performers align themselves behind Shiva and the latter in front sits in the *aramandi mudra* with heels facing each other and toes of both legs pointed to the opposite direction making a straight line from one end of the toe to the other. Amit being in *aramandi mudra* delineates aggression which is vivid from his physiognomy: his nostrils filled with air, wrinkles on forehead and intense stare justify the fierceness of the deity.

Prior to switching over to the next move, Shiva in the same *mudra* throws both arms outwards, places arms and shoulders in a straight line and opening the palms upwards and downwards alternately which is once more imitated by the performers. Amit kneels down one knee whereas the rest of the performers align themselves behind him in a straight line placing both arms on the shoulders of the one standing next to him. Amit throws both arms outwards, places arms and shoulders in a straight line and starts waving them in the frontal direction which is further imitated by performers behind him resulting in the arm wave motion. Shiva stands up and moves towards the right of the stage with a trail of eighteen performers joined behind him with their arms placed on the shoulder of the performer standing in front. Amit stands facing the right side of the stage and tilts partially to the right which is imitated by eighteen performers at his back creating a wave motion effect. Before enunciating the next move, three performers kneel down on both knees, eight of them are standing and six of them lift Shiva on a gold-colored metal sheet and arrange

themselves in the front, middle and at the end positions respectively.



Fig. 5. Amit as Shiva in *gyan mudra* (Photo: Screenshot taken by the author)

Fig. 5 delineates Shiva, with his eyes closed, sits on a gold-colored metal sheet in *gyan mudra* by sitting in *sukhasana* with his spine straight, placing both hands on knees with palm facing upward, joining the index finger with the thumb forming a uniform circle and the other three fingers are in a slightly stretched position. The performers standing in the front begin the tutting, a prevalent style in hip hop, by creating shapes (such as boxes) and movements using hands. The performers take down Shiva and spread all around on the front part of the stage. The former revolves, hop, and swing their arms whereas Shiva stands still, holding a trident in his right hand, at the back. With the beginning of the next move, the position of Shiva and the other performers has been interchanged.



Fig. 6. Amit as Shiva in *Nataraja mudra* (Photo: Screenshot taken by the author)

Fig. 6 depicts the frame in which Amit reaches the front and takes the *Nataraja mudra* with his right hand holding the trident and left in *danda hasta* position whereas the right leg is placed on the stage and the left thrown across the body in *kuncita mudra*. Meanwhile, the group members arrange themselves, behind Shiva, in *anjali mudra*, with their palms joined above the head in *namaste* position. Two performers come at the front with one of them performing “spin down sweep” technique and the other goes for a “headspin” whereas Shiva spins in an anti-clockwise direction by balancing his body on the left leg, and the right leg thrown across the body in *kuncita mudra*, holding trident in the right hand and the left in a relaxed position. The performers arrange themselves in three groups on the right side, centre and the left side of the stage, and Shiva is lifted on a gold colored metal sheet again at the

back on which he stands and waves his trident in all directions. Towards the end, they align themselves in a chariot form, of which two of them taking the shape of an elephant and the others as horses.

The dance performance is enhanced by the costume as chosen by the choreographer. Painted in sparkle gold color from head to toe with a snake designed in black colour on the torso symbolizes power and divinity in Hinduism where deities are usually shown with golden haloes. All participants, except Amit, have covered the body using shorts whereas the latter wears shorts along with a scarf in leopard print around the waist. The crown worn by Amit has hair locks attached to it in a way that it looks as if they were flying in two separate directions. String of *rudraksha* beads is visible on both arms and wrists, and a black colored snake is coiled around his stomach. As the light reflects on their costumes, they encapsulate a vision, memory and a sense of joy for the dance performance. The fusion of techniques and movement vocabulary prominent in bharatanatyam, hip hop and free style dancing with slow instrumental music makes the performance aesthetically pleasing. The essence of *tandava* is preserved even after blending the classical and the contemporary dance forms. The song and dance technique of Bollywood is blended to repackage and re-choreograph the performance as a new product. Following the lead of Uday Shankar, this dance show also blends Indian classical forms with western theatrical techniques reflected in the way the traditional bharatanatyam style is fused with hip hop and free style to morph into new hybrid forms. In the present times, the nomadic effect of remix has stepped down from the Bollywood dance to its byproduct, the dance reality shows. The remixing of various dance styles leads to the production of hybrid cosmopolitan dancing bodies of postmodernism, endowed with new emotion of aspiration.

Karan and Carling (DID Doubles):

Dance India Dance (DID), started in 2011 in Hindi language with seven seasons and more than two hundred episodes, produced

and created by Essex Vision Productions, and is aired on Zee T.V. The dance show opens with Karan as Shiva and Carling as Parvati standing in the Nataraja position, with their backs facing each other, in the mechanically revolving “circle of fire” and they unfold their performance with performing the *rudra tandava* and the *lasya tandava* together and step down and place themselves on the left and right side of the stage as the oval shaped ring of fire stops revolving. The way the show includes a variety of Indian as well as international dance styles such as jazz, hip hop, contemporary, bharatanatyam, Bollywood, freestyle, salsa, and kalaripayattu reminds us of the dance maestro Uday Shankar who widened the range of Indian dance by creating a new dance style known as ‘Hi-Dance’ and re-named as ‘Creative Dance’ that fuses European modern theatrical techniques and Indian classical dance with indigenous cultures and traditions.



Fig. 7. On the left, Carling as Parvati; on the right, Karan as Shiva hopping on alternate legs (Photo: Screenshot taken by the author)

Karan and Carling start performing *tandava* in Indian classical style in fast motion, using the traditional vocabulary movements as codified in the *Natyasastra*. The *tirumanam adavu* is being done in fast motion, placing their right arm forward parallel to the body and stretching the right leg forward and gently throwing the left hand in *alapadma* position to finish the *adavu*, but they end up doing the *tirumanam adavu* in a wrong way, jumping between two consecutive *adavus* and leaning forward way too much whereas the posture must have been kept straight to finish the *tirumanam adavu*. The same step is repeated but with different combination of left leg and right hand in doing the *tirumanam adavu* as in fig. 7. Karan as Shiva lifts the left leg with a bend from the knee with the sole facing the right leg and extends the right hand upwards with the left hand thrown across the body towards the right in *hamsapaksa* position. The move is further extended but with the opposite pair of limbs while Carling performs the same steps synchronizing with him on the left, and the move is performed twice. Further, they sit in the *aramandi mudra* with left hand raised upwards and standing up placing the hand in the same position whereas the right leg is thrown outside the body diagonally, and the movement is done twice with a background soundscape of bells and gongs for creating a contemporary effect. The performers then assume the *anga bhramari* position by starting with the feet placed one cubit apart, leap in the air and after a circling movement land in the original position.

Both Karan and Carling, then, begin with *kuditta metta adavu* by jumping on the toes and striking the heels and finishing the move with *mayuri gati bhedah* in which the performers are moving on the toes with their knees outwards and going down alternately with both hands extended outwards. Further, they turn towards the right of the stage and jumps with their alternate leg on the floor, moving forward and backward to complete the move with *hamsi gati bhedah* in which they place one foot after the other slowly at a distance of half a cubit with knees slightly bent and bending the body alternately on either side with both hands held

in *kapittha*. While doing *hamsi gati bhedah*, they move to the right of the stage, coming backwards, turning right and making a semi-circle on the stage. Further, facing the audience they start jumping on the toes and striking the heels in *kuditta metta adavu* with their right hand in *kataka mukha* by bringing together index finger, middle finger and thumb. Subsequently, they move back to the centre, place themselves in *mayuri gati bhedah mudra* and start swirling their bodies to the right and left alternatively. Karan as Shiva now sits in the *aramandi mudra* whereas Carling is seen standing behind Karan in *ardha chakrasana mudra*. Both jump on the stage and interchange their places with Karan as Shiva on the left of the stage and Carling as Parvati on the right. At the next moment, they start the *mayuri gati bhedah* movement in fast motion and Carling promptly stops herself to perform *natta adavu* by stretching her legs alternatively in *alidha* position in a manner that one heel is always resting on the floor with toes facing upwards and her right arm is in *tripataka mudra* to face up and left arm remaining in *tripataka mudra* facing down.



Fig. 8. Karan and Carling, standing in the “circle of fire”, as Shiva and Parvati respectively (Photo: Screenshot taken by the author)

At this juncture, Karan is seen whirling by taking multiple turns and tucks both legs underneath and rotates while Carling runs towards the revolving “circle of fire” placed at the back and climbs it with her one leg lifted and thrown across the body to the right and foot is upraised in *kuncita pada* position. The left arm of Carling is holding the “Circle of fire” above her head and right hand placed in *abhaya mudra*. Karan picks the trident from the stage and starts to dance aggressively, combining Indian classical movement vocabulary with gymnastics. With a trident in his hand, he performs side aerial cartwheel thrice and starts whirling multiple times while moving towards the left of the stage. Karan delineates his freestyle moves with his continuous hops and moves on the stage and climbs the revolving “circle of fire” and stands with his back against Carling’s back with one leg lifted and thrown across the body to the right and the foot is upraised in *kuncita pada* position. The left arm is thrown across the body in *gajahasta* and hand in *hamsapaksa* position and holding the “circle of fire”, from the top, with his right arm. The performance ends with both Karan and Carling as Shiva and Parvati respectively standing in the “Circle of fire”, in fig. 8, with the background soundscape of “Om” chanting.

Alike Uday Shankar, the choreographer in this dance production chooses Indian traditional dance costumes long with creative soundscape to retain Indianness. Karan wearing black clothes is painted in black whereas Carling has been given golden coloured costumes. Carling is shown as the female Shiva, *mohini avatar* of the deity, wearing a tiger skin as loin cloth, *rudraksh* beads on the ankles, the wrist and the biceps of both hands, a golden coloured moon (*chandrama*) on her matted hair (*jatayein*), blue throat (*neel kanth*) and ash on her forehead whereas Karan appears as male deity with all the objects coloured in silver. One of the reasons is to become like the God which is also an underlying notion in *Shaiva Siddhanta*. The performance

combines both *sringara* and *raudra rasas* in a special *bhavasabalata*. Carling as Parvati having *sringara* as her main theme and Karan as Shiva having *raudra* to illustrate these two *rasas* and combine the Siva-Sakti principle. The televisual framing of their performance is done in such a way so that the audience can have strong responses to the dancing bodies. It is obvious that the performers not only succeed in adding new techniques but also manage to retain the originality of classical dance forms, representing the cosmic dance. The show provides stage to performers for inventing new modes of dance through new ways of being feminine and masculine. The hand gestures, facial expressions and movement vocabulary are taken from *bharatanatyam* repertoire. The swaying of arms and legs, and repeated pelvic thrusts by both performers make the performance an exuberant spectacle.

Carling performing *rudra tandava* in disguise of *lasya tandava* indicates widening boundaries of a domesticated Indian woman. The dance reality shows blend eroticism and celebrity culture for which the spectators constantly await the consumption. The short costume, above the knees, worn by Carling not only unsettles the past notions of Indianness but idealized gender identities as well. In the earlier times, the gender codes were established by Indian nationalists on respectable Indian women. The nationalists established Indian women as the epitome of domesticity, spirituality, and motherhood. With emergence of Bollywoodization and globalisation, a performance in a reality dance show has transcended itself from choreographers and dancers to the westernization of Indian culture through revealing costumes. Performing in the reality dance shows wearing revealing costumes represents women as bearing low moral stature and unsettles the notions of a respectable Indian woman established by the Indian classical dances. At some places, the performance is digressed from *tandava* to the representation of Carling's body on screen. In the end, the jury marked a few hand gestures, by Carling while standing in the "Circle of fire", as incorrect which might be due to the costume and make up worn

by her. The frequent usage of the accoutrements, by Karan and Carling, on the stage, has played a dual role by making performance complex for the performers and allow the performance come into being in the world and at the same time help in bringing the outside world onto the stage.

The foregoing analysis reveals the fact that Indian dance has come a long way from its origin as it is no longer legacy of a particular region, sex, gender, religion family, social-cultural and educational background and household; rather it has taken on democratic and cosmopolitan dimensions as it comes to embrace in its fold producers, choreographers, participants, performers and audience from the cross section of Indian society even Indian diaspora. It is the open competition that makes it imperative for the contestants to put in a substantial amount of time and energy in rehearsing a variety of styles— acrobatics, ballet, jazz, hip hop and lyrical to win awards/ trophies or to get professional/career opportunities. Even though the traditional Indian dance performances are very ritualistic, it is now being performed in various venues and for various occasions. The long established view that dance originated from the Gods and should be performed in temples is slowly diminishing. Innovations are being incorporated while maintaining some sort of legitimacy and retaining fidelity to the classical spirit of ancient performing arts. Among the dancers, there is an almost universal feeling of being torn between a desire to remain firmly anchored in their original culture and an imperative need to draw on liberating techniques from other cultures. The proliferation of Shiva *tandava* in reality dance shows not only transforms the media landscape but also shapes the lived religion of the spectators. The issue of identity and nationalism is illustrated or reflected through the cosmic dance of Shiva in the dance reality shows on the television. The advent of new technologies in the wake of liberalization, globalization and privatization accelerates the dissemination of religious/ cultural symbols and ions as increasing markers of national identity and pride. Besides, proliferation of dance shows offers opportunities to the masses to make career and create

capital respectively. In other words, dance instead of a matter of passion and pride has become a profession for the consumerist-globalized society.

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Any Body Can Dance: Youth, Rage and Precarity in the Dance Films of Bollywood

Shikha Jhingan

Abstract:

This article tracks the rise of dance films in Bollywood cinema, when dance genres like hip-hop started dominating reality TV format-driven shows. I discuss how Anybody Can Dance films use a spectacle driven form to capture the rage and precarity of young lives through an embodied engagement with dance. Television screens and their discursive presence plays an important role in these narratives. However, the films use 3D technologies to invite audiences into film theatres to see reality TV dancing stars perform gravity defying movements through dance forms like Hip-Hop, Parkour and Breakdance. I argue that ABCD films need to be seen as part of new spectacle driven cinema that largely address concerns of youth located within specific geographies, while also highlighting their aspirations in a larger global context. Though, Any Body Can Dance films try to raise the nationalist themes in order to draw the bio power of the youth towards the symbolic discourses of the State, these remain as quick fix solutions, unable to shake off the spectre of rage, uncertainty and precarity in the lives of youth from the non-elite suburbs of Mumbai.

Keywords: Youth, Dance, Bollywood, Hip-Hop, Spectacle

Contemporary Bollywood cinema has been increasingly using the dance floor to raise contentious issues facing youth and adolescents in the uneven local, national and global terrains. Locating young adults within competitive arenas of performance, these films capture the struggle experienced by youth as they encounter intergenerational conflicts that are staged on a national and global stage. Deploying a spectacular form that piggy backs on the increased traffic of images, music and cultural commodities in a globalized world, films like *ABCD: Anybody Can Dance* (2013), *ABCD 2* (2015), captured global television's fascination for the youth genres of dance. In these films, the youth intimately and affectively encounter a visceral body that

has been amplified by changing media platforms like reality television and the post celluloid digital cinema. Dance films draw attention to youth aspirations in a market based liberalized economy, foregrounding tensions resulting from intergenerational conflicts, gender and class hierarchies, social exclusion, and a strong desire to pursue the passion for dance by destabilizing the boundaries between work and leisure.

Hardt and Negri have described the immaterial labor involved in the entertainment industry as affective labor. The products of this labor according to Hardt and Negri are “intangible” that can create a feeling of excitement and passion (2000: 293). This article addresses the emergence of the dance films in the context of the mutating form of media ecology, and the feedback loop allowing new genres to emerge in the multiplex form of Bombay cinema. While much has been written about the rise of the family film and its address to the Indian diaspora in the post globalized context, this article brings into discussion youth-oriented Bollywood films exploring narratives around dance and sports in the post millennial period. In the transmedia ecology, the emergence of the dance film needs to be seen as a response to the expanding audience base of televisual form and the rise of celebrity culture through talent-based reality shows. Digital technologies like 3 D are leveraged to depict young adults training themselves to heighten the affective power of the body under severe stress. While giving an enhanced and immersive experience to the audience in excess of the television form, these films bring to the fore issues related to precarity of bodies and lives, intergenerational conflicts and uncertain futures.

Dance Reality Shows on Indian Television

The deregulation of television accompanied by the opening up of the skies in the 1990s introduced audiences to a diverse range of images, music and genres that carried a global imaginary. Bollywood based content was brought forward in innovative formats to reclaim young audiences that were drifting towards American soaps or MTV. Pallabi Chakravarty shows how the quick spread of media along with a “bewildering ensemble of contradictions” made the aspirational

youth turn to dance as a quick road to stardom (2017, 3). Riding on the popularity of Bollywood songs, dance and music shows enabled talented youth to perform on television, and create a secondary market of B – level celebrities along with mushrooming of talent agencies and dance and music schools (Gaurav Jain 2010, 31). While Doordarshan until then had tilted towards folk and classical dance forms or film dances, reality shows like *Boogie Woogie*, in the mid-nineties, brought diverse forms such as rap, flamenco, Bollywood, break and hip hop into our television screens. The popularity of Indian Idol, format-based television quickly spread to the dance genre in the post millennial period. In 2006, Sony Entertainment Television introduced *Jhalak Dikh Jaa*, based on BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing*. Tweaked by national and local television industries to leverage the rise of consumer markets and the telecom revolution, format driven shows had huge implications for the youth both as audiences as well as its actants. A new generation of dancers and choreographers from “lower middle classes with diverse caste and religious identities” could emerge in the cultural landscape after India's encounter with economic liberalization (Gaurav Jain, 2010: 31).

Youth have been centerstage in dance-based reality shows, introducing innovative narrative techniques to draw audience into a contestant's journey highlighting their financial struggles, difficult social circumstances and sometimes lack of social confidence. The use of grainy videos capturing the contestants with their family members in their humble surrounding before the show helped in creating the narrative arch. The shows mapped the transformations made possible through ‘dance’ by bringing out the enunciative capacity of the body in alignment with the demands of the hyper mediatized globalized world. Though each show tried to create a USP, laborious training to carve out a disciplined body was pushed as the formula for success. The figure of the mentor/choreographer who would put the contestants through various stages of skill training and groom them for the promised goal of social mobility became key figure. This involved the staging of a transaction, a handing over of the adolescent body from the care of the parent to the mentor.

Youth as a site of investment by the media and advertising industry have been seen within the context of their desire to construct their “adolescent selves” (Deutsch, J and E. Theodorou 2009, 230). More recently, scholars have drawn attention to the way globalization enables imagination, negotiated through processes of production, distribution and consumption of cultural forms (Darling-Wolf 2015, 2). Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade have discussed hip hop as both a hypercommodified youth culture as well as a “transnational and hybridized cultural form” that has enabled the youth to participate in political movements (2012, 2). Format based dance reality shows on Indian television have particularly showcased the way youth negotiate hybridity in the culturally globalized world. By bringing their passion in dialogue with transnational images of genres like hip-hop or break dance, youth could offer imagination of new identities in response to the uneven economic and social terrain (Dewey and Brison 2012, 3).

Anybody Can Dance: Enter Cinema

Dance driven spectacles have always been major attractions in popular Hindi films since the 1940s. Usha Iyer’s *Dancing Women* has drawn attention to the labor, material practices and gestural repertoires involved in the staging of the techno spectacle of the dance number of Bombay cinema (2020). Discussing the rise of dancing stars like Madhuri Dixit in the 1990s through her productive partnership with Saroj Khan, Iyer notes the use of the hook steps and fragmented body parts that underlined Dixit’s corporeal performance in songs like ‘Choli Ke Peeche Kya hai’ (*Khalnayak*, 1993). With the rise of dance-based contest shows on television, there was a transformation in the visual economy of dance sequences in Bollywood films. For example, in *Dil To Pagal Hai* (1997), spectacular dance sequences with an accent on a new vibrant style of group choreography were presented along with behind the scene activities of a spectacle driven economy. This included an overt visibilisation of branded active wear and designer studios. The film cast included top dancers of the industry to perform set pieces that were woven into the narrative. Elaborate sequences choreographed by Shaimak Dawar were devoted to characters rehearsing and

training for dance, while highlighting an undercurrent of rivalry between the two female dancers and their romantic involvement with the director of their dance group.

In the dance films under discussion, I consider the rise of a new genre that directly animated reality television's pervading influence on youth cultures. The rise of star choreographers, the highly mediatized coverage of star-based award shows had already set the stage of these interlinkages. I focus on *ABCD (2013)* and *ABCD 2 (2015)* both released as 3D films and directed by Remo D'Souza that introduced this new genre to Indian audiences. The *ABCD* films use dance as a way of life for youngsters coming from difficult background who yearn to train, rehearse and perform dance to get recognized as a serious, trained and talented dance group. The city of Bombay with its slums with its propensity for the legal and the para-legal infrastructures in a web of relations with each other becomes an important backdrop for the film. The film is set in Dongri, a suburb in Bombay known in the popular media for its brush with gangs and gang wars. The first time that the *ABCD* team is introduced in the film is through the perspective of Vishnu (Prabhu Deva) a dance choreographer who has been humiliated by JD (Kay Kay Menon) for not being open to new and creative ideas as a choreographer. JD wants to expand his Jahangir Dance Company (JDC) by pumping in more sponsors and money and calls a new choreographer from overseas to ensure an edge over other dance companies. Vishnu decides to leave the city for good until he comes across a group of young boys from the poor part of the city performing Parkour while dodging the police. This thrilling sequence brings the bodies of young dancers in direct contact with the slum city, negotiating roof tops, narrow lanes by using the techniques of running, climbing, vaulting and jumping.

ABCD's investment in dance as a particularly potent form throws up issues of alienation of youth experimenting with hybrid identities from the dominant social fabric, intergenerational conflict, class distinctions and inclusive/exclusive citizenship. The fluid relationship between the street and the rehearsal space is at the center of the body's relationship with dance, that becomes an embodied

scaffolding for self-affirmation. There are three vectors around which the film develops the theme of dance and the youth's passion for it. The first is the asymmetries between the upscale Jahangir Dance Company (JDC) whose owner JD is ready to bend all rules to win in dance competitions and the Dongri boys and girls, the underdogs who are talented and passionate but in-disciplined despite living in precarious conditions. The second narrative is that of D, a Muslim boy whose father wants him to run his butchery rather than waste time in dancing. The third is the relationship between Chandu who is trying to kick his drug addiction and Shaina, a bar dancer who is initially not accepted by the group for moral concerns. The formation of the Dongri Dance Revolution, the name that the group give themselves, is thus fraught with tensions. A strong rivalry between two gangs, both passionate about dance keeps Vishnu on his toes initially. The film opens at its seams issues related to inclusion and exclusion by tracking the various obstacles that the underdogs have to overcome to finally win in the dance competition. What is at the core of the film is the anxieties related to globalization and the corporatization of dance that threatens to strike a blow on the Dongri gang. The final drama is set in a dance-based television show where JD is determined to make his team win at any cost.

ABCD accommodates the off-screen context of the dance-based television shows and its synergies with Bollywood music, fashion and celebrity culture. Given the fact that *ABCD* was directed by Remo Dsouza, a well-known choreographer who became a celebrity judge in dance shows on Indian television, it is no surprising that a lot of the performative sequences were framed through the optics of television. Both Salman Yousuf Khan playing the role of Rocky and Dharmesh Yalende respectively had won in *Dance India Dance* and had a major fan following among young dance enthusiasts. Several other actors as key protagonists had performed on reality shows like *Jhalak Dikhlaja*. The dance films thus addressed a particular youth driven market that was familiar with dance reality shows and its star appeal. Chakravorty has highlighted the showcasing of 'cosmopolitan masculinity' derived from the global youth culture of Hip-Hop and Bollywood dances (158). In *ABCD 2*, for example, D's character is reintroduced as a boy from Surat who has landed in

Bombay to join the new team. D auditions dancing with his stylish sun glasses while performing a break dance routine and is applauded and welcomed by the team. The film acknowledges the stardom of television dancing stars and his appeal to hip hop enthusiasts by giving this performative platform to Dharmesh Yalende.

The transnational proliferation of hip-hop and its homogenizing influence on local cultures in the post-global world has been debated by scholars. Recent research on global translocation of hip-hop and rap have challenged the framing of hip-hop as an essentially 'American' cultural practice (Darling-Wolf 2015). As Bill Ashcroft suggests that 'there are many globalizations' (2013: 1). The symbolic marginalization as expressed through hip-hop cannot be applied simplistically to format driven dance reality shows as they are driven by the expansion of global media corporations into Asian economies. Secondly, these shows have enabled the rise of an aspirational youth who actively intervene in the media ecologies not just as consumers of global culture, but as producers who fold into their own local/global context to push the boundaries of their own cultural practice and identity formation.

Dance films like *ABCD* and its sequel *ABCD 2* need to be seen as part of new spectacle driven cinema addressed to a young audience located within specific geographies. However, the films also capture the youth's aspirations in a larger global context. Both the films address the anxieties of youth in the post liberalization urban environment, where the street forms of creative expression are pitted against the more upscale dance forms. In *ABCD*, while the trainees at JDC are shown practicing ballet, jazz and flamenco dance moves, Vishnu's Dongri team focuses on high energy hip-hop, break-dance combined with popping and up rock, forms identified with street dancing. By intercutting between the flattened rehearsal space of Jahangir Dance Company where the upscale trainees, many of them Caucasian youth are shown practicing against wall-to-wall mirrors, and the Dongri boys and girls who desperately look for makeshift, residual spaces to practice or the competition. The spatial flows between the rehearsal space and the neighbourhood turn it into a 'place' with its palpable material geography. The dancers of JDC are

framed through Jahangir's point of view, foregrounding his narcissism and egoistical tendencies. Jahangir's attempt to sexually assault his lead dancer further foregrounds the specular space as an entrapment. In contrast, the rehearsal space of the underdogs is animated through multiple view-points, first from D's rival gang who keep loitering around so that they can peep into the training sessions. Later members of the larger community of Dongri also keep an eye on the boys both from supportive and adversarial positions.

The climax of the film depicts how the Dongri Team fights back to win the dance show when they realize just before their act that their sequence has already been copied by JDC. The television screen in the green room mediates liveness with mediatization, bringing out the drama of a Reality TV show through its key protagonists. The Dongri boys watch their rival gang's performance on the television screen and realize that Jahangir had bribed one of their members to squeal on their choreographed sequence. The first suspicion is on D, the Muslim boy, but soon the team realizes that it was Mayur who had fallen prey to Jahangir's lure to gain an entry into the elite dance company. Dejected, the team almost gives up on performing until Vishnu encourages them to fight back by connecting to their heartfelt passion for dance. This is where the local, vernacular form is reconfigured to scale up the visual and aural power of the performance. Amidst chants of 'Ganapati Bappa Maurya,' the Dongri group performs an energetic street dance that they have always performed at the Ganapati festival. The camera and the editing style are leveraged to show a mesmerizing response by the live audience, as the boys claim an edge their over other teams. By performing a dance in high energy and an unbounded dance form that combines free style Bollywood dancing with acrobatic and popping and flipping techniques. The lyrics of the song are a mix of Hindi, English, that include words like 'now raise your voice, make some noise for Bappa Morya,' followed by the use of Sanskrit chants in the concluding part of the performance. The formation of the boys donning Ganesha heads, in a pyramid formation, as Ganapati's Aarti in Marathi fades up on the audio track is framed as a moment of revelation. Both Vishnu and his adversary Jahangir are moved to tears at this riveting performance with an invocation of the 'divine.'

The *darshana* of the god is captured through several point of view shots, including that of the judges, Jahangir, the adversarial team. As the rhythms and the dancing get scaled up, we see the live audience standing with folded hands. These images are intercut with that of the performance as well as the audience watching the show on their television screens, including the residents of Dongri. Another visual layer added to this sequence is a sepia toned flash back from Jahangir's point of view, a recollection of the past, as we see Jahangir and Vishnu dancing at the Ganapati festival in their younger days.

It is only by connecting with his past, the gestures and movements associated with the street dance that Jahangir starts recognizing the skill and the passion of the Dongri group. By investing in a more vernacular, local form of dance aesthetics where the street with its chaos, noise, violence and edginess becomes the ultimate theatre of dance. The hip hop genre identified with the youth of the street is evoked but also pressured by the local social and cultural context. At the same time, the powerful divine form and its specularity is instrumentalized to 'erase' all the egotistical differences and effect a smoothening of past rivalries.

Rage in Dance

Both *ABCD* and *ABCD 2* use dance in crucial sequences to express rage. In *ABCD*, D's father blocks the group's entry into the rehearsal space thus threatening to crush their dreams. In defiance of his father, D starts dancing in pouring rain, as the song 'Bezuban/mute,' fades up on the track. This extended set piece performed by D and his team mates captures the harnessing of bodies in choreographed movements to express rage. The use of water as a fluvial surface for dance helped in creating the fantasmatic experience of dance through the 3D effect with ripples of water adding to the visceral experience of the dancing body. Fast paced dancing synchronized to music is interrupted by leaping and jumping movements that are shown in slow motion. The depiction of a mediatized digital body, leaping in the air in slow motion as seen through the POV of the community captures the tensions between the desire for selfhood in the post liberalization and globalized context and older norms of forms of

filial loyalty. The film dramatizes how the effects of economic restructuring brings out a varied response across different age groups: the hyper presence of media technologies such as television screens, boom boxes, CDs and the desire to 'be cool' is placed in confrontation with the older generation although the reason for their disenchantment is never fleshed out¹. Another important character in the film is Chandru who battles his drug addiction through his passionate engagement with dance.

ABCD 2 opens with interviews of audiences of a television dance show cheering for the popular Mumbai Stunners team. What follows is a series of performative acts including that of the Mumbai Stunners, who disappoint the judges and their fans by performing a piece that has been plagiarized from the well-known international hip hop group. Suresh (Varun Dhawan) is personally humiliated by the judge for bringing disrepute to his late mother who had been honored with a Padma Shri for her contribution to Indian classical dance. Suresh is the only person in the film who is fleshed out with few flashback sequences that show him watching his mother performing on stage. 'Chunar/Scarf,' the song that follows becomes a leitmotif to exteriorize Suresh's inner landscape, his fragile self, anguished by his mother's name being dragged into this humiliation. The 'rage' sequence that follows shows Suresh performing a solo dance with his visceral body combining hip-hop with Kalari dance moves, and ending with frenzied Islamic motifs of dervish style movements.

Released just two years after *ABCD*, *ABCD 2* captures the movement of Bollywoodized version of hip-hop dance on an international arena. The film fictionalizes the real-life story of Suresh and Vernon, two boys from Nalasopara, who formed the *Fictitious Dance Company*. The film was made at a much bigger budget with Walt Disney Pictures stepping in to produce the film for Remo Dsouza. By casting Varun Dhawan and Shraddha Kapoor in lead roles, the production team was also legitimizing the emergence of the dance genre. The film gestures towards the presence of a powerful mediatized landscape through the opening sequence itself, where the site specificity of television screen at diverse locations is tracked as

part of the feedback loop with recording of the show in the presence of a live audience. Accused of lifting an act of an international hip hop team without acknowledging them, the team sets out to look for a coach who can guide them and help them prepare for the Las Vegas international hip hop dance competition. Mimicking the narrative style of reality shows, the film juxtaposes the everyday and mundane events such as the group shopping at a mall before their trip to Las Vegas, with the spectacles of dance.

The youth in *ABCD 2* are part of the service industry working as pizza delivery boys or in beauty salons, who pursue their passion for dance in their free time. Suresh waits at tables in a restaurant and harbors his dreams to make it big in hip hop dance. It is important to consider the way the youth express themselves through dance genres like Hip-Hop, Parkour and Breakdance that resonates with the way they negotiate their lives as part of the service economy. Jumping, running, flipping and jumping across rooftops or vaulting involve intense bodily engagement that required skillful negotiation of space through speed. In the service economy, delivery boys too are expected to negotiate vast spaces across locations with speed. In *ABCD 2*, the team members get humiliated by their clients when they go about their everyday work life in the city. With Vishnu as their mentor, the team goes to contest at a competition in Bangalore where they desperately try to shake off the tag of being plagiarists. Recalling the memory of the sequence from *ABCD*, the group performs to 'Bezuban/mute,' to articulate their desire to express their passion and rage through dance. The sequence also uses water as a medium for the mobile bodies to express themselves. Their next destination is Las Vegas: the film shows the team members facing a series of disasters that keep them on their toes. The film highlights Suresh's inner resolve to win so that he can bring back the honor to his mother's sullied name. The team's final performance riding on a mixed tape begins with the Chunar song in a child's voice, reanimating the mother's theme. This is followed by a rap section where the Indian youth show their determination to take on the world. The aural assemblage includes an eclectic mix of the sounds of the nadaswaram, the 'Chunar' theme in Daler Mehndi's voice, and the lines 'Sujalam Shitalam' from Bankim Chandra's *Vande Mataram*.

As the Mumbai Stunners leap and dance, the three colours of the Indian flag create a psychedelic effect with the song: with digitally simulated effects of the dispersal of color matching on screen with the leaping and vaulting bodies, manipulated through the use of slow motion the chunar/veil of the mother mutates into the national flag.

Precarity

A parallel track in both the dance films is that of Punit Pathak who plays the role of Chandru in ABCD, a character who tries to get over his substance abuse. In ABCD 2, Pathak plays the role of Vinod, who suffers from hearing impairment but experiences music through his body and responds to it through his own innovative dance style. In Las Vegas, D discovers that Vinod is suffering from a terrible cough, realizing that he may be suffering from consumption. Vinod pleads with him not to inform the rest of the team. Thus, morbidity and precarity in the lives of youth living in the bottom rung of Mumbai city resonates in both the films through intertextual registers. In the final round, the team struggles to pull off the act of building the pyramid with human bodies, as Vinod suffers from another bout of illness. It is at this moment that the nationalist fervor is drummed up by intercutting with the shots of the spectators at this global stage where flags of different nationalities are being waved. After the first unsuccessful attempt, the team rises again with the chants of Lord Ganapati to make the formation of the pyramid. As Suresh ascends on the bodies of his team mates, to hoist the Indian flag, the labour of aspirational underclass protagonists performing at a global scale in a dazzling spectacle form, gets yoked to nationalist iconography.

This is where the question of scale making becomes important. Scale according to Anna Tsing is not just a neutral frame for viewing the world but needs to be “brought into being” (2000). The concept of scale allows us to analyse relationships between objects or a set of bodies and their representation. I am using scale as a method to bring into view the visual iconography of the flag that is being deployed to create a sense of magnificence and elevation by creating a hierarchy of scale. The visual iconography, the use of height to showcase the flag on top of the human pyramid, the vertical vision with a focus on

on-screen fans who need to turn their gaze upwards and get dazzled by its look. There is a certain 'to be looked at ness' which is being encoded repeatedly in dance sequences being deployed to mask the unevenness and the rough edges of the lives of these youth into a flattened mediatized ecology. However, 'Vande Matram' in *ABCD 2* is not a stand-alone entity but part of a medley that includes rap sections and EDM music, providing an aural hook to a set of young bodies performing hip hop dance with high energy. The image of the Indian team and the waving of the tri-colour in slow motion cheered by a live audience from the global community, including the rival German team, is in excess of 'realistic codes of a reality TV show.'

The scaled-up production numbers in Bollywood film usually seem to arrest the narrative enabling spectators to enjoy the star driven performances. In the dance films under discussion the dance spectacles become key sites of struggle, imitating the narrative and aesthetic drive of dance contest shows on television. Use of slow motion, freeze frames, replays, memory driven flashbacks get inserted into dance numbers to resolve past conflicts or reenergize the performance of the underdog protagonists to help them win the competition. Digital technologies, 3D effects, aural motifs are repurposed across both the films to insert the spectators in a paratextual form that draws on the televisual. Finally, I have tried to demonstrate that though the *Any Body Can Dance* films try to raise the nationalist themes in order to draw the bio power of the youth to symbolic discourses of the State, these remain as quick fix solutions that are unable to shake off the spectre of rage, uncertainty and precarity in the lives of youth who have been raised in the non-elite suburbs of Mumbai. This theme of precarity gets further explored in *Street Dancers* (2020), through the theme of illegal migrants and their abject lives in the city of London. More research needs to be done on the intersections between dance, rage and precarity in Bollywood cinema to understand further its wider aesthetic, political and spatial dimension.

Endnotes

1. Chandu's battle with substance abuse is another thread where we see Chandu practicing hard at night, in an attempt to discipline the mind through intense physical training

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Social Media as Public Sphere: Public Deliberation on Twitter during Farmers' Protest

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Abstract

The metamorphic growth of social media has substantially expanded the scope for information sharing. Blogs, social networks, content sharing platforms, Chat rooms have created enormous space for knowledge sharing and public debate. The social media supported communication channels are not constrained by any regulatory framework as is the case with mainstream media. The participants are free to express their ideas and feelings without being subjected either to space constraints or media gatekeeping. In public deliberations, the main stream media and social media influence each other. But, by virtue of providing first-hand raw information directly from the site of the event, social media remains ahead of the mainstream media in public sphere reporting and often compels the mainstream media to follow. As such, the mainstream media no more enjoy unquestioning sway in shaping the public sphere deliberations, the social media has substantially intruded into this domain influencing the nature and quality of deliberations. This paper makes a review of the public and political deliberations in India during the Farmers' protest in 2020-21.

Keywords: Social Media, Indian Public Sphere, Public Deliberation, Farmers Protest, Twitter

Introduction

The unparalleled scope of self-expression and interactivity offered by social media has indeed created a paradoxical situation. On one hand, social progress is attained with adaptive changes in social values and beliefs. On the other, the same platform is used to spread social taboos. The rising social media platforms are used to promote social harmony, at the same time attempts are being made to spread hatred and create tension and violence. On one hand, social media lead to democratization and on the other, it also provides space for mobocracy. On one hand, social media promotes cultural

homogenization; on the other hand, it also offers space for the promotion of new cultural identities. Social media space is used for generating public and political consensus as well as engineering conflicts around issues. Farmers' protests had created a buzz on social media. The counter and encounter of statements between the government, celebrities, common people, and farmers' supporters had drawn attention worldwide. The cacophony on social media needed to explore the issues of public deliberations during farmers' protests. Against this backdrop, this paper explores the influence of social media on the contemporary Indian public sphere and its deliberations.

The study aims to identify the issues of public deliberations that revolved during the farmer's protest 2020-21. The focus of this study is to identify the contemporary public deliberations around the farmer's protest in India during 2020-21. Further, it is to identify the political deliberations around the farmer's protest. The paper shall also foreground a discussion about the impact social media makes on public sphere, and vice versa.

The study comprises of two research questions – (i) what are the contemporary issues of public and political deliberations during farmers' protests in India?, and (ii) what is the potential of social-media in the Indian public sphere? The study has its vital significance in studying the characteristics and nature of the Indian public sphere. The study will help the researchers and academicians to identify the contemporary issues of Indian public deliberations during farmers' protests 2020-21. This study will be beneficial for the social activists, government, and political leaders to understand the issues of farmers for the solution. Online activism is drawing attention all over the world; the study on the use of social platforms in farmers' protests will give an insight into how social media can be used by Indian citizens in online activism. This study will work as a conceptual framework for future studies on the role of social media in the Indian public sphere.

Concept of 'Public Sphere'

German philosopher Habermas defines the public sphere as a

“society engaged in rational-critical public debate among private persons who gather to discuss matters of common concern.” Communication scholar Gerard A. Hauser defines the public sphere as “a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and try to reach a common judgement” (61). The public sphere constitutes groups of people who engage in discussing, analyzing, and criticizing the issues which affect them. McKee writes about the public sphere that it is a virtual space where communication about public issues takes place (5). According to him, the ‘public sphere’ is a useful metaphor because it allows people to play role in the creation of public culture, public policy, and the running of the state (8).

According to Susen, the public sphere is composed of private individuals whose societal interconnectedness transcends the boundaries of their personal lives. It is clear that each individual of society can associate with each other and make a public forum to express his views and ideas which are relevant to them. So, each individual of society is the basic element of the public sphere. Every person has their own private sphere (i.e., having their own problems, interests, needs, and solutions) but when individuals assemble and talk about an issue of common interest and try to find out the solution, then this assembled group becomes the public sphere. The concept of the public sphere is massive; it’s not limited to such a small group. Actually, the public sphere is a collective form of small public groups or forums. Always bear in mind that a public sphere cannot be created in the absence of a democratic environment.

Freedom to assemble and to express opinions in an inclusive manner influences the public sphere. It constitutes all the points of view, the majority as well as minority and includes the public opinion formed on that. Habermas’s study confirms, “Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion, i.e., with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions, about matters of general interest” (“The Public Sphere” 49). Every person has their own private sphere (i.e. having their own problems, interests, needs, and solutions) but when such individuals assemble and talk about an issue of common interest public sphere becomes apparent. Actually, the public sphere

is a collective form of small public groups or forums, of which individuals are the basic elements.

Social Media a Tool of Transformation for the Public Sphere

The advent of the internet has opened a new door to the public sphere; the researchers have explored the potential of internet-based technologies to facilitate a new forum for public deliberation and political communication (Dahlberg; Dahlgren; Graham; Papacharissi). Habermas argues that the public sphere requires “specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it” (“Public”⁴⁹). From this perspective, social media offers the means for transmitting information, the same way newspapers; radio, and TV have been doing. The hypertext-based environment has made the users (driven by contents) search the content proximate to them. The multimedia-enabled Webspaces offers enhanced scope for visual interaction among the members of the public sphere. Beyond private life, individuals and groups engage themselves in creating content, discussing political issues, organizing events and activities, and thus building public opinion on public issues. Social media, indeed, has become a more democratic and participatory public sphere.

Social media allows to sharing of ideas and views, leading to the creation of networks and forums, which constitute a vital part of today’s public sphere. As Benkler said, “The Internet is democratic in nature as it allows all citizens to participate in the public sphere and they no longer need be consumers and passive spectators. They can become creators and primary subjects” (272). The participatory and interactive nature of social media has empowered people to create their own ‘social sphere’ based on their choice and interest. Papacharissi describes internet-based technologies as a ‘virtual sphere’ that facilitate discussion that promotes a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions; thus, a virtual sphere enhances democracy (2002, 11). Papacharissi writes that the public sphere presents a domain of social life in which public opinion is expressed by means of rational public deliberation and debate. Individuals gather around online spaces where they discuss political issues, spread ideas, and seek support for their views from society (2009,

232). Social networks have a democratic potential and democracy is a central aspect at all levels of society having the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences (Brandtzaeg and Luders).

According to Noelle Neumann's spiral of silence theory, people tend to remain silent due to the fear of isolation. In public sphere deliberations, majority groups remain more vocal whereas minority and marginalized groups tend to remain silent. But, social media has empowered marginalized groups to speak out. Social media allows participants to remain anonymous if they have the fear of isolation. Thus, social media encourages democratic participation of people whether they belong to majority views or minority views. Fraser noted that several special interest publics coexist and flaunt their collective identities of dissent in this virtual sphere; thus, reflecting the social dynamics of the real world (cited in Papacharissi 2002, 21). It is being noticed that the online homogenous groups of public spheres are being cherished in one kind of ideology. According to Sunstein, like-minded people engage in 'enclave deliberation' and their deliberation moves towards a more extreme point and thus tends to group polarization. These deliberative enclaves are engaged in imposing their ideology on others. It increases polarization and extremism in the public sphere. This is the reason why there is a flood of hatred messages and photographs on social media.

Social Media and Deliberation

Being actively engaged in participatory networks, people of all ages and backgrounds create and distribute messages via online and interpersonal networks at a rapid and ever-accelerating speed. Henry Jenkins characterized participatory culture as "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations with others, members who believe that their contributions matter, ...and members who feel some degree of social connection with one another" (5-6). Social media is an inexpensive tool for the citizens where they want to discuss the issues which matter to them with the people who have common beliefs.

Dahlgren worked on the interactional dimension of the public sphere, especially, on how deliberation proceeds in the online public

sphere in the contemporary environment of political communication. Halpern and Gibbs found social media as a catalyst for online deliberation and users participate in political discussion and issues which may benefit them directly or indirectly from such participation (1167). Social media provides a platform for public policy deliberations whether it is political, economic, social, or cultural. People may be mobilized if something matters much to them. For example- In April 2011, Anna Hazare started a movement against corruption. He was on hunger strike for Jan Lokpal Bill. This movement had brought people of all regions to demand the Jan Lokpal bill. Anna Hazare and his team used social media effectively. They had created a Facebook page named 'India Against Corruption (IAC)' which helped in mobilizing people on social media and then on the ground at Jantar-Mantar and Ramlila Maidan of Delhi. In the Nirbhaya rape case, thousands of people got mobilized and inspired to reach India Gate and Raisina Hill for a candle march through a social media campaign. The social media campaign generated huge candles not only in Delhi but also at Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore, Ahmadabad, and London too.

According to McQuail, "New media allow dialogue between politicians and active citizens and thus it provides an arena where public deliberation can take place and public opinion can be formed" (as cited in Smuts 2010). Social media based public deliberation promotes the democratic nature of the media where everyone is free to speak on any issue. This is the place where sharing of information, public discussion, debates, and deliberation are done. However, there is always a chance of polarization of views; one, in the favour of an issue, and the other, in against of an issue. However, Semaan et al. (2014, 1420) concluded that social media are resilient in nature, and its users can shape them to suit their needs and interests; the users always engaged in discovering how to manipulate and integrate multiple social media platforms in order to create the information, dissemination, and discussion environments they desire.

Background of the Farmers' Protest

The Farm Bill was passed on 17th November, 2020, in the Lok Sabha and on the 20th September in the Rajya Sabha. On 27th September, the

bill was signed by the President of India and notified as a law in the Gazette of India. After the law was introduced, the farmers from Punjab and Haryana started the protest at the local level. The protest became massive on 25th November, 2020, by calling the farmers from all over India to arrive at Delhi through the movement 'Dilli Chalo'. The farmers started to march towards Delhi on 26th November even after not getting the permission from Delhi Police due to Covid-19 protocols. Due to the Farmers' continuous protest, the central government had decided to take back the Farms Act and on 29th November, 2021, the Act was revoked by both the Houses of Parliament. The Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) received a signed letter from the Government of India on 9th December where in the government had accepted all the demands of the farmer unions including the withdrawal of the cases against farmers and forming a committee on MSP. After that, The SKM agreed to end the movement and announced to vacate the protest sites on 11th December, 2021.

Research Design & Methodology

To study the contemporary public and political deliberations during the Farmers' Protest 2021-22, the tweets having the hashtag **#FarmersProtest** were studied. This hashtag **#FarmersProtest** is selected for study the contemporary deliberations because it is the second most tweeted hashtag in India in the year 2021 (#OnlyOnTwitter, December 09, 2021). The top most used hashtag in

India in the year 2021 was **#Covid19**.



Figure1: Image from Twitter India

The time period of study is taken from 26Nov. 2020 to 30 Nov. 2021. The massive protest started on 26Nov.2020. PM Modi accepted the demands of farmers and announced the repeal of Farms Laws on 19Nov. 2021. That is why, the time period of study is taken from 26Nov. 2020 to 30Nov. 2021.

Selection of the tweets

The 'Advanced Search' filter was used in which the 'Engagement' filter was set. Only those tweets have been taken for the study which has at least a hundred people's engagement (likes & retweets). From the 'Top' section of the tweets, 50 tweets were taken randomly month-wise for the study of public deliberations during the Farmers' protest 2020-21. 'Top' tweets are the most relevant tweets based on the popularity of a tweet; top tweets are selected through an algorithm, and not manually (according to Twitter Help Center). The tweets are analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Coding

For the qualitative analysis of the tweets, the content analysis of every tweet was done, and the context and meaning of tweets were interpreted. Further, the coding of the data was done to identify the themes for categorizing the tweets. Coding is a way of indexing or categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it (Gibbs).

All the tweets were categorized into the following themes for their qualitative assessment:

- **Tweets in the support of the Farmers & against Farms Act 2020**

Under this theme, those tweets are kept which are either in the support of the farmers or against the Farms Act. Tweets which are showing love, affection and sympathy towards farmers are kept in this category. Tweets which are displaying the efforts and struggle of farmers are also got placed here.

- **Tweets against the Farmers & in support of the Farms Act2020**

This theme comprises such tweets kept for study which are either in the support of the Farms Act 2020 or against the farmers' protest.

- **Tweets in the support of Central Government**

Under this section, those tweets kept for study which are in the support of the decisions of the Central government.

- **Tweets against the Central Government**

Under this section, those tweets are kept for study which are against the decisions of the Prime Minister and the Central government.

- **Neutral/Balanced Tweets**

Under this section, those tweets are selected which are neutral and balanced in nature, like the tweets of experts & intellectuals of society.

- **Informative Tweets**

Under this category, those tweets are kept for study which were tweeted by people to inform the common citizen and officials.

Analysis of the Tweets

The tweets done with **#FarmersProtest** were analyzed month-wise. The months are denoted with ‘M’ in Table-1. The following months are considered for the study–

1.M1-26 Nov. 2020 –25 Dec. 2020

The focus of this month was on the march of the farmers towards Delhi. The tweets done are showing the marching of farmers heading from Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan with their cattle and tractors, massive protest of farmers, and the oppressions of police.

2.M2 -26 Dec. 2020-25 Jan. 2021

The tweets done during this time-period had main focus on the survival of farmers in the bitter cold while few of the tweets were indicating the luxurious life of the farmers. Also, the deliberations started during the protest were the repeal of the Farm laws, hidden support of Khalistanis and other foreign support, deaths of farmers, ignorance of central government, and support of farmers from Mumbai.

3.M3–26 Jan.2021-25 Feb. 2021

Farmers Tractor-rally on Republic Day –

Farmers’ tractor rally done on 26th January 2021 towards Red Fort had flooded the twitter with the deliberations like, insult of Tiranga, violence during tractor march and clash between farmers & Police.

The other public and political deliberations included labelling protesters as terrorists, casualties during tractor-march, violation of routes by farmers, and suspension of twitter accounts of farmers supporters.

Foreign Nationals Tweets –

Till now, many Bollywood celebrities like Nasiruddin Sah, Amir Khan, Swara Bhaskar jumped into the public deliberation on Twitter. The tweets of pop singer Rihanna, environment activist Greta Thunberg, Mia Khalifa, and others had caught the eyes of the public and their tweets became the hot topics of the public deliberations. Immediately, a counter hashtag **#IndiaTogether** and **#IndiaAgainstPropaganda** was run by Ministry of External Affairs to counter back the foreign nationals showing their interests in Indian issues. Sachin Tendulkar, Akshay Kumar, Kangna Ranaut, Ajay Devgan and others have shown their solidarity on the matter of India's sovereignty.

4.M4–26 Feb.2021 -- 25 March 2021

Gun firing on farmers at Singhu Border by anonymous attacker, Toolkit Shared by Greta Thunberg, involvement of Khalistan supporters, international conspiracy, arrest and release of a farmer Ranjit Singh, arresting of women farmers & their children, Silence of PM on farmers protest, deaths of farmers, Covid-19 positive report of farmer leader Joginder Singh, and farmers Maha Panchayat were the main deliberations during this month.

5. M5–26March 2021 -- 25 April 2021

The public deliberations were got fade-up a little bit, but still supporters tried to keep posting the images of the farmers staying at protest-sites and encouraging to not give-up. On 26th March, 2021, farmer unions had called 'Bharat_Bandh' on completing our months of protest. Other public deliberations repealing the farm laws & guaranteeing MSP were started with hashtags **#ModiResignOrRepeal**, **#NoVoteTo_LiarModi**, and **#FarmerLivesMatter** by supporters of farmers. It was reported by few

media organizations that oxygen trucks were stopped by farmers while farmer unions have denied that no medical vehicle or ambulances were halted by them.

6.M6 –26 April 2021 – 25 May 2021

Repeal of farm laws, lathi-charge on farmers in Haryana, unity of farmers, pressure on Modi govt. due to farmers protest, and appeal to not to forget farmers were the issues of public deliberations. Rising Covid cases in Punjab & Haryana, and at the protest sites have also drawn the attention of the public deliberations. The gang-rape of a woman activist at Tikri border and arrest of six people were one of the most discussed issues during this month.

7.M7 –26 May 2021 -- 25 June2021

Organizing ‘Black Day’ on 26th May on the completion of six months of the farmers protest. Farmers Supporters had highlighted the death of more than 500 farmers while the government was still silent and not initiated the talk with the farmers.

8.M8 –26 June 2021 – 25 July 2021

On 26th June, farmers supporters tweeted with #SaveFarming_SaveDemocracy and demanded MSP (Minimum Selling Price) and repeal of farms laws. Few users tweeted the videos of farmers protesting on the road and hitting the vehicles. Farmers supporters tweeted the pictures and videos of protest sites to show how farmers are still staying there even in heavy rain and storm. Farmers started campaign for protesting at Parliament if the government will not listen them. Sedition charges imposed on farmers were also one of the issues of public deliberation during this month.

9.M9 –26 July 2021 – 25 Aug. 2021

Congress Leader Rahul Gandhi showed solidarity with farmers by driving tractor to Parliament on 26th July. Celebrations of farmers on shutting down the operations of Adani Logistics Ltd in Ludhiana.

Winning Olympic Gold medal by Neeraj Chopra was also celebrated by farmers by projecting him as one of farmer.

10.M10 –26Aug. 2021—25 Sept. 2021

Lathi-charge on farmers in Karnal (Haryana), Kisan Maha-panchayat in Muzaffarnagar (U.P.), and appeal to defeat the BJP & U.P. govt. in coming election were the main deliberations during the completion of 9 months of farmers protest along with NHRC notices to Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana, U.P. Govts, and the central government asking for reports of farmer protest.

11.M11 –26 Sept.2021—25 Oct.2021

Lakhimpur Kheri Violence, Calling Bharat Bandh on 27 Sept., protest against BJP leaders, murder of Lakhbir Singh at Singhu border, and international conspiracy against India were the main deliberations during this month along with repeal of laws.

12. M12 –26 Oct. 2021 -- 30 Nov. 2021

On 19th November, PM Narendra Modi announced withdrawal of Farm laws in the winter session of parliament. On 26th November, 1 year of farmers' protest was completed, farmers labelled it the biggest protest in the history and remembered their one-year journey. The Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 was passed on 29th November in both the houses and the farmer supporters celebrated it a victory day. The twitter flooded with the victory messages and celebration videos of farmers.

A total of 600 tweets have been analyzed thematically to discuss the public and political deliberations during the farmers' protest 2020-21.

S.no.	Themes of Study	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12	Total No. of tweets
1	Tweets in the support of the Farmers & against Farms Act 2020	24	27	19	25	25	27	27	28	27	24	26	31	310
2	Tweets against the Farmers & in support of Farms Act 2020	10	9	11	9	11	9	7	11	9	10	9	5	110
3	Tweets in the support of Central Government	2	1	3	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	24
4	Tweets Against Central Govt.	9	9	11	10	8	6	10	7	8	6	8	3	95
5	Neutral/ Balanced Tweets	3	1	2	1	2	2	3	0	2	4	1	4	25
6	Informative Tweets	2	3	4	3	2	3	1	2	3	4	4	5	36
	Total no. of tweets analyzed	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	600

Table1- Analysis of Tweets #Farmer's protest

Findings & Discussion

After the analysis of tweets, it has been found that more than fifty percent of tweets were in the support of farmers and against the Farms Act 2020, while only eighteen percent of tweets were against the farmers & in support of Farms Act 2020. Also, almost sixteen percent of tweets were done against the central government while only four percent of tweets were in the support of the central government. The percentage of informative tweets was around six percent of total tweets. It is found that farmers and their supporters had used Twitter efficiently for their protest. Instead of depending on already established media organizations, they used Twitter for conveying their messages, images, and videos throughout the protest. On every occasion, farmers' supporters had used a new hashtag along with #FarmersProtest to open the door to new public deliberations. This protest was the largest protest against the government in the history of India in terms of the number of days.

This protest has proved that Twitter can be an alternate medium which can be used wisely by the citizen to draw the attention of the government. The frequent tweets of the farmers' supporters had

created a buzz over Twitter; it enforced mainstream media to cover their issues. It can be said that the public deliberation on Twitter had set the agenda for the common citizen as well as for political parties, and mainstream media to discuss the farmers' protest. It is noticed that the political deliberations on farmers' protests were mainly focused on the encountering of each other's statements. The ruling party was tweeting against the farmers' protest while the opposition party was tweeting in the support of farmers. The study affirms the findings of Jennings, Suzuki, & Hubbard (14) that social media has the potential to foster deliberation and participation in the political system. Social media has the potential to create new political identities too by giving the opportunity to common citizens to lead the public deliberation. The farmers' protest was not led by any established politician in the beginning; it was started and mobilized by farmers on their own flaunting their local identity, e.g., protest-march with their cattle and tractors moving towards Delhi. It is noticed that the Indian Public sphere is more conscious of its local issues and local identity, like, growing vegetables and doing langar-seva at protest-site.

Conclusion

The farmers' protest in India has shown that social media has the potential to convert the local public deliberation into international public deliberation. The protest of farmers on Farms laws fully belonged to the Indian issue, but the tweets of international personalities had made it a matter of international public sphere. This protest has proved that the common Indian citizens have now identified the potential of social media in setting the agenda of public and political deliberation. Social media has given a voice to those who have still recently considered themselves voiceless. The marginalized groups are able to create their own deliberative forums to raise their voice instead of remaining alienated. The public sphere has become dichotomous because on one hand there are attempts for content homogeneity and on the other new points of view are also seeking public attention. The conflicts among the public sphere are creating cacophony on social media. Besides this, we cannot ignore that social media is a powerful tool of transformation because it allows the public sphere to interact with geographically dispersed and

diverse participants. Also, social media based public deliberation is able to promote democracy as it provides space for everyone to speak freely on any issue. Various social media platforms can be used innovatively to create new local identities and cultures. It can be also concluded that social media based political deliberation in India have altered the dominant political alignments and given way to new political identities which are local in nature.

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The Farmers' Protest: Contours of the 'Popular' within the Dissensual

Manisha Gangahar

Abstract

The 2020-2021 Indian farmers protest, against the three farm acts passed by the Indian Parliament, was one of the most exclusive and in other words the most popular and widely followed protest that India had seen in the recent decades. The objective is to explore how certain expressive forms that were used during more than a year-long farmers' agitation contributed to or borrowed from the popular culture. It is hard to ignore the sociocultural and political significance that popular culture plays when it comes to dissent. The elements of popular culture elements are helpful tools for protesters. Not only do they mirror common concepts that bring together all protests but they also provide relatable images that the public can associate and engage with.

Keywords: Culture, Music, Tractor, Farmers, Narrative

Across various stages, ages and eras of human history, there has been ample evidence of the existence of opposites in different forms of actions and processes. It is more than established through recorded history that the coexistence of any type of trajectories would give rise to some sort of conflict and, thus, resistance becomes an inevitable result of such a human situation. The phenomenon of resistance is as fundamental to human existence as is its permanence beyond all individual and collective effort to evade it. However, messages of peace and harmony have a cyclical emergence through the course of social evolution, nevertheless, resistance and its manifestation, through different forms of protest, has been essentially imperative to civilized human entity.

While assuming that the idea or the urge to protest is a crucial and an elemental component of human mentality, it may just be noted that protests are not merely rash or reckless and impetuous actions against or obstinate and prejudiced reactions to the establishment and its power. Rather, they have their place and purpose to play in the

society, and even contributing to socio-cultural, economic and even political life of people, irrespective whether there is an authoritarian or democratic set-up. More importantly, they point at the existing disgruntlement and dissention regarding a certain existing situation or the newly introduced laws and policies.

Unlike a mass revolution or a social movement, the incidence of protest may be seen as more of a spontaneous expression of resistance in a routine manner which may not necessarily be as insidious and well-thought of. It may occur in form of an impetuous reaction of a section of masses which may not essentially turn into a long-term resistance through a prior strategic action plan (Shah 2004). A dissent can be manifested in a variety of forms including public rallies, demonstrations, protest marches, raising voice through press, launching social media campaigns, etc. In order to study the concept of protest rather methodically, it becomes significant to investigate various aspects relating to the understanding of civil movement, concerted action and antagonistic policies and practices. In case of a collective action, which must be primarily directed by the common goals of the participating parties, organisation, mobilisation and opportunity play key role in ensuring a proper execution (Tilly 7).

The 2020-2021 Indian farmers protest, against the three farm acts passed by the Indian Parliament, was one of the most distinctive, the most popular and widely followed protests that India had seen in the recent decades. The Delhi borders, primarily, were the protest sites though protest camps, rallies and agitations were held in different parts of the country and even abroad in solidarity with the Indian farming community. The fact that India is predominantly an agricultural country remains true even today since, as per the Census-2011, more than half of India's working population belongs to agricultural sector. Hence, in some way or the other, the majority of the Indian demography was touched and impacted by the farmers' agitation.

The paper, however, makes no attempt to delve into the political and the economic aspects of the protest. Rather, it aims to study farmers' protest, primarily that by farmers of Punjab, in relation to the popular culture. The objective is to explore how certain

expressive forms that were used during more than a year-long farmers' agitation contributed to or were borrowed from the popular culture. During any protest, especially one that involves a large community and is against a strong establishment or authority, it is a given that the media, fashion agencies and even marketing industry pick up the imaginative and innovative expressions, slogans and symbolic signs being used by protesters. As these varied expressions are repeatedly showcased in various forms of the media at a given point of time, they get imbibed as style statements into the routines of the public (Fahlenbrach et al.). Over the years, facets of popular culture have percolated into the protest sites and the other way round, facilitating a mass accessibility and acceptance. For instance, metaphors from novels, poetry, mythology, folktales, music have been used to articulate the anger, annoyance and the sentiments of the protesting population. On the other hand, iconographic representations, images, signs and slogans from the protest sites are picked to punctuate the daily narrative of resistance. Thus, popular culture happens to drive protests that thereby balloons into a popular movement.

Framing the Protest: Tractor as the Signifier and the signified

Within a protest, manufacturing and structuring of meaning or signification is relevant to not only interpretation of protesters' demands, but also for acquiring social and cultural legitimacy and gaining mass support. The process, conceptualized as framing in Erving Goffman's work, in context of collective action, suggests:

meanings do not naturally or automatically attach themselves to objects, events or experiences we encounter, but arise, instead, through interpretative processes mediated by various contextual factors... the idea of framing problematizes the meanings associated with relevant events, activities... suggesting that those meanings are typically contestable and negotiable, and thus open to debate and differential interpretation (Fahlenbrach et al. 123).

Thus, frames are interpretative expedients, either material or linguistic or even both, that provide meaning to events and

occurrences, are often borrowed from or are founded on cultural repertoire and can invoke a collective consciousness and manifest a collective identity, thereby mobilizing that very collective in support of the protest.

During the farmers' protest, one such frame was the "tractor", a dominantly visible image which has come to be regarded as an entity all by itself. Every schoolbook would, on one page or another, offer the statement that India is an agricultural country and with that would accompany an image of a tractor. But tractor is much more than just a machine or a tool to be used on the farms. However, it was only in the 1960s that the agriculture sector of the country saw some revolution with import of sophisticated machinery and the tractor was one of them. While the Indian Government had then imported tractors from countries like Germany, the UK, and Poland, it was the DT 14 and Belarus brought from Russia under the scheme of Green Revolution that made a lot of news. Amidst all the cheering was also an apprehension— "Stalin's revolutionary transformation of the Soviet countryside, beginning in 1929, was an attempt to transform peasantry into a mechanized enterprise through the programme that was termed as 'tractorization' (*traktorizatsia*) of the countryside" (Oja). Will the Indian farmer and the new machine get along well? Tractor came to be seen as a mark of wealth and riches, representing the land-owning farmers, but it has also hinted at the exploitation and depravity among the tilling community. However, irrespective of the verdict and beyond scientific and technical boundaries, with at-home production, tractor not just became the staple, and of course a sign of modernization and innovation, but it also grew into a "thing" from merely being a tool or a functional object. This distinction comes from Heidegger, for whom objects turn into things when they do not merely perform their intended or pre-determined function but are rather seen to be useful and operating in other new ways. Thus, looking at the tractor within the frame of what scholars have referred to as the thing theory (Brown) — the dynamics between human subjects and inanimate objects—it becomes a mania, value, totem and an agent.

On the canvas of Punjab agriculture, beyond farming and related practices, tractor has been a status symbol, a cherished gift during the

weddings and similar occasions and a popular style statement. However, in the farmers' protest, the machine that had been at the centre of agriculture on the one hand and a product of luxury on the other hand acquired a certain agency, for it became representative of the unity of the farmers irrespective of the inner divisions. Framing of the tractor as an image in the context of farmers' protest designates it as not only warranting attention but also an extended pondering and deliberation. In fact, with the mounting awareness of and attention towards the significance of images, which serves as an extension to the phonological and textual methodologies of interpreting the world around, was summarized in the early 1990s by the notion of a 'pictorial turn', a phrase adopted by William J.T. Mitchell (1994). Since then, the varied cultural and theoretical permutations and combinations have incorporated visuals and images, rather becoming increasingly induced by them.

The impact and relevance of symbols rely upon how much persuasive they can prove about the projection of reality, its interpretation and panning out the narrative effectively. The significance of symbols and images depicted in validation of knowledge demonstrates added value in conveying the meaning more adequately in a sociological context, be it for the assimilation, deciphering or holding together vital pieces of information.

Interestingly, tractor—in its modern avatar during the protests—emerged as a symbol of the amalgamation of a popular highway living, on the one hand, and the rural culture at the grassroots, on the other hand. At the Singhu and Tikri borders, tractors are customized — some have two trolleys serving as a lounge and a store, others have just one which is serves as a bedroom and sitting room, a few tractors are only storing the groceries, or wood and cow dung cakes. There are still others that have been transformed into leisure cells, while a few all-purpose shelters. The tractor, as a frame, works to stitch together varied and diverse interspersed rudiments in such a way that only a particular and predesigned meaning or a set of meanings is conveyed and not any other. The tractor-trolley township that came up at the Delhi borders “breached the lines that divide town and country – an antithesis that was first identified in 1872 by Friedrich Engels, the German philosopher and revolutionary socialist

associated with Karl Marx, as an obstacle to solutions for agrarian problems” (Singh).

At the protest site, the tractor, covered with plastic sheet and cloth, represented both the home and the field of a farmer; a life was being lived in and around the tractor, while parked on the Delhi borders. It is the peculiarly designed image of the tractor that resonates with all and sundry and invokes a connect and solidarity among not only the farming community but the ordinary people striving to make a living. The altered forms and shapes of the tractor-trolley and the modification carried out to serve different purposes created metaphor for working class that required no private sponsorship. Haryana’s Sunil Gulia takes his tractor to the next level, having it modified especially for the protest at a cost of Rs. 40 lakh. “The trolley is equipped with Volvo seats and the tractor has a hi-tech music system and GPS installed,” he explains (NDTV). Certain trolleys were converted into gymnasiums and *gurughars* through innovative arrangement and engineering, locally called as *jugaad*, which also in way became a metaphor for protest. Yet another mutation of the tractor visible on the roads was a buffered one, a customized music system with heavy bass. The tractor no longer remained merely the subject of the narrative, it became the narrative of protest.

Yet another creation, the tractor had inspired and curated—*Trolley Times* The distrust on the part of mainstream media led the farmers to start their own biweekly, community-run newspaper with an aim to reclaim their discourse and write their narrative. Ajay Paul Natt, one of the three co-founders of *Trolley Times* based at the Tikri border, said, “We reached the Delhi border on tractor trolleys, live in them here and decided to start a newspaper called *Trolley Times* from a trolley” (Arora). With its first headline – ‘Unite, Fight and Win’, it caught everybody’s attention. The paper was started with an aim to share information and updates with the community and to reach out to a larger audience with the concerns of the farmers. But soon the paper, which was brought out in Hindi and Gurumukhi, had a good following: “The first edition of *Trolley Times* was published on December 18, 2020 and had a print run of 2,000 copies. The second edition had a run of 5,000 copies, and the

third 7,000, at the time of writing this report. Its slogan is a quote from Bhagat Singh: “The sword of revolution is sharpened on the whetting stone of ideas” (*Trolley Times*).

For any protest, not merely reaching out to the masses but also convincing them of the intended meaning becomes crucial to its success. Since meaning is a social production, it is fluid and in fact becomes the site of struggle (Storey). The editions of *Trolley Times* provided that deeper and elaborate meaning to the protest through stories of ordinary people and their acts, through simple jargon-free editorials in the language of the commoner.

The first edition carried an article, “*Janta ke Pratirodh Sangharsh ki Nai Ibarat Hai Kisano Ka Dilli Parao*”, by Purshotam Sharma, in which underscores the special facet of the farmers’ protest: “*Is andolan main nahi peedi ki baghidaari lagataar barh rahi hai, jo pichle 30 varsho se kisan andolan se lag bag kinara hi kiye rehti thi*” (“the new generation’s participation in this protest is continuously increasing, which in the past 30 years, in any farmers’ agitation, would remain only in the margins”) (*Trolley Times*, December 18, 2020, p. 3). It was not just the youth but also the women who became a very integral part of the farmers’ protest. The stories of women—making *pinnis*, knitting sweaters, cooking food and mobilizing other women back at home—subverted the whole idea of Punjab as a pure, rigid patriarchal society.

Then the second edition, December 22, 2020, of the *Trolley Times*, carried a story titled “*Pizza-Foot Massager Se Pare Sukha Ki Sewa*”, highlighting how popular articles make way into the narrative of the protest. The stories and narratives in 22-edition *Trolley Times* pan out a world in itself—an ordinary one but real and connected to the grassroots, and hence popular among the common masses. In the 18th edition of the *Trolley Times* (April 18, 2021), Apurva writes her experience of visiting the Tikri border. Having judged Punjabiya through the contemporary rap songs that endorse gun culture and represent the Jat boys as being over the board and far from being grounded, she stood corrected among the tractor trolleys: “We were sitting and looking around when a tall, strong young man with a bushy mustache came into the tent, carrying a tray with two steel

cups. As he served us tea, we were embarrassed.” Apurva is reminded of the image of masculinity in those pop songs and the contrast they draw. She wonders how these boys would continue to camp at the protest site while she will conveniently return to her home. *Trolley Times* did not merely serve as a newsletter, but a site where the popular culture of the grassroots was reiterated and represented.

Popularizing the Dissent: Self-Expression through Cultural Narrative

The liaison between protests and popular culture becomes extended and more defined because much engagement with politics takes place through the inherited cultural catalogue and repository. Moreover, self-expression through discursive narratives has been integral to popular culture, and it is during dissent that its manifestation becomes most crucial. Barthes and Bremond recognized the narrative as a “semiotic phenomenon that transcends disciplines and media” (Herman et al. 344). In fact, stories have been instrumental in comprehending the world around and even altering convictions and beliefs, achieving political and cultural goals and bringing about social makeovers (Lovins). Thus, it is these popular narratives that shape a protest’s rhetoric and works as a strategy towards mobilizing people and to accord legitimacy to the agitation. Stories are told in a few words that find place on placards, posters, banners and flyers—“No Farmers, No Food, No Future”; “Without Farmers No Country Can Progress”; “Repeal Black Laws”; “If You Ate Today, Thank a Farmer”; “MSP *abhi nahin toh kabhi nahin*”—and they attract attention, interest of the onlooker and even wrap up a message or even a political statement.

Adding weight to the words are images and photos — of leaders from history, of the elderlies and women participating in the protest—all building the narrative of protest. It is always important to have a means of communication, not only to gain the support, confidence and endorsement of masses, but also to communicate at low expense, and nevertheless be efficient in communicating. Protest can possibly be manifested in the poster itself, in the visual part of it, even before the content or the textual part has been read. The role of the poster in protest culture is primarily to catch immediate attention, attract the

interest of the onlooker, and to wrap political statements in an aesthetical package. A common poster seen during the farmers' protest was that carrying paintings of Baba Nanak as a farmer and alongside is written the poetry of Sant Ram Udasi and Lal Singh Dil, emphasising the value of labour: "*Utth Kirtiya, uthve, utthan da vela* [Rise, O, Worker (those who toil), for it is the time to rise (in protest)]". This was meant to invoke the passions of the commoners.

However, narratives, being linguistic and discursive phenomena, are "fluid, continuous, dynamic, and always constructed interactively—with an audience and within a context—out of the stuff of other narratives" (Ewick and Silbey). These narratives, through a multimodality approach — where a text is encoded with different semiotic codes like words and pictures—arouse emotions in the audience. Emotionalization in a protest becomes crucial to turn the tide for it "offers a multifaceted picture of human beingness that, without denying the reasoning capabilities of movement actors, posits emotion as a ubiquitous feature of social life" (Fahlenbrach et al. 161). However, there is the other side of the coin. "Indian national media on sale" reads a banner at the Singhu protest site, while another placard reads "We are farmers not terrorists". These are penned to counter the narrative build up by most mainstream media agencies, brushing the agitation in Khalistani colour or representing farmers as anti-nationalist and anti-social.

Striking Chords of Protest: The Symphony of Punjabi Pop Music

Music, emotions and human condition have intertwined threads, irrespective of borders, boundaries and temporality. Undoubtedly, music is regarded as a cultural artefact, upholding the cultural affinities of a community and, at the same time, becomes a means to articulate and represent a group's identity or reinforcing the projected identity. When a melody acquires a wider appeal among the ordinary people, reaches out to larger audiences and is enjoyed even by those with no formal musical training, it becomes a popular music. Astonishingly, popular music, however commonplace and innocuous in its nature, has always been able to offer sufficient space for social, cultural and political activism by challenging the established power

structures with quite an impact. As George Steiner puts it, music, much like art and literature is a critical act, akin to Arnold's notion of "a criticism of life" in that, whatever garb such criticism may wear, "the construct of the artist is a counter-statement to the world" (Steiner 1989).

Since popular music, along with other symbols and expressions such as clothes, gestures, insignia and speeches, becomes instrumental in the creation of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic power", protest music and songs use this popularity of the artist and of the genre—rap—to pull the masses and bring more attention to a specific issue. Music has come in handy, rather as a provocative tool, as and when people have felt let down by the authority, in checking the injustice meted out to them and to raise their voice against the impositions of the unacceptable. Such songs are usually either politically indicted about topical issues, taking an aim at the government, or are culturally focused songs pointing at the wrongs and discrimination faced by the marginalized groups or the ordinary masses. Also, to sustain a prolonged struggle, it requires a regular fuelling of motivation and energy through a variety of modes and actions and here music becomes useful to impart a supplement of enthusiasm and tenacity. Music with its mass appeal has the capacity to infuse fresh vigour among protesters when the agitation is getting dull, monotonous and full of hardships.

As has been witnessed during the farmers' protests, many contemporary Punjabi singers came out in support of the Indian farmers' struggle through their music. Their songs related to Sikh history and religion, stories of valour, Punjabis in the armed forces, pre-partition Punjab, the struggle for Independence, the Punjabi diaspora and the unity of the farmers of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The Punjabi songs, with their homespun brand of foot-stomping music, have always been part of popular culture, appealing the masses even across linguistic barriers. Blending the folk sounds of *tumbi* and *dhol* with genres like hip-hop/gangsta rap and disco, Punjabi music composers and singers have managed to catch the pulse of the modern youth. The groovy notes and trippy beats along with relatable lyrics make a compelling package. With this kind of music being played out and using sarcasm in the lyrics, the singers

raised their voices against ‘Delhi’, the seat of the Union government, also bashing up the biased media and its fake narratives against the farming community.

The song “*Sun Dilliye*”, by Rajvir Jawanda, pen down by Saab Pangota, says: “*Tenu das k aaye ha hoja kaim ni, tere kad k jawage sare vaim ni, tere mann ch na reh j koi shaq dilliye, le k mudage...mudage Punjab asi haq dilliye...*” It translates as: “we have come by warning you...we here to remove every doubt of yours...no doubt should be left in your heart.... we will go Punjab only when we will have our rights!” Another popular song that advocates for farmers’ rights is Jass Bajwa’s “*Jatt Takda Hoja*”, which had 6.3 lakh views, urges Jatt farmers to fight for their land that they have been tilling since centuries: “*O Center Ton Bill Pass Karake Kehnde Ne Hun Masla Behje O Haqq Tan Laike Shaddnage Bhawe Chakkna Asla Paije...Jatta Takda Hoja*”, translating into: “Center has passed the bills and now are expecting that farmers should accept it, we will not go back until we are given our rights backGear up boy!”

(<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/entertainment-news-kisan-vs-delhi-how-punjabi-singers-contributed-to-the-farmers-protest-by-words-and-melody/401790>)

A protest song carries an impact, shapes opinions and determines actions through semiotic means. Many more Punjabi songs became popular on YouTube, like Ranjit Bawa's *Punajb Bolda* crossed 35 million views, Rajvir Jawanda's *Sun Dilliye* got 7.5 million views, Gippy Grewal's *Zaalam Sarkaaan* 5.5 million views, and Himmat Sandhu's *Asi Vaddange* received 3.2 million views. It can be instrumental in building solidarity, uplifting activists and forming and asserting a collective identity. There have been instances in the past where some form of oppression found voice through musical expressions and could raise an uproar in an otherwise-silenced masses. For instance, in protest of the arrest of the famous poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Iqbal Bano had sung “*Hum Dekhenge*” at a jam-packed Lahore stadium in February 1986 and a crusade was launched, the defiance against the dictatorship of General Zia-ul Haq was unleashed as the singer appeared in a black saree and openly refused to follow the ban imposed on the wearing of sarees. Such is the power of music and the iconic image of the singers that crowds of ordinary

people can be set ablaze in a single stroke of challenging musical notes soulfully presented. Thus, popular music has the force and the influence in conjuring up a passionate sentiment of intense resistance among an otherwise subdued public known for its generally conforming track records.

Kisan Anthem is yet another song that features the struggles of farmers during the protests. Some part of lyrics read thus: "...*Bik gaya bhawe India da media, BBC de utte jatt chay ehoye ne* (So what if the Indian media has sold itself, Jatts are famous on BBC News)." The medley has been prepared by popular singers, belonging to both Haryana and Punjab, like Mankirt Aulakh, Nishawn Bhullar, Jass Bajwa, Jordan Sandhu, Fazilpuria, Dilpreet Dhillon, Dj Flow, Shree Brar, Afsana Khan, Bobby Sandhu. In a song titled Punjab Bolda (Punjab Speaks), singer Ranjit Bawa sang: "...*Dhakke nal dasi jande attwadi aj da, national media bhike dab hala chaj da* (Forcibly, they [the Indian media] are calling farmers terrorists, the national media is good for nothing)." Similarly, a couplet from renowned Punjabi singer Kanwar Grewal's song *Ailan* became a slogan of the movement: "...*Tainu Delhiyee kath pareshan karuga, par faslan de faisle kisan karuga* (Delhi [Union government], this farmers' gathering will trouble you, but it is farmers who will make decisions about their crops)".

For centuries, popular culture has been a tool for ordinary people to externalize political frustrations even prior to the existence of advanced technologies. It was one of the few forms of soft power used by the public to catch their governments' attention, and examples of these are found across cultures and times. Today, as agitations become a recurrent happening across the world, popular culture still serves as an appeasement for people's conscience. It is hard to ignore the sociocultural and political significance that popular culture plays when it comes to dissent. The elements of popular culture elements are handy organic tools for protesters. Not only do they mirror common concepts that bring together all protests but they also provide relatable images that the public can associate and engage with. But this has also resulted in a blurring of the lines between what is considered to be cultural, political and 'popular'.

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Straight from the Battlefield: A Study of Blog Diaries from Iraq War

Navdeep Kahol

Abstract

This article undertakes to explore blogging as a privileged form of self-expression in war-torn Iraq. It proposes to analyze two blog diaries, one by Salam Pax and the other by Riverbend (both pseudonyms) in the backdrop of the US attack on Iraq and its subsequent occupation in 2003. They are significant as their coverage of the war is three-pronged. These war narratives record the battles of ordinary men and women who negotiate violence, fear and strife on daily basis in Iraq. The bloggers undertake political analysis and continuous appraisal of the situation throughout the conflict. As they do so, they offer a discourse different from that of the cheerleaders of war and liberation and also provide deep insight into the motives of local leaders and US representatives in Iraq. The blogs compare life in Iraq before and after the “occupation” and lament the institution of political Islam and the proposed division of Iraq on ethnic lines. Lastly, they serve to bridge the people on both sides of the border despite their cultural differences. The blog named *Where is Raed?* at dear_raed.blogspot.com maintained by Salam Pax and riverbendblog.blogspot.in by Riverbend were later published in the traditional format as books titled *The Baghdad Blog* and *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq* respectively.

Keywords: Baghdad, Blog, Diary, Iraq, Riverbend, Salam Pax, War

Introduction

Of the many legacies of the US occupation of Iraq, blog diaries stand out as important documents covering the war in unprecedented ways. Blogs contributed to the production of knowledge on Iraq during years of war. With the advent of the blogosphere, communication from Iraq became people-centric in comparison to the state-sponsored literature produced earlier under Saddam Hussein. Many trauma narratives recounting the incarceration and torture of Iraqi

people in prisons came to light. Haifa Zangana's *Through the Vast Halls of Memory* (1991) is an account of the torture she went through in the Abu Gharib prison. Nuha-al-Radi wrote *Baghdad Diaries* (1999) which records the daily travails of Iraqi people during the Gulf War of 1991. However, most of the literature was published outside the country as the dissemination of any kind of writing has long been controlled by the Iraqi government. The overthrow of the Iraqi Ba'ath regime by the coalition forces in 2003 ended an extremely repressive rule but led to a leadership vacuum and chaos in Iraq. The US invasion of Iraq was glossed over by the rhetoric of liberation and war propaganda. The picture of Iraq presented by the Western media to the world was lop-sided and the coverage of the US attack on Iraq was inadequate. Blogs during the 2003 war, however, make a clear distinction between the liberation claims and the predicament of Iraq. The multidimensional coverage of war through blogs reveals the hegemonic stance of the US and its willfulness. While carrying out an incisive analysis of the politics of the "war on terror," the blogs enhance the readers' understanding of Iraq, its culture and its people and help in creating dialogue across cultures.

The Advent of the Internet

The groundbreaking discovery of the World Wide Web in 1994 changed everything. In 1997, American writer Jorn Barger coined the term "weblog," which was later shortened to "blog" and turned into a verb by Evan Williams, a co-founder of the Blogger and Twitter services. The Internet has democratized the process of writing to a great extent. There is a shift from the margins to the centre with ordinary people choosing to articulate their stories. Of course, the young and technologically oriented people with fairly good knowledge of English are the first to break their silence and share their narratives with the world. Anyone who has access to a computer can tell his or her story or the story of a community and nation to the whole world. Those living in the battle zones have benefitted a lot from the medium. The communication during insurgency being truncated, the blogs provide an unadulterated account of the happenings. The blogs also cut across borders to create spaces for dialogue. This fast interconnectivity has created new spaces for articulation. Noted journalist Julian York says the online diaries are

as old as the web itself whereas the blog came into existence by the turn of the century. In her study of the digital forums in the Arab world, she points to the increasing use of the blogosphere for political and social debate and activism. It is also to be noted that bloggers are increasingly communicating across borders and networks are being formed as a result of the shared cause of resistance to dictatorship and western hegemony. “This was made possible by a new genre of autobiography produced by changes in communication technology: the weblog or blog” (Whitlock 1). Eugenia Siapera in her article “Bridge Bloggers in the Middle East” studies the contribution of blogging in terms of redressing stereotypes and building bridges across diverse cultures and religions. She also argues that social media have created new opportunities for debate and criticism which entail political change. Jillian York, while expounding on the contribution of web forums, says,

Such forums became sources of unreported news, discussion, social commentary, and political debate, paving the way for the region’s future bloggers. In countries where political discussion was taboo and crossing red lines – such as discussion of the ruling family, or debates about Islam – resulted in persecution of journalists, web forums created new spaces outside of society, where political discussion was relatively safe. (York 33-34)

Where is Raed? and Riverbend blogs

Blog entries of two Iraqis, who stayed in Iraq throughout the war and the “de-Ba”athification” process, resonated with the western reader. Timed with the US “war on terror” following 9/11, the two blogs became popular. Their analyses yield a lot of information and reveal the complexity of the situation in Iraq. In September 2002, a new autobiographical subject named Salam Pax was born online. The twenty-nine-year-old architect started writing a blog under the sobriquet Salam Pax ostensibly addressing his Palestinian-Jordanian friend Raed, a palindrome of dear. Raed, Pax’s co-blogger, used to study architecture with Pax. Blogging on demand through unprecedented and intimate exchange between himself, Raed and his readers, he gradually grew in stature. Eventually, Salam Pax became

a cyber-celebrity. Rory McCarthy thinks his weblog “blossomed in confidence from idle chat to startling reportage that seems to have been driven by an underlying urge to resist the regime and to document its fall” (McCarthy 2003). Cooke observes that several Iraqi women chose to chronicle their lives reeling under the aftereffects of war and occupation. Some were engaged in group blogging and others were writing individual blogs under pseudonyms like HNK, Marshmallow 26 and Chikitata.

Whereas the earlier conflicts produced state-sponsored literature that was conventionally published and distributed, this latest stage has seen a transformation in the production of war stories. Young women and men have turned to the internet to publish their experiences. These bloggers are writing for a global audience so that they keep abreast of social and political developments in their occupied country. (Cooke 23)

Another blog that caught the attention of the world post-US occupation of Iraq was written under the pseudonym Riverbend. She began to post her blog in August 2003. Her blog moves over a variety of subjects that closely concern Iraqi people. Ahdaf Soueif in her foreword to the book (based on Riverbend blogs) rightly points out, “*Baghdad Burning* brings us as close to the war in Iraq as it’s possible to be. And close does not mean just knowing about electricity cuts and water shortages, about street battles and raids on homes; close means right inside the heart and mind of a young Baghdadi woman as she lives through the war” (Soueif VII). The stories of Iraqi people move beyond the personal to evoke universal reactions against warmongering and expose the US indifference to the Iraqi plight under military rule.

Citizen Journalism

Blogging proved to be extremely significant in the highly volatile and unstable Iraq of 2003 when there was a dearth of journalists reporting live from Iraq. “...The primary role of those new technologies has been to bypass professional news media organizations, and to undermine their role as gatekeepers,” says Glenn Harlan Reynolds

(59). She is of the view that the internet is serving the role of disintermediation. Internet bloggers are cutting out the middlemen in journalism. The online medium of the blog allowed the writers to share their narratives with the wider public, especially the West. Written in English, their posts became a matter of interest for the world media, aid workers and foreign governments. Pax attacks international and local media for failing to report important happenings. The ability of people to use the internet to bypass traditional organizations with different priorities has made a significant difference. It undermines the role of gatekeeper of traditional news media and other international organizations, argues Reynolds.

The immediacy and accessibility of such forms distinguished them from accounts of previous wars, and enabled a new level of interactivity since many readers contacted the bloggers within hours to discuss issues raised by the blog entries. Since the war was mediated in new ways, readers were able to perceive war from previously unavailable perspectives. (Pitchford 696)

While posting their blogs, Salam Pax and Riverbend referred to the other blogs, provided hyperlinks for greater authenticity and interacted with their readers almost daily even during bombardments. No piece of news reporting could match up to these blogs as the blogosphere lent immediacy and vividness to the events and facilitated discussions. In this way, they laid the foundation of a kind of “citizen journalism” in the Arabic blogosphere. More importantly, these blogs served as bridges between the Iraqi and Western populace. The American masses, fed on biased media information, were unfortunately ignorant of world affairs and tempted to believe in the superiority of their nation.

The War up Close

Pax and Riverbend present the naked truth of war unlike the sanitized versions offered by Western media. Pax’s blog covers war in a unique way. It records in real-time the experience of being in Baghdad during the bombing raids that marked the beginning of the Coalition

invasion of 2003. For example, at 3.13 PM on March 21, 2003: “The most disturbing news today has come from Al-Jazeera. They said that nine B52 bombers have left the airfield in Britain and are flying “presumably” towards Iraq. As if they would be doing a spin around the block! Anyway, they have six hours to get here” (Pax). After the raid, he and his friend would go out, take stock of the situation and click pictures. They managed to report events even before news channels were able to air them. This live reporting enabled his readers to fully comprehend the term “collateral damage” and unravelled the politics of casual war terminology. “Pax is a stunning example of synchronic connections between the virtual and the material worlds that can be wired through online life writing. Pax’s taste, desires, and disorders, his belly and his bowels, are signs of a human presence and local habitation in Baghdad that was erased in pro-invasion propaganda at the time” (Whitlock 2).

Pax’s blog also makes use of synesthesia, “You can hear the sound of the planes. Look this is what you hear” (Pax). Riverbend reminds the world that Bush was not fighting the war in some distant mountains or barren deserts. In her post on September 12, 2003, she poignantly says, “The frontline is our homes...the “collateral damage” are our friends and families” (Riverbend). The dated entries and the two-way communication with the readers make war a tangible reality rather than a distant abstraction. In her analysis, Jenna Pitchford observes, “Developments in communication technologies, and the subsequent proliferation of Iraq War bloggers, resulted in the birth of a new virtual Iraqi. In this conflict, technology did not render Iraqis invisible but rather provided them with a framework in which to communicate their stories and reclaim their visibility” (702). It helps the reader to empathize with the victims of war and not be swept away by the rant of war propagandists. In her post-dated October 18, 2003, Riverbend ironically comments on the way the war had derailed life in Iraq. In response to “how was your day, dear?” one can expect an answer “that varies from stories of abductions and hijackings to demonstrations, to empty gas cylinders and burned-out water pumps” (Riverbend). She chronicles the subhuman conditions under which Iraqis had to live post-occupation. The bombing raids, abduction of family members, illegal detentions, harassment at innumerable check-posts, displacement, feeling of insecurity and the

lurking shadow of death accompanied by a shortage of power, gasoline, skyrocketing prices and black marketing became the norm. She gives a vivid description of bombing raids and ironically makes them sound like a daily routine.

If you are close enough, the first sound is that of an earsplitting blast and the sounds that follow are of a rain of glass, shrapnel and other sharp things. Then the wails begin—the shrill mechanical wails of an occasional ambulance combined with the wail of car alarms from neighbouring vehicles and finally the wail of people trying to sort out their dead and dying from the debris. (Riverbend)

While Pax's blog focuses on reporting happenings accurately, Riverbend's text gives way to long contemplative passages in her characteristic style. Most of them are sombre reflections on death.

We learned that while life is not fair, death is even less fair – it takes the good people. Even in death, you can be unlucky. Lucky ones die a “normal” death. A familiar death of cancer, or a heart attack, or stroke. Unlucky ones have to be collected in bits and pieces. Their families trying to bury what can be salvaged and scrapped off of streets that have seen so much blood, it is a wonder they are not red.” (Riverbend)

War's Other Voices

Pax and Riverbend emerge as informed citizens of Iraq. They exhibit great insight into global and local politics and construct counternarratives through their blogs. Pax is critical of Saddam's regime but disagrees with the way the US has dealt with the crisis in Iraq. He criticizes the US abandonment of Iraq after the Gulf War when it was easy to remove Saddam. According to Raymond Hinnebusch, an expert in international relations and Middle East studies, the US claimed to be a well-wisher of Iraq and attacked it “to remove a brutal dictator and spread democracy that would benefit Iraqis” (210). He adds, “And if intentions towards Iraq were benign, why did the US destroy the country in the process of ‘liberating’ it”

(211)? In his conversation with a US soldier, whom Pax addresses as “Mr-Somewhere-in-the-north,” he testifies that any claims of altruism in politics are empty. Both war blogs choose to articulate the silences and gaps in the official narratives. They present Iraq as a victim of the US political intervention in the Middle East. Hinnebusch agrees, “Bush wanted to establish the right to attack countries the US deemed threats, and Iraq, being both weak and easily demonized, was an exemplary case to establish the precedent” (222). The blogs deconstruct the rhetoric of war, expose the politics of “liberation” and term the war as legalized violence. The refrain of liberation versus occupation runs through Riverbend’s blog. “No matter how much CNN and the rest try to dress it up as liberation, the tanks, the troops, the raids, the shootings (accidental or otherwise), and the Puppet Council all scream occupation” (Riverbend). The blogs thus provide an alternative discourse in an atmosphere vitiated by propagandist culture. Riverbend questions the US justification for the attack on Iraq.

This war started out as a war on WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. When those were not found, and the proof was flimsy at best, it turned suddenly into a “War against Terrorism.” When links couldn’t be made to Al-Qaeda or Osama Bin Laden (besides on Fox and in Bush’s head), it turned into a “Liberation.” Call it whatever you want – to me it’s an occupation. (Riverbend)

She also condemns local leaders propped up by the US who escape to foreign lands whenever they sense a threat to their lives. She argues, “When you put a bunch of power-hungry people together on a single council (some who have been at war with each other), they’re going to try to promote their own interests. They are going to push forward their party members, militias and relatives in an attempt to root themselves in Iraq’s future” (Riverbend). She laughs at the proposal of the CPA to have nine presidents govern Iraq in rotation terming them as nine dancing puppets. Riverbend accuses western news networks of showing only the Hollywood version of war. She continues to de-glorify the war in her text.

Blog as a literary piece has a short gestation period as compared to published work. Here experience is quickly followed by recording and sharing on the blog which in turn gets immediate reactions. As such blogs are generally free from the tricks memory plays with the writers. The autobiographical subject Pax engages with the readers directly and promptly. When a network of bloggers discusses the same issues, a consensus is generated on crucial issues facing Iraq. The informal tone and colloquial style draw readers into the conversation.

Pax and Riverbend are at their sarcastic best when they point out the political gimmicks of Bush and his representatives in Iraq. Riverbend quips, “So now the heads of terrorism in the world seem to be Osama bin Laden, Aimen al Dhawahiri, and Abu Mussa”ab al Zarqawi. Here’s some food for thought – Osama is from Saudi Arabia, al Dhawahiri is Egyptian and al Zarqawi is Jordanian. Which countries in the region are America’s best allies” (Riverbend)?” Her text, like that of Salam Pax, is strewn with examples of black humour. Ten years after the Occupation, Riverbend critically reviews the situation. She writes,

We are learning that those amenities we took for granted before 2003, you know the luxuries – electricity, clean water from faucets, walkable streets, safe schools – these are for deserving populations. Those are for people who don’t allow occupiers into their country.

Those who didn’t know it in 2003 are learning (much too late) that an occupation is not the portal to freedom and democracy. The occupiers do not have your best interests at heart. (Riverbend)

The Aftermath

Having braved the war, what Pax and Riverbend dread the most is the division of Iraq along ethnic lines. Riverbend refers to some news on *Informed Comment* by Juan Cole in which the US plans to legitimize militias controlled by warlords. She is of the view “an armed extremist is going to mean trouble. A militia of armed

extremists is going to mean chaos – especially when you allow them to enforce “security” in volatile areas (Riverbend). The bloggers are pained to see their country heading towards division and imminent civil war. Orit Bashkin in her essay “Deconstructing the Destruction: The Second Gulf War and the New Historiography of 20th Century Iraq” emphasizes the importance of blogs and digital publications as crucial platforms for information about the consequences of the US occupation as well as sectarian violence. The emergence of deep fissures in the multi-ethnic fabric of Iraq worries Pax and Riverbend alike. On the possibility of an Iraq split into several parts, Salam Pax aptly remarks “there are no lines and none should exist.” The idea of segregating Iraq is absurd as the ethnicities are quite intermingled. Pax’s father is a Sunni, his mother a Shia and his neighbours are Kurds. Riverbend agrees with Pax on the issue claiming that Iraqis have lived together before and can live together in future also. Hinnebusch remarks, “The US, therefore, generates not stability but an ‘empire of chaos’ since it is capable of overthrowing regimes it dislikes but not of reconstructing staple replacements (214).

Bridging Gaps, Shattering Stereotypes

Riverbend articulates that an average Arab knows more about American culture and history than the average American knows about Arabs and Islam. These blogs enable dialogue across cultures and civilizations. The authors intend to share with the world their cultural and religious beliefs and practices through their blogs. The blogs are believed to bridge disconnected parts of the blogosphere. Siapera considers these blogs really useful as the authors disseminate information their region to other parts of the blogosphere and/or Western readers and media. She thinks, “These blogs are very important in levelling out the differences and polarization between Western and Muslim ideas on culture and politics, or at least in fostering an understanding between them” (49). Secondly, connecting common people on both sides of the fence, the blogs may contribute to redressing stereotypes and remove certain misconceptions about the region’s culture, religion and politics. Siapera rightly points out that this is the clearly stated intention of many bloggers at the outset and one of the main reasons for writing in English. Occasionally war blogs turn into blog wars when Iraqi

bloggers protest the spreading of misconceptions about Arabs and Muslims by Western writers. Pax and Riverbend respond to the articles and blogs on western media which imprison Muslim men and women into certain images. Riverbend's projection of Iraqi men and women is at variance with the popular images of fundamentalist Iraqi men and traditional veiled women. She claims that women in Iraq were better off than women in other parts of the Arab world and some parts of the Western world. Almost 50 per cent of the workforce consisted of women. They were doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, professors, deans, architects, programmers and more. Riverbend opposes the view that the oppression of women reflects badly on Islam. "It is a reflection on certain narrow minds, ignorance and the politicization of religion," says she in her Jan 15, 2004, post. She quotes Juan Cole, "So, the response of the Bush administration to the September 11 attack on the United States by a group of radical Islamist extremists has been to abolish secular law for Iraqi women and impose a fundamental reading of Islamic law on them" (2004). The blogs prove to be a fluid, ever-changing and dynamic medium where stereotypes are challenged and images revised. Riverbend writes on October 21, 2003, "The majority of Iraqis have a deep respect for other cultures and religions...and that's what civilization is. It's not mobile phones, computers, skyscrapers, and McDonald's. It's having enough security in your own faith and culture to allow people the sanctity of theirs." Riverbend concludes befittingly by juxtaposing the experience of an American with that of an Iraqi in her blog post published in 2004. She compares 9/11 in the US with 9/11 of an Iraqi household and concludes that the feelings evoked by violence are universal and visceral and hit an American as well as an Iraqi equally.

September 11... he sat there, reading the paper. As he reached out for the cup in front of him for a sip of tea, he could vaguely hear the sound of an airplane overhead. It was a bright fresh day and there was much he had to do [...] there was a rising heat and the pungent smell of burning flesh mingled sickeningly with the smoke and the dust ... and suddenly it was blackness.

9/11/01? New York? World Trade Centre?

No

9/11/04. Falloojeh. An Iraqi home. (Riverbend)

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the blogs offer the most revealing of war accounts in ways unprecedented in conventional literature. Blogs of Salam Pax and Riverbend introduce the reader to the little-known wars, anonymous heroes, lesser-known battlefields and implications of the terms collateral damage and insurgency. Blogs have an advantage over books. They are in the moment, reciprocal and directly address the reader. Interspersed with astute political analysis and reflections on the future of Iraq, this exchange of ideas and information will eventually lead to a less fragmented world. The appeal of these literary pieces of cyberspace is never ending as they trace the journey of two thinking Iraqi citizens during the war years. Various forms of life narratives like testimony, trauma, prison diaries and hostage narratives have already endeared themselves to the readers due to their cathartic function. The power of retelling personal events transforms apparent “victimhood into a powerful act of human connectivity,” says Daphne Grace. However, blog diaries are a class apart as the blogosphere provides a lot of creative space, connectivity and anonymity to the authors of these blogs. In this democratic space, they assume flesh and blood and are not subsumed under rigid categories. They act as potent weapons of self-expression in precarious times and even during seemingly normal times. The blogs might have begun as a mere pastime owing to security threats and limited mobility during the war, but they ended up becoming a means of survival for the writers and the readers. In an environment dehumanized by war, this online exchange of feelings and ideas helped people connect and ease their pain if ever so slightly.

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Forced into War: An Arendtian Analysis of Aditya Dhar's *Uri: The Surgical Strike*

Bindya Rani

Abstract

The present paper seeks to question the legitimacy of violence in acts of war and terrorism through an Arendtian analysis of Aditya Dhar's *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019). Insightful reflections and inferences are included from Hannah Arendt's concepts of power and violence. Her significant contribution to the study of the decline of the nation-state in Europe coinciding with a rise of nationalism, lying in politics and futility of war offers theoretical underpinnings to the present paper. In order to address the issue of territorial disputes, the paper also examines Arendt's advocacy of the principles of equality and human plurality.

Keywords: Legitimacy of Violence, Terrorism, Equality, Territorial Disputes, Human Plurality

... warfare—from time immemorial the final merciless arbiter in international disputes—has lost much of its effectiveness and nearly all its glamour.

Hannah Arendt (*On Violence*)

The dynamic destructiveness of the concrete practices of domination emphasizes the fragility and hypocrisy of civilized life and invites a critique of the world separating man from nature. This world manifests both—the most tangible expressions of human freedom and the dreadful forces of cultural barbarism and capitalist intensification: freedom for its subjects to move across the socio-political milieu and barbaric because it demands solidarities, sacrifices, preservation of hegemonic structures and hierarchies by applying the force of violence. National ideals and ethnic ties are often rendered obsolete after witnessing the devastating impacts of colonialism and imperialism as extreme forms of state violence

during Nazism and the two world wars. However, surprisingly these discredited racist ideas have survived through the anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa during 1940s and 1950s and the Black power movement in America during the 1960s and 1970s.

A re-emergence of these insurgent ideologies snowballed into the liberation movements inspired by Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse Tung, and Che Guevara witnessed in Angola, Somalia, China, Yugoslavia, Vietnam and Kampuchea. Also, the demands of “ethnic autonomy” in the regions of Quebec, Scotland, and Catalonia undermine the general perceptions of a transnational, global world and democratic ideals of equality and plurality. The Indian sub-continent has its own share of Pandora’s box with long-standing border disputes of India with the neighbouring countries. The vital and pressing issues of safeguarding boundaries, respecting the lines of control, diverting huge amounts of money towards maintaining security forces on borders while fighting poverty and hunger within the respective territories leave the governments on each side in a precarious political crisis. The nationalist inclinations cause a stir-up of violent exchange among the states and the non-state actors. While the people suffer unprecedented losses of life and property, the power groups keep busy ensuring their dominance.

With this pre-text, one would like to investigate the legitimacy of violence while bringing to justice the acts of terror and a reconsolidating the monolith of ideology in the film *Uri: The Surgical Strike*, directed by debutant Aditya Dhar. The film can be interpreted as a sight for upholding valour and a chivalrous display of duty, unarguably. However, it navigates in another direction, which can only be noticed with a sharp eye of critique, highlighting how the film disallows the pleasure of attributing any lasting solution to a long-standing territorial dispute. The rebels encounter their rightful fate, the enemy from across the border is vanquished, sometimes the lost territories are reclaimed and at others a strong message is conveyed that the authorities are alert. At yet other, the status quo is maintained through non-consequential skirmishes. Thereby, we are left with a vagueness that serves the purpose of those in power thriving on the fears and affiliations of ordinary citizens undermining the general perceptions of a transnational, global

world— such scenario ushers in a flurry of discourse which entails a deepening division of opinion among intellectuals. Moreover, violence as a violation of the public sphere in contemporary times emerges to be an aleatory tool in reasserting the state dominion through available ideological apparatuses, leaving us to grapple with the questions: could we realistically predict any depletion of nationalism in near future? Can we reimagine the world without physical boundaries? Addressing these questions, let alone attempting a full account of the importance of maintaining the lines separating states is a gigantic task. This article endeavours to answer a tiny part of the colossal issue by defending the moral grounds for taking into cognizance territorial boundaries, by inferring that such moves can contribute in creating ethically desirable, diverse and tolerant international ties. By drawing on Arendt's (1998) pluralistic approach, one is convinced that human existence is intrinsically diverse, in her elaborations: "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live" (Arendt 8).

We live in times where violence prevails. These are the times of utter unrest and fanatic adherence to clashing ideologies. These are the terrorizing times of mutual distrust, the rise of xenophobic tendencies and ethnoreligious violence. The post-truth world where certain nations are more capable of exhibiting valour and preserving their boundaries and particular people are considered worthier of inhabiting a territory, insinuates a conspicuous case of vulnerability versus survivability. As Judith Butler (2015) suggests, a schism exists between righteous assault and unthinkable horror at self-destructiveness. Butler's assertion carries the undercurrents of a necessity to look from the perspective of the other. Those who enthusiastically adopt extreme violent recourse to subdue others, do they themselves accept the violence meted out to them with equal readiness? The reference point here is the US interventions abroad, a tendency to use force in order to increase control in the Middle East and the treatment of the Arab hostages at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp. Apart from the violent means, Big Brother can neatly pull the rug from under the feet of the opponents by imposing sanctions. As the proclaimed world leader, the US offers a shaky role

model to other democracies in the world, given its excessively violent policies. Implementation of the global war on terror after 9/11 poses serious concerns regarding use of violence by authorities in silencing dissent. These developments encourage an invocation of the Arendtian principles of human plurality and toleration and her analysis of the interrelation between power and violence. Hannah Arendt, as one of the leading political theorists of the twentieth century, takes the issue of violence in the public realm head-on.

A holocaust survivor and a Jew forced into exile from her native land by Nazi authorities, Arendt advocates a polity of shared responsibility between the Arabs and the Jews, with these differences she separated herself from the Zionist movement. She is more of a spectator with global outlook whose thinking is necessarily rooted in her Jewish experiences. Her global outlook is manifested in her reservations against homogeneity and retaining the unique cultural identities guarded by geographical borders. Apart from the personal tragedy of the Jewish people, the world wars and the practice of imperialism shaped Arendt's standpoint on the violent world around her. Unlike many other concepts in her political thought, the concept of violence is systematically developed and consistently followed in most of her works. Using Hannah Arendt's theory as a template, the present article attempts to examine the political crisis in Kashmir as portrayed in the film, *Uri: The Surgical Strike*. Undoubtedly, Arendt would find the suspected links between Pakistan and various insurgent groups including Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad and many others, problematic. But it would be interesting to notice and imagine her reflections on the involvement of the Kashmiri youth in fueling cross border terrorism. *On Violence* (1970) is Arendt's treatise on nature and implements of violence where she proclaims that as distinctive from strength, force, and power, use of violence is no guarantee for attaining sustainable peace.

Violence is the absence of the "political" because it eliminates the possibility of debate and persuasion. With the availability of nuclear weapons of mass destruction, avoiding wars will be no mean feat, argues Arendt. While investigating into the 'origins of totalitarianism,' Arendt observes an unprecedented violation of the "political" by criminal violence of the Nazi system of bureaus. In

addition to voicing the past suffering, pain and loss, her theory of totalitarianism is distinctive in the manner that unlike other theorists she ventures to look into the psychology of the perpetrator along with the victim. Her explanations of violence suggest that Nazism was more than mere evil to be castigated, as an unprecedented totalitarian force it attracted her attention to mark the failure of the “political” and the constitutional. The tension between the standards to assess the political institutions and their credibility as justful instruments in safeguarding the rights of individuals has an ethical and political significance. Arendt approaches this issue in her survey of modern politics as a system of bureaucratic dominance. The largescale genocide and torture in the extermination camps carried out by perfectly “normal human” beings typified the “banal evil” emanating from an incapacity to think about the enormity of the crimes they were committing in the name of performing their duty. Having cynically scrutinized different aspects of violence, Arendt’s conclusive remarks are obviously against the use of violence. Far from being an object of glorification, violence is a dangerous tool in the hands of the powerful that can destroy both the victim as well as the oppressor.

Surprisingly, despite reproaching Sartre and Fanon for glorifying violence, Arendt does not completely reject the use of violence. Violence used to overthrow the tyrants, win freedom for people and initiate revolutions for “new beginnings” is justifiable to her. In *On Revolution*, first published in 1963, her analysis of prominently French and American revolutions is a detailed account of the outcomes of dissent. To her, revolutions are not only necessary to disturb the status quo but mandatory in sowing seeds of change; revolutions imply a change greater than merely shifting power from one authority to another, albeit her conclusive remarks do not favour violent uprisings (Arendt 1990a). Moreover, her later observations are more inclined towards the Gandhian peaceful methods of Satyagraha and Asahyogⁱ. The dual pattern of violence evinced in Arendt’s discussion, namely the violence of the state and the violence of the revolutionary militant who considers the state a tyrant and is supposedly fighting for the freedom of his people, are relevant to the situation dramatized in *Uri*.

Undoubtedly, *Uri* fits in the exemplary Bollywood masala action film where violence meted out to the dissenting voices, and the enemy are most earnestly justified. However, looking beyond the cursory glance, one can trace many layers of sacrifices and the political failure of subverting the transgressive acts of the Naxalites in the Northeast and the militants in Kashmir valley. The film opens in the green grandeur of district Chandel of Manipur on June 4th, 2015, one year before the Uri attack. A convoy of the 6 Dogra regiment, carrying soldiers—full of life and hopelessly trained to kill or be killed, these soldiers lull their vehicles through the rocking cradle of the greens. Within seconds, the serene scene metamorphoses into a gory slaughterhouse, and the lifeless pawns are strewn around on the crimson mat. In this attack carried out by the United Liberation Front, a separatist group functioning in the Northeast of India, reportedly 18 soldiers were killed, and 15 were seriously wounded. The counter-action in Myanmar by the name of “Operation Hot Pursuit” as claimed by the authorities, destroyed the launchpads of the Chandel attackers by killing the terrorist handlers from Manipur and Nagaland. This occasions a pertinent question—Are the pre-existing ideological strains of state dominance and exhibitionism more pervasive in the film than the presence of the protagonists and the antagonists as agents of change? Manifestly, the circumstantial necessities of reactionary undertakings are significant to depict, which is why the scene portraying fight between the soldiers and the Naxalites ends at a triumphant note for the army.

The film exposes the clashing ideologies of democracy and dissent, by rendering the tenets of both inconsequential, flawed and insufficient in ensuring a positive enduring change. The incidents of terrorist attacks keep repeating. The martyr soldiers and the *fedayeen jihadis* are trapped in an endless abyss of violence. The latter is blinded by religious fundamentalism whereas, the former is committed to protect the life and property of the civilians and de-escalate the tension in the region. Such an exchange between power, ideologies and violence could be detrimental to the social ties. Zizek in his book, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, borrows Marshall Sahlins’ idea to explain that “the reciprocity of exchange is in itself thoroughly ambiguous, at its most fundamental, it is destructive of the social bond, it is the logic of revenge, tit for tat” (Zizek 25). In *Uri*, “Chapter

Three: Bleed India with a Thousand Cuts (Kashmir),” on 18th, September 2016 at 5.22 a.m. four ISI-supported Jaish-e-Mohammed militants attack Indian Army Base Camp in Uri, Kashmir, killing 19 Indian soldiers, as many as 30 soldiers were injured. Unarguably, such insurgencies are traumatizing and the audience is reminded of the wars imposed on India by Pakistan since partition: the wars of 1947, 1965, 1971 and 1999. One is left with little choice but fight against such adversary. At the same time, one is compelled to think whether wars could be the “final arbiters” of disputes among states in an extremely technologically advanced world guarded/threatened by nuclear weapons? Wars as Arendt (1970) examines, hold no place in contemporary world.

Demands for a separate state based on the faith of the dominant population in the region is as much problematic as the violence applied to suppress such demands. The unfortunate religion-based Partition of India in 1947 left the providence of umpteen citizens on both sides of the border in utter jeopardy. Could we afford one more such partition by separating Kashmir without taking into account the long-term repercussions? What could be done to foil the Pakistani ploy of a much-prolonged proxy war in the valley? In his article in *The Tribune*, Rahul Bedi (2019) claims that the empty ultimatums to Islamabad leave India invariably hostage to the benevolence of other states whose intervention is whiningly sought in the situation, ensuing an impasse that would only serve to worsen bilateral relations. This requires an investigation into the burden of frenzied inclinations of war-mongering that sets the states into an eternal geopolitical rivalry, to examine non-violent procedures rather than succumbing to provocations, to circumvent the hijacking of national hysteria for sabotaging human plurality and the capacity to think from the viewpoint of the “other” that underscores Arendt’s political thought advocating the creation of “public sphere” reiterating the ineffectiveness of violence in perpetuating the political.

Arendt’s emphasis on the importance of coming together and interacting by creating the public space offers a foundation for developing relations based on mutual trust, initiating dialogue and resolve political deadlock by accepting the principle of plurality. In Arendt’s (1990b) interpretations: “...community is not made out of

equals, but on the contrary of people who are different and unequal. The community comes into being through equalizing....The political, noneconomic equalization is friendship...just as eating is not life but condition for living, so living together in the polis is not good life but its material condition” (Arendt 82-83).

Reposing faith in the unique identity of the “other” in diverse societies is fundamental to developing an understanding of how the “other” perceives the world. In the common world inhabited by individuals of varying identities and diverse backgrounds, the capacity to unite and think from the perspective of their counterparts endows the individuals with a quintessential insight. This is the condition for the “plurality of men, out of which arises the whole realm of human affairs” (Arendt, 1990b: 103). The public realm is the world of appearances where individuals come in contact with other fellow humans. It is in the presence of multiple perspectives that the individual identity acquires meanings. It is in this worldly political arena that fallible human beings own their voices of hatred, fears and prejudices. It is here that conflicts are considered and acknowledged to be addressed head-on. Arendt’s advocacy of diversity is insightful in comprehending the importance of territorial borders and the fine lines drawn by time to separate cultures, simultaneously asserting a need for differences to be respected and a commonness to be maintained to ensure a peaceful international community. Cognizance about the significance of diversity guides towards a politics of tolerance, a far more understanding international community promising solidarity and reciprocity of goodwill, and a world community enabling incessant discourse to promote egalitarianism and fight against intolerant, violent repression.

Arendt constantly favours the role of difference in generating meanings from the life experiences of individuals. Her Jewish identity is shaped by her life experiences during the Holocaust in Germany and later as a German Jew in exile. Expressing her disapproval of the Nazis for rejecting the identity of people other than themselves, Arendt (1983) writes: “those who reject such identifications may feel wonderfully superior to the world..., but their superiority is ... the superiority of a more or less well-equipped cloud-cuckoo-land” (Arendt 18). Her capacity to embrace varied

view points and uphold the fair judgement even if it involved an assault on her own racial identity proves her a thinker beyond prejudice. The vast appeal of her political thought can be credited to her genuineness and originality. Arendt's involvement with the problem of violence in American cities, the Black Power movement, the anti-Vietnam War moves and the civil rights movement establish Arendt's "profound political egalitarianism and moral universalism, her distaste of any kind of groupthink, her deep dislike of nationalism, and her insistence on the disjunction between nationalism and the rule of law in the modern state" (Benhabib 61).

In an attempt to draw conclusions for lasting peaceful solutions to the territorial dispute as depicted in *Uri*, the paper utilizes Hannah Arendt's political theory as an alternative to an implicit but more common liberal understandings of the possibilities of international conflict resolution through dialogue. The concept of toleration is deeply embedded in Arendt's reflections on the significance of diverse societies. Tolerance is the key to acceptance. Though preserving peace is significant, at times tolerant attitudes might give way to bigotry, as in the case of Kashmir. So far, India has adopted the policy of restraint and avoided any initiation in escalating violence between the two countries. However, lately, there has been a paradigm shift in India's dealings with the irksome neighbour. The film pronounces these changing undercurrents in the following proclamations: "Yeh naya Hindustan hai," "yeh Hindustan ab chup nahin rahne wala," and "hum dushman ko ghar mein ghus ke mareng." As the film depicts, a plan is laid out to execute the "surgical strike" to avenge the Uri attack. From September 28th till the wee hours on 29th of September, the Indian Army troops, including the commandos from other para forces, attacked the launchpads of the major ISI-funded terrorist organizations: Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad. One prominent accomplice in handling the Uri attack has been the Sirat-ul-Jannat terrorist group operated by Idris Khan and Jabbar Firozi, Idris is from Sialkot and Jabbar is from Gilgit. Major Vihaan's killing of both the terrorists culminates in a loud scream: "Indian Army!" An emphatic assertion of the courage of Indian soldiers and the efficacy of their actions, a harbinger of a changing attitude, a shift from tolerance to retaliation.

Similar overtones are present in the war cry delivered by Suhani Kashyap, the young daughter of martyr Karan Kashyap, during the funeral of her father. In her tear-jerking cry, Suhani screams: “Shauryam daksham yuddhe, Balidan parama dharma,” meaning “dexterity in war is valour, sacrifice is the ultimate merit.” The chant uttered by little girl, in the glorious setting of the state honour, intensified by the agony of a lost father must evoke the feelings of respect and pride in the audience. This glorious showcasing nonetheless, falls short in dodging the impending dangers of an unresolved contention. The Pulwama attack and Balakot air strikes have left Uri far behind, on top of that heavy shelling on the border continues. Such incidents leave little room for anticipating respite from terror. In early August 2019, Kashmir resurfaced as a flashpoint between age old political rivals India and Pakistan after the Indian government abrogated Article 370. Following the decision, the valley came under siege with heavy deployment of security forces, breakdown of internet services and complete surveillance of the leaders and dissidents in the region. These proceedings have further intensified the possibilities of clashes between the two countries as Pakistan feels cornered more than ever.

Hannah Arendt’s findings offer useful insights in this context. Arendt’s thesis on nationalism rests on her first-hand experiences as a member of the Jewish minority community in The Third Reich. In Her observations nationalism resulted from disintegration of the nation-state as an aftermath of the expansionist, imperialist tendencies of Europe, the seizing of the state by the nation. The inherently aggressive and expansionistic tendencies of the “state,” Arendt (1958) claims, are acquired by the “nation” in the process of nationalism which signifies “the conquest of the state by the nation” (354) and threatens the minorities and the naturalized citizens who fall out of the “national umbrella.” Hence, despite connecting the nation-state to the rule of law, Arendt rejects the “homogeneous society” as a foundation for a “well-ordered” community. On the contrary, Benhabib (2010) notices, for Arendt, “such homogeneity would prove politically disastrous and morally abhorrent” (8). Arendt’s political thought prioritizes humanity and plurality over national identities. By emphasizing a change in perception, Arendt advocates that dissent must neither be a permit to stigmatize nor an

apparatus to perpetuate hierarchical order but must be exercised as a praxis to deconstruct and restructure the establishment to embrace a peaceful coexistence. What Arendt (1970) inspires us to do is to critique violence even if it has “the ability to begin something new” (Arendt 82), because: “The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world” (Arendt 80). The idea is to debunk the basic assumptions shaping the nation-state mechanism and enlarge the scope for understanding the discriminatory and suspicious character of nationalism triggered by the vested interests of power groups. For this reason, Wilfred Owen (1920) in part VI of his poem “Insensibility” published in 1918, curses the power-hungry war-mongers:

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones.
Wretched are they, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever moans in man
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears (Owen 14).

¹*Satyagraha* is Gandhi’s “truth-force,” first applied in South Africa for securing the rights of the people of Indian origin and later in the liberation movement of India. It stands for the power of persuasion in fighting for a “just” cause. For more visit: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274344783_Satyagraha_The_Gandhian_Philosophy_of_Conflict_Management

Asahyog is “non-cooperation” movement which included a mass boycott of the British, for more visit; https://www.academia.edu/18406164/M_K_Gandhi_and_Non_cooperation_A_short_Essay

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The Ciphery Knot: Reading through the Many Impasses in Marquez' *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*

Rina Ramdev

Abstract

In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's fiction, an interweaving of the journalistic ethic, the need to investigate and inform, allies closely with the creative art of storytelling—a coming together that could fly in the face of genre and classification, but one that finds dynamic integration in his writing. While drawing attention to the collaborative practice that brought fiction and journalism into a productive tension in his work, I will, in my essay, see the ways in which this is foregrounded in the writing of his 1981 novella, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. For this, I will also look at the event of Santiago Nasar's death in the novel through a reading of Roland Barthes' categorization of the *fait-divers* as a literary technique that emphasizes the details of the event rather than its emotional or moral implications.

Keywords: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Journalism, Chronicle, Roland Barthes, Pundonor, Fait-Divers, Causality, Patriarchy

Introduction

In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's fiction, an interweaving of the journalistic ethic, the need to investigate and inform, allies closely with the creative art of storytelling—a coming together that vexes genre and classification. As a point of departure, this had long been acknowledged by the writer himself, and he is famously known to have said: "Journalism keeps me nailed to reality. Curiously, as time goes on, I find the professions of fiction and journalism merging" (Marquez and Streitfeld 60). In this, he also consciously sought to draw the reader's attention to the hybridization that his writing mines, and what Francisco Rodríguez Sierra sees as the "mixing and matching of the 'fictional pact' and the 'pact of veracity'" (Sierra 213) that has come to singularly define his writing. Marquez's twin careers as journalist and writer ran parallel, and were launched more or less simultaneously with the publication of his first short story,

“The Third Resignation” in 1947 in *El Espectador*, and his newspaper article, “The People of the City” a few months later in 1948, in *El Universal*. Journalism functioned, in a sense, as his day job, giving him much needed financial security, one that allowed him the means to sustain his fiction writing—which, during the early years, was a night-time pursuit. And yet, he never created a distinction in the creative passion that he invested both his professional journalism and his fiction writing with. Despite the success and recognition that came his way, first with *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1967 and then with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, he continued to maintain a publicly announced loyalty to his journalistic work.

While drawing attention to the collaborative practice that brought fiction and journalism into a productive tension in his work, I will, in my essay, see the ways in which this gets foregrounded in the writing of his 1981 novella, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. For this, I will also look at the event of Santiago Nasar’s death in the novel through a reading of Roland Barthes’ categorization of the *fait-divers* as a literary technique that emphasizes the details of the event rather than its emotional or moral implications. While the reporting of political news demands an embedded context, with the *fait-divers*, as Barthes says, everything is given, “its circumstances, its causes, its past, its outcome, without duration and without context, it constitutes an immediate, total being which refers, formally at least, to nothing implicit” (Barthes 186–187). How this is implicated within both the narration and reception of the news of the killing, will be delineated during the course of this essay.

Mining a Productive Tension

In his short piece “The Precursors” that he wrote for *El Espectador*, Marquez cites both journalism and storytelling as equally important community archives. “Without doubt”, he says tongue in cheek, “the first sensational news produced—after creation—was the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. It would have been an unforgettable front page” (Marquez, *The Scandal of the Century* 43). Every town and every place, he says, will have reporters, either as gossip relayers

or professionals, who would transfer conversations from the page to the street corner, “There will always be a man reading an article in the corner of a drugstore, and there will always—because this is the funny thing—be a group of citizens ready to listen to him, even if just to feel the democratic pleasure of not agreeing with him” (Marquez, *The Scandal of the Century* 43). This, for him, is how communities converse and cross plough stories between fiction and fact.

During his years at Bogotá’s *El Espectador*, Colombia’s oldest newspaper, Marquez specialized in writing human-interest stories, as well as in-depth investigative pieces related to public life in Colombia. Of these early writings, perhaps the best known remains *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, which was serialized over 14 days. His other exposés, covering military scandals, the government’s indifference and neglect of war veterans, and also a series that drew attention to state corruption and smuggling, earned him the government’s ire. So much so that not only was he forced to relocate to Paris as a foreign correspondent, but the government also shut down *El Espectador* for its incendiary intent.

The investigative stories Marquez wrote were marked by a dramatic, compelling quality—a quality soon recognized and eagerly awaited by a reading public that often queued outside the newspaper’s office for copies that carried his pieces. As Raymond L. Williams notes, he possessed a remarkable artistic ability, one that was able to transform a news item into an anecdote—complete with literary undertones (Williams 118). For Marquez, of course, this never quite qualified as a difference marked through genre: “The essence of literature and of journalism is the credibility they create” (Marquez and Streitfeld 60). While the shared credibility that he speaks of might seem to be at odds with the incredulous that finds its way into his fiction, he explains this through the classical understanding that lies at the heart of magic realism—one that goes a long way in uncomplicating the “magic” in it: “[E]veryday life in Latin America proves that reality is full of the most extraordinary things” (Marquez and Mendoza 36).

While working at the *El Herald*, Marquez was writing columns called “giraffes”, which poetically experimented with the spare language of reportage—a style that would come to be uniquely his, and one that was identifiable in his writing throughout his career as a journalist. His 1996 documentary novel, *News of a Kidnapping*, about Pablo Escobar, Colombia’s powerful drug lord, is written like a gripping Marquezian news story, with all its urgencies brought to life in a literary language and style.

When he announced that he was withdrawing from literature for as long as the Pinochet dictatorship continued in Chile (the period of his self-imposed hiatus started in 1976 and ended in 1981) and would continue only with his journalist commitments, the publication of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* was justifiably greeted with some amount of public cynicism. But in an interview soon after Marquez clarified that he was not really breaking his pledge since the work in question was a “chronicle”. In this, he was outlining what he saw as the minimal difference that separated reporting and the writing of a chronicle. This, in fact, ties in with his oft-expressed desire to combine journalism and fiction in such a way that the news item could be enriched with fictive elements in a creatively satisfying manner (qtd. in Rabassa 48).

Chronicling Events

As an unstructured, protean genre, the chronicle as a popular narrative mode in the Middle Ages disseminated events through a particular brand of telling that wove in both literary aestheticism as well as the historian’s responsibility to recapture and convey information. In Latin America, chronicles have dotted the history of its foundational literature right from the time of the first Spanish explorers and conquistadors (a history that also both overlooks and denies indigenous writing as it existed before Columbus’ log). Written as first-person reports, the “Chronicles of the Indies”, as they are now loosely termed generically, were important documents detailing native American customs and traditions—written undoubtedly to mine the recorded information for trade and colonizing. As chronicles, their documentation included a mix of

journalism's report and essay, and from literature, the language and effect of theatre and poetry—narrated through the subjective idiosyncrasies of the chronicler. The subject matter of a chronicle typically coheres around a matter of some significance, “a great undertaking” (White 20) as it were.

When Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* first appeared, it was embroiled in a cacophony of different claims regarding its generic grounding, and also its relationship to real and actual events. The events narrated in the novel relate to the highly publicized tragic circumstances that occurred in 1951 in Sucre, Colombia, involving the murder of Marquez's childhood friend, Cayetano Gentile, by the brothers of Margarita Chica Salas—who were seeking to avenge her “dishonour”. After Margarita's husband, Miguel Reyes Palencia, discovers on their wedding night that she was not a virgin, she names Cayetano, to who she had earlier been engaged, as the one responsible. Miguel's “returning” of his wife to her parent's home the day after the wedding, then sets in motion the event of Cayetano's publicly announced murder. As a young man, Garcia Marquez had been invited to the wedding, but had not directly witnessed the drama of the killing. Speaking of the incident decades later, he says,

It was still not the time of easy telephones, and personal long-distance calls were arranged first by telegram. My immediate reaction was a reporter's. I decided to travel to Sucre to write the story, but at the paper they interpreted this as a sentimental impulse. And today I understand, because even back then we Colombians killed one another for any reason at all, and at times we invented one, but crimes of passion were reserved as luxuries for the rich in the cities. It seemed to me that the subject was eternal and I began to take statements from witnesses (Marquez, *Living to Tell the Tale* 334).

In his reconstruction of the episode for *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Marquez changed the names and the number of protagonists involved, and also kept both the village and the narrator unnamed. The decision to sidestep certain biographical details was in

deference to his mother's reserve regarding the retelling of the incident—since she was intimately associated with the community and, in particular, the dead man, Cayetano's mother, Julieta Chimento. In fact, Marquez took on the project of writing the novel, and its publishing, only after Julieta's death:

My mother remained firm in her determination to prevent this despite every argument, until thirty years after the drama, when she herself called me in Barcelona to give me the sad news that Julieta Chimento, Cayetano's mother, had died without ever getting over the loss of her son. But this time, with her strong moral sense, my mother found no reasons to interfere with the article (Marquez, *Living to Tell the Tale* 553).

In the novel, the writer-narrator returns to the site of the crime more than 27 years later, ostensibly to decode the event and compose a story, "trying to put the broken mirror of memory back together from so many scattered shards" (Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* 5). The craft of reportage for the story is honed through a particular speciality of Marquez—what in Latin American newspaper parlance is called the *refrito* or "refried", which is a detailed reconstruction of a dramatic news item, retold and written with an almost virtuoso narrative skill. Further in this, the narrative technique takes on the mantle of Marquez's own particular journalistic style—one that comes leavened through his literary sensibility. s

News of the Killing as *Fait-Divers*

Chronicle of a Death Foretold begins with its own purported ending, and a telos is attempted upon the opening line, "On the day they were going to kill Santiago Nasar" (Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* 1). But as Carlos Alonso incisively delineates in "Writing and Ritual in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*", "the development of the text is guided primordially by a performative rather than by a logical or teleological drive" (Alonso 153). The recall of events is mounted upon a lurid, sensationalistic detailing, and, in this, it gestures at what the French term as, *fait-divers* — borrowed and

popularized in the work of writers like Flaubert, Gide, Camus, and Breton, among others. For this, I will draw upon Roland Barthes' 1964 essay, "Structure of the *Fait-divers*", where he talks of the quotidian theatricality of the smaller news items hierarchized against the bigger, usually political, news story in the daily press, which can be understood only in relation to a knowledge anteriorly and externally present. The event of Santiago Nasar's gruesome killing in the novel reads as the Barthesian *fait-divers*, giving the reader "all" the details, and information necessary for "understanding" the death, it "contains all its knowledge in itself. No need to know anything about the world in order to consume a *fait-divers*; it refers formally to nothing but itself" (Barthes 185). The *fait-divers* marks in this its own self-sufficiency, its own hermeneutics—lurking at the edge of totality, never quite integrated into it. Barthes reads in this, its closeness to the short story, the tale, and not the novel—for it is never purposed as a fragment, since it is its immanence that defines it. Although formally structured as a news brief, the *fait-divers* also borrows from literature the complicated greyness of a causality, implicated within coincidence and chance. Further, as Sophie Beaulé writes, its telling informs the reader of the "who, what, why, where, and when" of the event, but as she says, "the event must also lend itself to a telling that makes the hearer of the tale cognizant, though perhaps in feeling more than in thought, that a chasm has opened up between the particular real-life incident he is hearing about and the familiar social, moral, or natural norms that he assumes are in place regulating real-life incidents" (Beaulé 150). What the chasm opens up to and what it reveals in the novel, I will come to presently.

The *fait-divers* approaches reality from a decentered, ex-centric point, unsettling and disturbing the hegemony of the overt and the established. Its telling evokes an astonishment, one that comes from its estrangement from known social and cultural contexts—as Barthes says, "astonishment always implies a disturbance, since in our civilization, every elsewhere of a cause seems to be situated more or less declaratively outside of nature, or at least outside of the natural" (Barthes 188). In this, it creates space for a different mode of engaging with society and its underlying frictions—through an almost primordial, savage intervention, as it were.

With this, the *fait-divers* performs an “eventing” of an otherwise precluded thought or action and in this, bringing it into critical scrutiny. With this, it ruptures what has come to be consensually established and even homogenized—and it does this by insidiously inserting a subversive social critique through its shocking staging. It provokes the reader, as Jeannette Baxter says, “into a confrontation with the deviant logics and violent psychopathologies which operate below the polite surface of contemporary history and culture” (Baxter). This was also what fascinated the Surrealists about the *fait-divers*—triggered by the disgust and disdain they felt for what they perceived as the bourgeoisie’s repressive values and its everyday collusions with capitalism and religion. The sensationally lurid *fait-divers* had afforded them the rich potential for visual and literary experimentation that had augmented and fed their surrealist re-visioning.

In a referencing thus of the *fait-divers* in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, what I am attempting to also establish is the townspeople’s tacit acceptance of the inevitability of Santiago Nasar’s murder—an acceptance that extends from a shared understanding of it. It is an understanding that is conditioned and arrived at by a primordial sanctioning, one that evades social structures of knowing. In this, be it the avenging of the crime against Angela Vicario or the Vicarios’ killing of the “perpetrator”, the action is located within a collective adjudication of the crimes. For the reader-outsider, the immanence of the event forecloses the possibility of easy comprehensibility and understanding. The narrator ostensibly guides and leads the reader while also stopping and highlighting various instances and causes—and, in this, misleading the reader into believing that a satisfactory explanation and resolution for the killing is possible. The narrator plays with the incredulity that the occurrence invokes, simulating all along the thrust and thoroughness of an investigative report. And yet this only deepens the mystery, never quite resolving it or allowing it closure. The reader is to finally realize that the narrative is structured as an evasion, a ruse, mounted on a Barthesian “aberrant causality” (Barthes 188) that will resist easy knowability, as the narrator revealingly lets slip in through his perspicacious remark, “affairs of

honor are sacred monopolies with access only for those who are part of the drama” (Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* 98).

The Pundonor

The honour code, the *pundonor*, as it is referred to in Spanish, horrifically invoked in the killing of Santiago Nasar, is set in opposition to the inquisitorial court of law that bases its judgements and legislations on testimonies, witnesses, and a civilizational ratiocination through which cases are argued and fought. It is also set up against the importance that the narrative accords to dreams, intuition, and superstitions that characters recall and colour their retrospectives through. There is a semantic saturation that overloads the day’s events, and in its excesses, it thwarts every attempt at narrative closure. Finally, after the inquest, the court is forced into an acknowledgement of the dense network of unknowability, and a different order of meaning that informs the killing—defying all possibilities of investigative inference and deduction. Such is the perplexity of the investigative magistrate in the face of what stands as a social hieroglyphic that he writes his judgement notes in deference to the enigma: “Most of all, he never thought it legitimate that life should make use of so many coincidences forbidden to literature, so that there should be the untrammelled fulfilment of a death so clearly foretold” (Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* 100). Here in the magistrate’s report is a rueful acceptance of failure—of a lack of control over an incident that was always going to be non-investigatable. As Barthes says, “an ideology and a psychoanalysis of the *fait-divers* are possible, but they would concern a world of which knowledge is never anything but intellectual, analytical, elaborated at second-hand by the person who speaks of the *fait-divers*, not by the person who consumes it” (Barthes 186).

The constitutive ambivalence of the *fait-divers* might, in the first instance, elude intellectual comprehension, but in it is a lesson that reveals an unfiltered, unmediated reality. What is it finally then that the killing of Santiago Nasar— an event that mimics the *fait-divers* in its reporting— reveal? For this it is necessary to go back and reconstruct the marshalling of the *pundonor*—the honour code—as it

is evoked to direct and organize the circumstances leading to the killing of Santiago Nasar. The *pundonor* exists as a closed system, a structure of belief that constitutively drafts the response to familial “dishonouring”. Within this, violence and all forms of vengeful action are read as justifications against the violation of the code. Angela’s purported “dishonouring” (it is never revealed in the novel, whether her lost virginity resulted from a consensual sexual encounter or from rape), and her naming of Santiago Nasar as the man responsible, sets up the irrevocability of the vengeful violence that prompts and propels her brothers.

It is also for this reason that there is no cathartic relief for the townspeople, and even decades later, the town continues to reek like an open wound, “For years we couldn’t talk about anything else. Our daily conduct, dominated then by so many linear habits, had suddenly begun to spin around a single common anxiety” (Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* 97). The violence that ravages the town only reinstates the critical hold of the *pundonor* as a code that has to be maintained and followed.

It is important to bring in the brief of the *fait-divers* that my essay has attempted to read it through, and for this it is necessary to see what the mobilizing of the *pundonor* and the resultant horrors it unleashes, reveal. While the *pundonor* exists as a closed structure of beliefs, primal and in opposition to accepted and regulated social behaviour, it also reveals the patriarchal ordering of men and women’s lives, as the novel reminds the reader, “The brothers were brought up to be men. The girls had been reared to get married” (Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, 30). In the staging of violence and the *fait-divers* that informs the creation of the news of Santiago Nasar’s gruesome public killing, is a reminder of the everyday patriarchal violence that demands men and women’s submission. What Marquez accomplishes deftly in a story that never really establishes the veracity of Santiago Nasar’s guilt, is an ingenious albeit potent comment on our lived social encodings that successfully paper over and suppress violent excesses. If, as Barthes says, there is an anti-God that prowls behind the deranged causality of the *fait-divers*, then it is a playing out of that causality that needs

our attention. It is finally not an aberrant or deranged causality that disorders the reader's understanding of the killing, but a crucial and urgent reminder of all that has been contracted to ensure social behaviour remains regulated and non-disruptive of the status quo. For Barthes the *fait-divers* was a form of "mythology" that revealed the underlying structures of society and the way that power operates within it. Both Barthes' *fait divers* and Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* demonstrate the importance of questioning dominant narratives and looking beyond the surface of events to understand their underlying structures and dynamics. They also highlight the way that language and storytelling can be used to create and shape truth, and the value of being critical readers and listeners in order to uncover the hidden meanings and agendas that underlie our social and cultural realities.

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One More Thread of Promised Protection: Debriefing Raksha-Bandhan

Amit Kumar

Abstract

The study attempts to unfold the means of subjugation a woman faces in socio-cultural festivities like Raksha-Bandhan – a festival that, on the one hand, symbolizes the piousness and selfless love between brother and sister and a symbol of an unbreakable bond and on the other, hinders a women's subjugated status under patriarchy. For instance, the festival is sugarcoated with symbolic significance. It camouflages the structural motives of male patriarchy accessing material/resources and exchanging social capital in between kinship, controlling female sexuality by appointing a brother as a lifetime bodyguard, objectifying women as property, and women being the historic victim of various forms of gender-based violence such as dowry being considered as a significant ritual, honour-killing justified in the name of male patriarchy's love for sisters or daughters, and the forms of sexual abuse such as rape threats used as means to punish sisters or daughters if found involved in transgressing social-boundaries and standardized gender norms.

Keywords: Raksha-Bandhan, Kinship, Hinduism, Patriarchy, Pop Culture, Global market, Women Empowerment, and Gender Equality

Introduction

One wonders how beautifully these days media portrays the festive season of *Raksha-Bandhan*¹. One can notice such festivities in streets, street vendors selling the threads of million designs along roadside hoardings of special discounts, merchandised corners of shops filled with greeting cards detailing bond between brother and sister, and government subsidising travelling fare for women in public buses etc. on this occasion. Every year, this festive season reminds me of an incident from my childhood when I was forced to be a part of this festival. It was funny and disastrous too. I was literally forced to tie this thread on my wrist (or the way a maniac is handcuffed in a mental asylum) with an intention that after tying that

‘sacred’ thread we (a group of boys) will not look at girls with any socially inappropriate/mischievous motive. Being entitled to the gender-identity of the male has its pro and cons. Being male is not all about being at privileged positions but also to bear the burden of it (a gender-victim), though the intensity of burden might differ than that of women’s place in society. But again, one cannot compare the two on the same scale. One might be in a graver situation than others in one context and maybe at better in another context. Not that I have any dishonourable intentions for those girls or lack of empathic values regarding the celebration. My resistance was wholeheartedly intended to oppose the way of celebration, the forcibly imposed manner, and violation of one’s civil rights. Though they labelled me as an example of arrogance, self-centred, and immoral, when I decided to oppose that act of forcible celebration.

The effort made in this study intends to inquire about the origin, motive, and manner of the festival Raksha-Bandhan. In other words, it aims to trace the historicity of the festival, and to identify the plausible arguments for the need of the same. It has been observed that most of the people are not even aware of the fact why do they celebrate this festival. Myths and tales attached with the festival consider Raksha-Bandhan, a Hindu festival, but the practice of the same in other religious communities (among Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists) questions the praxis of the same. It is also aimed to investigate how the changing nature of society gets feed by the various ideological phenomenon to maintain the customs (Raksha-Bandhan, here) in practice. How had the same been manifested under authoritarian regimes over the period? And, in the present context, how far pop-culture along with a globalised form of market rules people’s psyche? Or in other words, to investigate the concepts of materialistic conditions and consciousness enrooted in the practice and its relationship with the maintenance of kinship ties. Finally, the intention is where, why, how, and what to look in such folk festivities rather than simply accepting or practising the same.

Such festivities provide a momentary boost to people. People, those are tired of their routine workspace, or in other words, they get a space to escape from reality. But the way extremities and motives (power mechanism) ornate these festivities become the Gordian knot for the one with consciousness about the practice. The literal meaning

of *Raksha-Bandhan* is ‘a knot of protection’. The Ancient mythologies and beliefs attached to the ritual of tying the knot on the wrist mean a blessing to save one from all the evil and bad omen. Whereas the value that festival entails changes in later ages of the medieval period as the thread of protection becomes the role or responsibility to protect someone (here, brother as protector of his sister). Though there are not any specific and authentic piece to validate the idea of the festival, so what we have got is a few mythical tales, and some medieval life-excerpts justifying the existence of Raksha-Bandhan as an important folk ritual turned into a festival. Followed by Raksha-Bandhan, the same day is also celebrated as *Upakarma* or *Avani Avittam* by Brahmin community in central and northern parts of the India, *Balrama Jayanti & Rakhi Purnima* in North India, *Gamha Purnima* in Orissa, *Jhulan Purnima* in West Bengal, *Pavitropana* in Gujarat, *Jandhyam Purnima* in Uttarakhand (Kumaon region), *Narali Purnima* in western parts of Gujarat, Goa & Maharashtra, and *Kajari Purnima* in the state of Madhya Pradesh. But how this festival came into the practice with such importance is what next section is going to deal with.

Historicity

Historically, Raksha-Bandhan as a Hindu festival has several origins (mythological narratives from ancient to medieval periods), though they do somehow contradict each other in the present form or the way it is in practice nowadays. So far, the ritual of tying this knot of protection is considered as a Hindu festival celebrated every year in between July and August (known as *Shravan Maas*) on the day of the full moon (*Shravani Purnima*). The narratives that justify the origin of this ritual fall under two categories as we already mentioned, i.e., for the blessing of protection and second, as a role or responsibility (brother protecting his sister).

As per ancient mythology, Goddess Lakshmi tied the first-ever Rakhi on King Bali’s wrist and asked for the return of Lord Vishnu to *Vaikunth* (home of Lord Vishnu), as Lord Vishnu was guarding King Bali’s empire. King Bali influenced by Goddess Lakshmi’s love for Lord Vishnu, accepts her request (Bhalla). Another excerpt of *Bhavishya Puraan* mentions Sachi (wife of Lord Indra) suggests Lord Indra, to tie a spellbound thread by Guru Brihaspati and

following so, Lord Indra won over demons and claimed back his empire (Jones and Ryan 346). A snippet from the epic *Mahabharata* also tells the practice of tying such knot of thread when accidentally Lord Krishna injured his finger by his *Sudarshana Chakra* and Draupadi tore a strip from her *Saari* and tied around his finger. Impressed with her concern and affection, Lord Krishna promised that he would protect her by any means (Aparna). The earliest cited historical evidence of *Rakhi* as a festival of brother and sister dates to 300 B.C. when Alexander, the Great's wife Roxane approached the King Puru (King Porus) with *Rakhi*. King Puru accepted her *Rakhi* and her as a sister and on Roxane's request did spare Alexander's life several times during the battle (Wieber332). But the most famous anecdote of *Raksha-Bandhan* is of Mughal emperor Humayun and Rajput Queen Karmawati (the widowedwife of Rana Saanga of *Mewar*). To save her empire from Bahadurshah (Sultan of Gujarat), Karmawati sent a *Rakhi* to Humayun and asked for help. Humayun accepted Queen Karmawati's request to protect her as a sister and marched with his troop but got stuck in the way, and in meanwhile Karmawati committed *Johar* (self-immolation) to save herself from the enemy. Though, Humayun did help Karmawati's son Vikramaditya by defeating Sultan of Gujarat and reclaimed his state (Harikrishna). But all these mythical tales and historical excerpts do not suffice the queries raised. In a way, they do contradict each other's stance.

A Handful of Contradictions

Despite the effort invested, to solve the puzzle by tracing its historical records, the labyrinth has further tangled as the query remains far-fetched. Looking closely at all the excerpts mentioned above regarding the origin of *Raksha-Bandhan*, none of these validly suffice the raised query. If analyzed, the tale of King Bali and Goddess Lakshmi is considered earliest, also known as first-ever *Rakhi* tied but the narrative lacks some primary ground. If Goddess Lakshmi tied a first-ever *Rakhi* on the wrist of King Bali, how King Bali can know the value that *Rakhi* possess, i.e., a medium of the bond between brother and sister. In that case, King Bali might be aware of *Raksha-Sutra* but not *Raksha-Bandhan* as *Raksha-Sutra* means the thread of protection irrespective of any blood-relationship and

Raksha-Bandhan as both a knot of protection and the symbol of the bond between brother and sister.

Before proceeding any further, to avoid any misunderstanding, it is necessary here to differentiate the two, i.e., Raksha-Sutra and Raksha-Bandhan. In literal terms, Raksha means protection whereas Sutra means a thread (or a medium of connection between two, or to surround something to bind it), and *Bandhan* means tying or bonding. The values both Sutra and *Bandhan* entails also differ as Sutra is used in many rituals as a symbol of well-being, prosperity, a connection (in context of alliance of two parties, for example, *Parinay* Sutra in marriage) protection from any evil omen etc. whereas *Bandhan* has very limited role and value entitled, i.e., a tie between two or more parties. For instance, a *Bandhan* of marriage, *Bandhan* of people of same kin or different, a symbol of bond-like in the present context of Raksha-Bandhan between brother and sister.

The mythical tale of Lord Indra and Guru Brihaspati also falls under the concept of Raksha-Sutra. In most of the Northern states (Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, some parts of Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh etc.), *Kul-Purohits* (Brahmins) still visits their patrons on this full moon day of Shravan month and tie the spellbound thread on their patron's wrist. The narrative of King Puru and Alexander is also not eligible to be considered as the earliest event of celebrating the festival. Though, the dramatic occurrence of circumstances mentioned by Premi (1957) in his play while narrating the story of Mughal Emperor Humayun and Rajput Queen Karmawati of Mewar gives a public-hype to the celebration and adds the moralistic essence to Raksha-Bandhan, a festival of brother and sister or abstract notion of love and bonding between the two. So far, the tale of Lord Krishna and Draupadi seems a bit convincing as Lord Krishna moved by Draupadi's affection and care for him, made a promise to look after her by any means. And Lord Krishna saves her from the unceremonious incident of *Cheer-Haran* (Disrobing) when Pandavas (the five husbands of Draupadi) lost her to Kaurav as in a game of gambling. If summarized, every other mythological tale depicts a value of exchange (every act of tying Rakhi was intended with prior intention to extract some value) except the tale of Lord Krishna and Draupadi as Draupadi had no intention of expecting material or spiritual gain, though Lord Krishna himself took the stand and

promised her a protection. As we also mentioned before how the act of tying Rakhi legitimized the brother's role to protect his sister (irrespective of the need of protection), or in other words how controlling a young female's sexuality is justified through the process of value exchange in the act of sister tying this so-called sacred thread on brother's wrist.

But despite such inadequate stances how the festival acquired its pre-eminent place in such a culturally diverse and flourished country? The next section is an attempt to explore this question.

Arguments behind Celebration

When asked, the response one gets is, 'we are aware of the fact that this thread does not guarantee the protection, but it is part of our culture.' If enforced a bit more, the response one often gets is, 'the festival is a symbol of a *pavitrata* (piousness) and *atoot* (unbreakable) *bandhan* (bond) between brother and sister'. Here, the dichotomy between Raksha-Sutra and Raksha *Bandhan* comes to an end as the general conscience of people is in accordance with obliterating the idea of Sutra or spellbound sacred thread entailing any abstract notions of powers to protect and considering the same as vague. Raksha-Sutra remains within the thousands of other ceremonial rituals performed in the presence of priests whereas the Raksha-Bandhan in kinship ties as the second response claimed it as a festival of brother and sister. But one must also keep the commonality distinguished between Raksha-Sutra and Raksha-Bandhan. The word 'Raksha' in Raksha-Sutra means protection from abstract notions of harm such as evil, bad omen, or spiritual elements with the potential of defilement. Whereas the word 'Raksha' in Raksha-Bandhan means of physical protection (as a blessing and return expectation) as also mentioned before that how the festival entails the concept of role or responsibility of protecting someone.

One possibility could be of that Raksha-Sutra might have given birth to a separate ritual. A practice of sister tying the knot on brother's right arm for the prosperity and well-being to ensure that at times of crisis he will look after her or a medium to stay connected with the lineage of father or a bond with paternal kinship. Hinduism or any other religion of the world is not alien to the concept of rituals

and customs engaging people to perform the same irrespective of its form (may be severe to the extreme). *Kanyadaan* (giving away the daughter as a gift) is one of them in Hindu marriage system. The ritual is performed by the father of the bride or by a father like male-member in the same kinship (in case of a father's absence). The word *Kanya* means girl and *Daan* means to donate. Once donated cannot be taken back at any cost. So that is the reason behind the social notion of the concept of considering a girl as '*Paraya-Dhan*' means someone else's property. It is believed and practised according to Hindu belief that after giving away his daughter in *Kanyadaan* by performing certain ceremonial rituals, it is forbidden for the father of the bride to visit his daughter's in-law's house or stay or eat-drink etc. The custom is still in practice in many parts of northern Indian states. But to keep the kinship ties alive between the two families (connected with this act of marital alliance), the relationship with the brother plays the medium between the two. If in any case, a girl after marriage faces any sort of issue, it is the brother who handles things after that. As per Hindu patriarchal system, being the sole inheritor of kin's legacy (property), brother plays a vital role in such issues. Brother and Sister (son and daughter) are on the top of the list of legal heirs also known as Class-I heirs as per the Section 8 of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956. So the bond between brother and sister might be not the way it has been defined in the contemporary context of self-less love between the two but the bond of these kinship ties to uphold the patriarchal system of the social relations to wield the social capital and other means of inheritance management.

About the establishment of ritual as a festival has a series of events mentioned in mythological excerpts, ancient and medieval historical records. The earliest historical records of Raksha-Bandhan in its present form of practice (a sister tying Rakhi to brother) traces back to the tale of King Alexander as King Puru gave him the boon of life on the request of King Alexander's wife Roxane (tying a Rakhi on King Puru's hand). Another tale of Mughal Emperor Humayun and Rajput Queen Karmawati also highlights the practice of the same with quite a show of secularism. But A.K. Singh claims that, as an established festival of the state it was a popular and elite festival of Mughal India. Singh further maintains that it was Akbar who declared it as the holiday of the empire while enlisting folk festivals

of communities for the same. Akbar declared Raksha-Bandhan as an empire holiday. By making it as a court festival and practising the ritual of tying a knot around his wrist, Akbar made it the custom of courtiers and other. After Akbar, Jahangir revived the practice of tying Rakhi but failed to establish it as a festival of commoners except for Brahmins. While referring to works of the likes of Abul Fazl and Al- Badaoni, Singh also points out that it remained the festival of elites as Brahmin community tying a thread on their patron's wrist on the full moon day of Shravan month. Though one might also argue that the celebration of the festival in Mughal India had its political motives, still the festival has been given place and the recognition.

The limitation and a commonality these cited records possess are of patronage. Most of these records talk about the history of the elite class and especially about the emperor as most of these records have been documented under the patronage of an emperor. Therefore, it will be an analytical error to conclude that Raksha-Bandhan was only the festival of elite and masses were alien to practice of the same. It can be justified in a way that only courtiers and people at higher rank used to get/celebrate a holiday on this day not because they celebrated the festival, but because they were paid on daily basis. Rest (or most, as most of the population, was depended on agriculture) of the masses might be alien to the concept of holiday due to their daily basis engagement in season-based activities of livelihood. There are not any written records of the celebration of the festival during British India except in 1905 when the British government decided to divide Bengal into Hindu majority and Muslim majority region. The initiation of the order of partition fell in the same month and around the date of the Raksha-Bandhan. On Rabindranath Tagore's call, people from both communities, i.e., Hindu and Muslims, came forward in protest of Bengal Partition based on religious grounds and tied Rakhi to each other. Students in Shantiniketan still follows the same by tying Rakhi to neighbours and common people to deliver the message of harmony. So, the dynamics of kinship ties and Raksha-Bandhan nurturing under the patronage of patriarchal dynasties/authority over different periods nullifies the abstract notion of values attached and reveals the purpose of exchange of material values it entails. But after the end of such patronage, how Raksha-Bandhan maintained its legacy or even flourished more than ever?

Role of Pop-Culture and Globalised Society

The question raised before that after the end of patronage how it became the festival of so much importance not only among the Hindu community but others too like Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. And the credit goes to the rapid advancement of Pop-culture (media/movie-culture) after Independence and the role of the global market in the twenty-first century. The Table 1, shows the list of movies in which the festival of Raksha-Bandhan has been demonstrated as the core part of the storyline. The ways to manifest Raksha-Bandhan and its importance in one's life has been eulogised in such a way that each time the audience surrenders themselves of their common conscience. Emotions rule over logic, common-sense and blind people of their consciousness. For instance, one narrative explains the dynamic nature of human psyche as a villain had this change of mind (transforming from a rapist to saviour brother), the moment girl ties a strip of cloth on his wrist. Such manifestations of the practice or festival not only aided the importance but also provided the potential to influence the wider arena of society. As the act of tying Rakhi is often used as an instrument to punish socially mischievous elements or an alternative for making culprit realise of his deed ("Girl").

Table 1. List of Movies on Raksha-Bandhan Festival			
Year	Name of the Movie	Year	Name of the Movie
1959	Chotti Bahen	1991	Sanam Bewafa
1962	Rakhi, Anpadh	1992	Tirangaa
1965	Kaajal	1994	Hum Apke Hain Kaun
1969	Anjaana	1998	Pyaar Kiya to Darna Kya
1971	Hare Rama Hare Krishna	1999	Hum Sath Sath Hain
1972	Be-Imaan	2000	Krodh & Fiza
1974	Resham Ki Dori	2008	Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na
1975	Dharmatma	2012	Agneepath
1976	Raksha Bandhan	2013	Bhaag Milkha Bhaag
1983	Andha Kanoon	2015	Dil Dhadakne Do
1987	Marte Dam Tak	2016	Sarbjit

Source: Internet Movie Database (IMDB)

Table 2, shows the list of songs that became the anthem of this festival. Beautifully written lines of Anand Bakshi (1971), '*Phoolon*

*ka taron ka sab ka kehna hai, Ek hazaron mein meri behna hai*² in the 1970s, and after that became a hymn to celebrate the festival of Raksha-Bandhan and added one more ornament to beautify the bond between brother and sister.

Sr. No.	Songs	Movie	Year
1	Bhaiya Mere Rakhi Ke	Chhoti Bahen	1959
2	Rakhi Dhagon Ka Tyohar	Rakhi	1962
3	Mere bhaiya mere Chanda	Kaajal	1965
4	Hum Behno Ke Liye Mere Bhaiya	Anjaana	1969
5	Phoolo Ka Taaro Ka Sabka Kehna Hai	Hare Rama Hare Krishna	1971
6	Yeh Rakhi Bandhan Hai Aisa	Be-imaan	1972
7	Behna Ne Bhai Ki Kalai Se	Resham Ki Dori	1974
8	Ise Samjho Na Resham Ka Taar	Tirangaa	1992

Source: Internet Movie Database (IMDB)

At one hand, where this Raksha-Bandhan anthem deepened the love for a sister or strengthens the bond between the siblings, on the other hand, it is ironical as it also explains the status of females in our country in comparison to their male counterparts. Ironically, these lines itself explain the imbalanced pattern of sex-ratio as it is only one in thousand (as per Census of India, child sex ratio among age-group of 0-06 falls from 976 in 1961 to 964 in 1971, whereas in the age-group of 06-09, it falls from 962 to 948 in the years 1961 and 1971 respectively). As of now, child sex-ratio declined from 927 in 2001 to 919 in 2011 (Census of India 1961, 1971, 2001, & 2011). Speaking of imbalanced sex-ratio, in the last three months, 132 villages of Uttarkashi district (Uttarakhand) delivered 216 male children, but not a single girl child ("In 3 months"). One might also argue that what the lyricist meant was that my sister is unique from 1000 other girls. In that case, what I see is that my sister will be the only girl I will respect and protect among 1000 other girls or in other words we can say how the process of maintaining intra-kin relationships has been appropriately justified. Maintaining intra-kin relationships to prevent the cases of elopement, inter-caste marriages, and justifying the superiority-inferiority concept of the caste system

or in simple words, the concept of a brother as a protector acting as a tool of surveillance to control the female sexuality.

In the first phase (Post 1947 - early 2000s), media in the form of movies eulogised the Raksha-Bandhan by portraying such festivities in a most evocative way to rule the conscience of the mass to consider the festival as an essential part of life. The aspect of material conditions has its motive in-built (kinship ties) but developed further with society becoming more global. The sort of short videos, quotes-sharing on social media on such festivities are the primary agents of manifestation. The access to the worldwide web and globalised market not only blurred the physical boundaries but socio-cultural too. And that clarifies the Raksha-Bandhan as an important festival being practised not only among Hindu communities but also among Jains, Sikhs, & Buddhists and between Hindus and Muslim, Sikhs and Hindus, Sikhs and Muslim, Jains and Sikhs, and between Jains and Hindus. The forms of manifestations are so convincing that society does not care much about socio-cultural boundaries. Raksha-Bandhan as a symbol of pious bonding between siblings has created an urge to be part of it and the sole benefiter of this need is a global market. The price range in which these threads of protection have a variety covering every other level of income group. It may cost a person a minimum of two rupees to the range of thousands. And the returning gift may vary according to the choice and income level. The global market has successively exploited the most interesting characteristic of human being's mind-set, and that is the maximisation of behaviour and act of choice as Amartya Sen defines it. In the present context, the person will never buy a Rakhi (for brother) and a gift (for sister) of lower value than of the previous year. One always will be in the process of maximising his/her action of choice.

Another aspect of how this festival survived and maintained its essence is nothing else but the kind of patronage it received. Under Sultanate reign, Muhammad bin Tughlaq asks Brahmins to tie the thread on Emperor's arm (Rahman); under Mughals, it received patronage by Emperor Humayun, Akbar-the Great, Jahangir, and Shah Alam II; under the British empire, the Raksha-Bandhan didn't get any patronage by authoritarian regime but by revolutionists and socialists leaders such as Chandrashekhar Azaad and Rabindranath

Tagore, and lastly in the democratic country of India, the festival received its importance in the form of helping hand or in other words, the patronage it receives by government authorities (under the umbrella of women-empowerment), as the government charge no fare from women in public transport on this occasion. Along with it, events are organised to celebrate the festival by Prime-Minister of the country himself (“Pakistani-origin”; “Modi”), military officers at the different border (extreme) military posts etc. (Smriti”). One still wonders, for what reason all those mythical tales were revered, or historical excerpts eulogised in such way. Such endeavour to portray the love and bonding between siblings seems a little eccentric. There must be something in it, some idea, some purpose, or some value to look for.

Ideological Stance

In such a diverse realm of social practices, customs, or rituals, why and how one needs to be a rational being. What to accept/follow/practice, and what not? The question is not the origin or controversies attached to a practice but of *what, why, where, and how*. What value it inherits (the value), and relevance through why (the idea)? Is it universally applicable (the where aspect)? And how it should be conducted, if necessary (the purpose). V.L. Allen defines ideology as a process influencing behaviour with the help of three major elements, an idea, a value, and a purpose (224). And every custom/ritual/practice follows the same pattern. Allen further explains while citing Marx that there cannot be any custom or festival in practice without any preceding intentional consciousness. Every practice developed in the form of consciousness and later imposed in the form of norms, values, customs or ritualistic means through various institutions on the rest of the mass, irrespective of their level of consciousness about the practice being practised. In that case, after ensuring the material means of subsistence (production of material life), consciousness is the second feature of practice as an intentional activity followed by the transformation of the men, Marx affirms (41). The whole ideological process remains invisible in the core structure of the custom or festival here, being practised. The hoardings, those covers these structures not to reveal publicly are of widespread irrational abstract notions in the form of values such as piousness, sanctity, self-less love and affection, unbreakable bonding

etc. As Allen claims that values do not question the structure; they assume their continuity (21). In the name of such moralistic attributes of values and practices adorned with such values hinders socially-ill actions like honour-killing, dowry, women as the first-hand victim of domestic issues, riots & war and portrays it as an essential part of social-life without providing alternatives to question the same.

a. One Must Raise a Hand, if in Doubt:

Let us analytically conclude the given context in this ideological framework of analysis step by step. Raksha-Bandhan as a festival sugar-coated with the symbol of piousness and selfless love between the two, a symbol of unbreakable bond which perfectly hinders all other aspect like, motive of accessing material/resources and social capital in between the kinship, control of female sexuality by appointing brother as a lifetime bodyguard, practice of honour-killing and justified in the name of brother's love for sister's well-being, rape threat used as punishment for sisters if caught or involved in transgressing social-boundaries, considering women as a property or objectification of women, dowry death etc.

b. Existing Ballyhoo

- Raksha-Bandhan as a symbol of the bond between brother and sister, a symbol of piousness, selfless love, and an unbreakable bond.
- The Sister ties Rakhi on the right hand of the brother as the right half part of the body is considered masculine enough to protect her.
- Draupadi tied a strip of cloth on Lord Krishna's injured finger and along the wrist, and in returns, Lord Krishna came to Draupadi's rescue as he had given his words to protect her.
- The power of Roxane's Rakhi made King Puru not to kill King Alexander.
- After tying spellbound thread, Lord Indra defeated all the demons.

- Goddess Lakshmi asked for Lord Vishnu to return as he was guarding King Bali's empire.
- Rajput Queen Karmawati's Rakhi melted the heart of Mughal Emperor Humayun.

And What is Practically Incumbent?

All the ballyhoos cited above shares a commonality which nullifies the statement that festivals entail the values to inspire people to live in harmony and peace. Every tale or historical excerpt mentioned above explains the act of power accumulation and process of justifying war. If appropriately examined, why the terms like piousness, selfless love or bond are highly eulogised? As the country is suffering from the crisis like threatening sisters for rape as a form of punishment ("Indian"), property disputes between brother and sister ("She"). The Family ends up all relationship/ties with the girl if she claims her share of the inheritance. What sort of 'Atoot' (unbreakable) bond is that? What kind of selfless love that is going to be? The other aspect is of tying Rakhi on the right arm only but what if the brother is left-handed? Isn't he going to be masculine? Or his masculine part will be on the left side. But that will again challenge the concept of '*Ardhanarishvara*'³. In the context of tales and excerpts, no one questions about Raksha-Bandhan as to why Lord Krishna has to save Draupadi and from whom? Why were women considered as a property to be used for gambling in a game? Why Lord Vishnu has to guard King Bali if King Bali was the bravest of all? Despite knowing that King Alexander's actions were not justifiable, what makes Roxane to beg for his life and not put an end to tyranny of her husband? How blurred socio-cultural boundaries (due to the influence of pop-culture and globalised society) do not reflect in reducing the practices of social discrimination? The reason might be that roles are well defined and considering the practice of such roles a good thing created a mirage of society living smoothly (Connell 23). The reality of everyday life has been taken for granted as reality (Allen 14).

But let us not put this into another blame-game debate of men are bad, and women are good or vice versa. Both are responsible at their end. Both consciously and unconsciously support the practices that

might be beneficial for men and certain strata of women and might be violating other women's rights. For instance, women unintentionally became the active agent of violating their rights in cases of dowry-related crimes, or by following any other practice/ritual of receiving any materialistic capital in the form of a gift from their kinsfolk. There is a possibility of thought existing that abolishing dowry has not only displeased in-laws but somehow daughters too. As now she is aware of the fact that getting not much in her name after marriage will leave her in possession of no significant materialistic capital. So the compensation (a desire to have strong possession of capital) might be carved (with no prior intention) in other rituals/customs (like receiving such capital during Raksha-Bandhan as brother is expected to give a gift to sister, during the birth of a child or especially a male child etc.) where a girl receives such capital.

To suggest, one must look beyond such illusions. One must not only fall for the manner but to look for hidden values and ideologies of the alliance between market and patriarchal structures enslaving marginalised sections. In whole, Raksha-Bandhan is a festival sugar-coated with the value of selfless love for sister (to build-up a medium of connection between two families); with an idea of providing protection to sister (as an invisible form, making her dependent on both side of families); and with a purpose of life-long source of support through tying this sacred thread called as Rakhi (by inheriting her share of property, to control and accumulate the power over women and in order to access the resources and social capital of other party through the approach of sister and vice versa). And ideologically it works in a process, under the patronage of different regimes and authority, the festival of Raksha-Bandhan has been exploited for political motives by Sultanate and Mughal dynasties to gain the trust of Hindus; used by rebels and intellectuals to spark the light of patriotism for freedom during British Empire; by entrepreneur through pop-culture and global market to control the economy and build business empires; and by leaders of democratic nations for vote-banking, politics of power accumulation etc.

Areligious practice may differ from any otherworldly religion, but it serves the same purpose. Our religion is no different than any other; our patriarchy is not much different than other patriarchal

societies. Every social institution has the same narrative, same values attached to it (with different forms of practising), and are an inextricable part of the society, and what else society is made up of is no more to be discovered.

Conclusion

To conclude, by no means at all, the study supports to discard such festivities or suggest to abolish such traditions but to advance. The ancient literature (*Vedas, Puranas & Upnishada*), traditions, belief system etc. may be little outdated but are of enormous importance and contain vast sources of knowledge. As Feyerabend (1988) maintains that 'We should regard the world-views of the Bible, the Gilgamesh epic, the Iliad, the Edda, as fully fledged alternative cosmologies which can be used to modify, and even to replace, the 'scientific' cosmologies of a given period'. Festivals represent an ambience of harmony and peace, and so they should be. But one must not repeat the mistake of blindly following such practices; one must not be only aware but responsible too, to advance the form of manifestation as per the applicability in the present. As P. Kumar puts it, India needs renewal, not revival. One must not accept the past without questioning it, one must look for scientific rationale.

Endnotes

1. The *Raksabandhan* festival (Raksha means protection and Bandhan means bond/to bind), which takes place on the full Moon of the lunar month of Shravana (July–August), is one of the most popular festivals in India. On this day sisters tie an amulet of red or yellow threads on their brother's wrists to guard them for the year. If they are more learned, they may utter a well-known Sanskrit mantra. The brothers then offer them presents (For details see, Jones and Ryan).
2. My sister is one (unique) in thousand, and everyone believes and say the same.
3. *Ardhanarishvara* is a concept that believes that human body represents the synthesis of masculine (right half of the body) and feminine (left-half) and depicted as half-male (Shiva) and half-female (Shakti).

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Only a Joke: Stand-up Comedy and Disability in the Indian Context

Tirtha Pratim Deb

Abstract

Often taking the form of anecdotes and observations, the formal elements of stand-up comedy performances are directed towards a public circulation of knowledge about the nonnormative body. Such knowledge is transacted through the medium of public performances which not only disrupt the social expectations that have come to be centered around non-normativity, but also stretch the boundaries of a political register about identity-based claims and assertions. Thus, humour, with all its bearings of being disruptive, becomes a fertile space where meanings regarding disability can be reinscribed. Taking off from the idea of cultural production as an index of the everyday, this paper would begin with the assertion that the political construction of a disability identity was integrated into the process of artistic production of its many meanings. Following which, this paper would bring together the incidence of disability in the popular arts movement of the early 1990s and establish the ground for an analytical model where the radicalism inherent in dissemination of disability culture comes forward. Theorising on the radical potential of both the content of a disability performance as well as the formal elements of stand-up humour, this paper would finally seek to ground these conceptual ruptures within a normative social space through a study of Indian stand-up comics with disability.

Keywords: Disability, Subversion, Humour, Culture, Experience

Introduction

As ubiquitous as it is in the realm of human experience, recent debates surrounding disability have stretched out its construction beyond the limits of sociological or anthropological analyses to account for its perennial presence within forms of cultural production. Underscoring this cultural value of disability facilitated an interrogation of its predetermined meanings, intercepting the associated networks of power which had come to be premised on the

conceptual axes of normativity at one end and bodily, psychological, and emotional difference on the other. As a discursive object that had been drawn out, molded, and determined to hold in place an unequal and discriminatory social sphere, disability when studied in its cultural formations, brings out the possibility of realizing the framework of difference through which persons with disability have come to be classed in recent history. This in turn leaves open the potential for subverting those meanings which a nondisabled imaginary has hoisted upon them.

By cultural formations, here is meant the proliferation of disability-centric texts, as well as the critical study of those where disability, as a neutral narratological element, is present in some form. The emergence of disability studies as a discipline was fundamental to this discursive shift, thematically aligned as it was with social movements from the late 1970s onwards in both the United States and the United Kingdom for a renewed perspective on disability as a political category. Not only did the literature emerging from this critical juncture rewrite the conceptual paradigms of disability through a revision of its medicalized definitions, but the newer frameworks of the social and the affirmation models paved the way for a reinvigorated emphasis on disability as a way of life which was culturally and aesthetically significant. Take for instance the disability arts movement, which Colin Cameron sees as fundamental to the conceptual emergence of John Swain and Sally French's affirmation model of disability (Swain and French 569). Citing the examples of musicians such as Johnny Crescendo, Ian Stanton, and the Fugertivs, Cameron writes how the disability arts movement had emerged in the 1980s and 1990s since "disabled artists, working within a diverse range of art forms, started to resist mainstream disability discourses and to explore and develop their own life perspectives: to claim and reclaim power and control in their own lives" (Cameron 382). Drawing upon this discursive shift in the political landscape where the person with disability was repositioned to actively participate in the writing of their social narratives, Swain and French's affirmation model underscored the importance of moving away from the tragic and medicalized rationalizations of disability, with a sustained emphasis on the lived experiences of persons with disability, and seeing in this theoretical framework the

possibility of “collective as well as individual” (577) iterations of a political identity.

Rooting the study in the political claim of a disability identity, this paper would try to understand how personal, anecdotal experiences are deployed within a public forum to mediate the ideological grounds of a nondisabled imaginary. Intervening in this process of cultural construction of the person with disability, the stand-up comics discussed here rewrite the degree of active participation that characterizes most objective assessments and assumptions about the lives of disabled persons. Complexly negotiated experiences therefore punctuate the notions of selfhood, identity, autonomy, as well as socio-religious expectations of disability. Thus, this paper would primarily expunge on the performances of Indian stand-up comedians as generating a space where this reconfiguration of meaning is possible, through the intersecting narratives of personal experiences constructing public personas. To this end, it would discuss the conceptual bases of humour, jokes, and comedy as a form of art, as well as the position of disability within them. The comedians discussed conduct their routines in the English language, and despite the localized nature of their narrated experiences, their performances mostly take place in comedy clubs or other metropolitan venues, thus conferring another layer to both the subjectivities they construct as well as the interactions they have with a largely upwardly mobile class of audience. This has a bearing on the reception of their experiences of disability, given how a liberal-progressive stance with respect to bodily, mental, and emotional difference does not operate in the same social circumstances as those which are entrenched in orthodoxies regarding the disabled body.

Disability as a Cultural Space

Comic performances can be understood as one of the several artistic forms through which a claim for identity-based disability politics can be made. Contextualising ‘culture’ in this case would therefore require looking back at that conceptual turn where it is displaced from its rigid originary framework. Reading culture as “ordinary” (Williams 4) adds to its position as an index of artistic production by not only considering the “inner processes” of its creation but also the

“common meanings” (Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 17) and “general process, specialized to its presumed configurations in ‘whole ways of life’” (17). This mediation between the ordinariness of everyday life and the documentary nature of public artistic expression is what has come to underscore the fluidity of this concept. This space of mediation is constituted by the relations between cultural forms which keep engaging and disengaging with “dominant cultural forms” (Hall 50), but also engender “the ongoing process by which the dominant cultural forms are able to change and adapt to new circumstances precisely by incorporating such residual and emergent forms” (50). In this context, when cultural struggles play out to varyingly engage tradition, they foster a possible shift in the practices and processes deemed to be dominant as well as marginal. In a state of change, culture becomes a site redolent with the scope of rewriting power differentials and this is where the conceptual possibility of disability as subversive can be located. Driven by a nondisabled imaginary which places it at the edges of mainstream cultural production, or in a tokenistic relationship to the formal structure of a text, a renewed emphasis on lived experiences which are circulated through a popular medium, therefore constructs disability as integral to the process of political fashioning.

Comedy as a form of expression has had a turbulent relationship with disability, often eliciting spectatorship at the cost of denigrating nonnormative bodies. Culturally formulated imaginings of the person with disability are centered around a conception of difference, where this perceived lack is embodied through a presumed inability to fit inside a normative ideal. The person with disability, thus, bears a currency of difference, through which a hegemony of socio-cultural inadequacy is established and rationalized through a curious blend of narratives. Cornering the person with disability because of this presumed and deflected difference has a long history, such as in the instance of freakshows in late nineteenth century America (Thomson), and its gradual formalization in instances such as the trope of the sexually belligerent as well as the desexualized person with disability (Wendell 43), or the inspiring ‘supercrip’ (Mitchell and Snyder 59) whose identity is subsumed behind a narrative of overcoming adversities (19). This “ideology of ability” (Siebers 8) coalesces around the various cultural-historical afterlives of disability

by generating a profusion of narratives which seek to justify the seemingly normative dictums that push the experience of disability to the margins. Thus, as a process imbued with the potential for overturning the ideological rootedness of a nondisabled world, performative comedy provides a significant intervention.

Reading Comedy Through Disability

The critical literature on humour makes note of three primary conceptual frameworks through which it can be analytically grasped. These are the superiority theory, the relief theory, and the incongruity theory. Humour exists, in each of these frameworks, as the direct result of certain degrees of engagement with difference. For instance, the superiority paradigm recognises humour as resulting out of conflicting power differentials where the object of humour is deemed to be of an inferior value. The relief theory, on the other hand, traces its conceptual origin to psychoanalysis, where humour is posited as resulting from the release of nervous energies. The framework for incongruity, placed as it is at a relatively recent historical juncture as compared to the previous two, places the burden of humour on discontinuous expectations and unexpected patterns which bear an element of surprise for the receiving audience. Thinking of humour through the analytical lens of disability, therefore, requires the recognition of both the superiority framework as well as the incongruity theory as fundamental to the circulation of ideas about disability, despite the negotiations of each being starkly different from the other. Superiority theory, Shawn Bingham and Sara Green note,

generally focuses on individuals; it positions the source of blame or liability at the personal level, rather than blaming broader ideals and norms. It often does so with a specific set of evaluative standards or criteria that relate to both moral and physical attributes of the joke's target—thereby putting the target in his or her place while also reinforcing norms and assuring the audience that they, unlike the target, uphold these norms. (Bingham and Green 96)

By reducing the joke directly to the fact of bodily nonnormativity, this framework carries over several points of continuity with the medical model of disability, which is premised on the arbitrary reduction of the lived experience of the person with disability to the biological fact of their impairment. Cultural precepts of disability which immediately simplify the complexities of their worlds to their impairment status, thus, foster an ideology rooted on the acknowledgement of ability as a marker of socio-cultural value. The difference, which had been presumed to begin with, keeps deepening a rift which postulates social inferiority on one side, and acceptance on the other. This conduit transpires into a space where jokes can play off against normative presumptions about the body which, as Alison Wilde notes, “lends itself well to understanding humour used in the service of the torment, or condemnation, of others” (Wilde 32).

Perhaps some form of radicalism fits into the formal elements which make up the performative practice of stand-up comedy. Premised as it mostly on the idea of incongruity, surprises, and unexpected responses, the structures of stand-up routines facilitate a space where a surprising retort can edge into the comfort of anticipation. Through the structure of a punchline to alter the political valence of a joke, stand-up performances make a strong case for this kind of radicalism to take effect. As Bingham and Green note,

Through the lens of incongruity and the analytic frames it offers, comedians can traverse areas of ambivalence and uncertainty, and even the taboo. Drawing on the element of surprise and the incongruous, they are able to navigate a fine line between audience comfort and discomfort within the short distance of a sentence or two (Bingham and Green 112).

Yet, the incongruity inherent in stand-up routines does not presuppose an ahistorical, fixed reception within the duration of the performance. John Morreall writes about how stand-up jokes usually consists of a “cognitive shift”, that is, “a background pattern of thoughts” (Morreall 50) called the setup, and “the punch, which causes our thoughts and attitudes to change quickly” (50). The concept of incongruity is, likewise, structured to elicit a response

from its unexpected, unpredictable change in thought and structure. This inscribes a space for the tacit reversal of norms and conventions, which becomes significant in performances by persons with disabilities. Moreover, Bingham and Green also note how

Incongruous humour can, however, also serve the opposite function as a mirror to reflect and invert traditional norms and values and as a form of resistance. In this sense, incongruous humour is still used as a social corrective, but in ways that challenge the values of the dominant group, while giving voice and even power to the subordinated through incongruity” (Bingham and Green 110).

However, for its thematic and ethical constituents to breach its designated limits, the incongruity must spill over into the receiving audience in a fluid, collaborative process. It is only when this incongruity has been recognised, and acknowledged or denied, that the political prowess of the joke in tackling the ideological presumptions of the audience is realised (Brodie 155). Moreover, Brodie writes that

the stand-up is in a position of re-affirming her right to be the one to reveal this incongruity: that she is not making an outsider’s pronouncement and judgment but knows whereof she speaks as a member of this particular folk group. (Brodie 155)

Brodie’s assertion is similar to what Lockyer also postulates regarding the movement of narratives between the performer and the audience. Calling it “interactional power” (Lockyer 1402), Lockyer specifies how through her ethnographic findings she had come to conceive of this flow as primary to the self-identification and realising of dignity on the part of the disabled comic (1403). Both authors therefore, confer a centrality to the person with disability with respect to how they deploy their experiential narratives, by underscoring the active role that the responding audience plays in this performative setup. This confers a sense of control upon the disabled comic, who may negotiate with the formal features of the joke to suit their ends. Hence, positing the stand-up performer as the primary mediator of their lived experience carries the potential to mediate

culturally prescribed notions of disability. In fact, this aspect of stand-up comedy can be read in the terms of a performance that entails the everyday experience of persons with disabilities. In the introductory chapter to *Bodies in Commotion*, Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander write about the social interactions of persons with disabilities, who they note “perform their identities in explicitly self-conscious and theatrical terms” (Sandahl and Auslander 2), with the purpose of becoming “an active maker of meaning, rather than a passive specimen on display” (Sandahl and Auslander 3). Substantiating this claim, the authors write how

As in traditional representation, disability inaugurates the act of interpretation in representation in daily life. In daily life, disabled people can be considered performers, and passersby, the audience. Without the distancing effects of a proscenium frame and the actor's distinctness from his or her character, disability becomes one of the most radical forms of performance art, "invisible theatre" at its extremes (Sandahl and Auslander 2).

It is at this critical point where the experiential complexity of disabled livelihood comes to negotiate its public presence through the form of stand-up comedy. If one of the conceptual possibilities of culture is realising the constant flux between dominant and marginal forms, as well as interiorised and public expressions of life, can the public performance of comedy be considered as one of those vital spaces where a culture of disability persists? Lockyer relates the foregrounding of disability experiences within comic routines as related to Swain and French's affirmative model of disability, where moments of cultural assertion rise in the richness of everyday negotiations with disability (Lockyer 1405). Therefore, the push and pull of power which determines what meanings are ascribed to which social subjects could qualify stand-up performances as a point where the potential for disability's reinscription exists. Discussing how disabled comics manage their material, Lockyer further notes through her findings that

Stand-up comedy thus offers a socially accessible space for disabled comedians who can control their participation in this particular social environment. Such responses are united

in the way in which they recognise the positive benefits of self-definition and self-authorship in comic performance (Lockyer 1402).

Moving from superiority paradigm of humour to the incongruity theory, therefore, shifts the focus of power towards the person with disability, who now has an active role in its mobilisation. Bingham and Green use the terms ‘disabled humour’ and ‘disability humour’ to flag this shift in autonomy of the disabled subject. According to them,

Disabled humour ... denigrates people with disabilities by making them targets of derisive jokes, and disability humour ... enlightens others about the disability experience, affirms the humanity of individuals with impairments, counters the widespread view that disability is a tragedy, and challenges stereotypes (Bingham and Green 4).

Taking root in the formalistic device of incongruent punch-lines while imbibing the personal experience of the performer within its fabric, the act of disability comedy therefore clears out a cultural space where notions of identity, autonomy, and selfhood of the person with disability are asserted. Not only that, the dialectical process of performance and reception contests certain ideologically prescribed ideas of normative social behaviour, especially in the context of South Asia where disability is not constructed in terms similar to specificities in the West.

Stand-up comedy by persons with disabilities in India

Despite the richly documented literature on cultural interpretations of disability in the context of India (Anand 36) (Anand 25) (Miles “Glimpses of Disability in the Literature and Cultures of East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa”), there has been a general ambivalence in representations of disability in media such as cinema and television. Anita Ghai writes in the context of the Bollywood film how disability “in most Indian films is used as a meta-narrative, thus allocating the viewer to create meaning within the larger, scattered, melodramatic filmic space” (Ghai 280). When not being reduced to caricatures to serve the purposes of comic relief, characters with disabilities in mainstream Hindi films bear a shadow of reluctant

political engagement that does not intervene within a majorly nondisabled cinematic world. That is to say, certain hauntings of normativity continue to fold the person with disability back into a largely accepting nondisabled, yet liberalised sphere. Despite a gradual turn in mainstream cultural representation through several instances of empowering portrayals (Pal 128), the radical possibilities of disability are subsumed as part of a “non-threatening” (Friedner 10) and “feel good diversity” (10) in the public sphere. Such constructions are reinforced through cultural conduits such as Hindi reality television, or the state’s controversial normalisation of *divyangjan* as an identifying term for persons with disabilities (Karmakar, “‘Divyangjan’ is a Controversial Word Similar to ‘Mentally Ill’, says U.N. Body”).

Therefore, one constitutive element in the routines of disabled comics from India is this suspension of socio-cultural normativity by reiterating anecdotal events where difference continues to colour their construction of identity. Sweta Mantrii, who was born with spina bifida, relates an incident at a family gathering where an uncle of hers had come up to ask her whereabouts (“Hear These Funny, Differently-Abled Women Joke About Uncles & Sex,” 00:00:57-00:01:26). Having enquired if things were okay, he goes on to ask her if she could manage to do things by herself. She had answered that she could. Following which, the person had asked her if she could take a shower by herself. To this, Sweta had replied that she could not, but she knew a boy in her neighbourhood who comes by her place in the morning and they take a shower together. The response had scandalised the man so much, that he would go on to avoid holding any conversation with her at subsequent encounters. Sweta’s anecdotal frame brings the audience inside a circle of intimacy, with a familiar theme of paternalism setting up the incongruity in the punchline. Further, Sweta’s joke also edges past the presumed inadequacy attested to persons with disabilities, with the breadth of her identity reduced to a lack of functionality, which in any case is rebuffed by the punchline of the joke.

Similar themes of contesting paternalism and shock are also evident in other comic acts. Nidhi Goyal, an activist-comedian, talks about an incident that had occurred to her on a matrimonial website (“Bad Girls with Aditi Mittal| Ep 1| Nidhi Goyal,” 00:04:00-

00:04:58). She had received a call from a man who was interested in finding a match for his son. The man had heaped praises on her online profile, saying how he was very impressed with her education, career, and so on, and he would have liked her to meet his son. Nidhi, however, reminded him that she had also written about her blindness on her profile. The man appeared shocked, and at a loss for words, hung up the phone. The punchline, however, extended beyond this anecdote to her saying how upon hearing about her visual impairment, the man became “speech impaired”. Nidhi’s account, while rooted in the same experiential framework as Sweta’s, centers around a different affectation. In her case, the profile, despite its redolent qualities, was reduced to a blind woman’s profile, which could only produce disbelief and shock on the part of the caller who is suddenly rendered unfamiliar to the person with disability.

In his comedy special titled *Thank You, I’m Sorry*, Sundeep Rao, a partially sighted comedian from Bangalore, relates an incident when he had received a phone call asking him to come to a college as a guest because he was deemed an ‘inspiration’. Rao’s initial response, before ending the joke in a tone of self-deprecation is to retort “how about you develop your own disability and come and inspire me” (“Sundeep Rao on Inspiration and Political Correctness,” 00:00:05-00:00:27). Further, he goes on to say, with a similar note of irony, that if nondisabled people end up failing in life, they maybe called failures but if he fails in life, he will still be an inspiration (“Thank You I’m Sorry,” 00:43:54-00:44:04). Quips against this bracketing of persons with disability where they are reduced to a story of inspiration, is also reiterated by Sweta Mantrii. She insists that administering this label on her will never make her feel equal (“Hear These Funny, Differently-Abled Women Joke About Uncles & Sex,” 00:00:42-00:00:52). Aligning persons with disability to this cultural narrative of inspiration, thus, carefully maintains and normalises the fact of difference which keeps drawing from a position of condescension and paternalism. Thus, a subversion of the mandated meanings of the disabled subject occurs through the consolidation of a political identity that opposes the cultural prevalence of reductive categorisation of disability.

Conclusion

This paper had argued for the construction of a political identity for persons with disabilities through the public medium of stand-up comedy in India. Locating the emergence of a disability culture at the historical juncture where the question of a disability identity and disability rights was a focal narrative, this paper had also tried to trace the concept of cultural struggles as imbued with the intersecting forces of everyday, ordinary experience as well as traditional aesthetic forms. This mediation between lived experiences and public facing art forms the fundamental basis of stand-up comedy, especially when comedic outputs have historically circulated an objective, reductive, and often discriminatory notion of disability. Stand-up comedy, therefore, serves as a site for the reinscription of ideologically provisioned ideas related to the disabled body. Given its formal structure of observational, experiential humour which uses an incongruous turn to subvert constructions rooted in a nondisabled imaginary, stand-up comedy by persons with disabilities provides a space where expressions of political intent, assertions of selfhood, and claims of autonomy can be made. In the context of India, stand-up comedy provides a radically inclined conduit for the expression of a lived experience of disability which interrogates the liberal-progressive put out to assimilate the person with disability into a largely nondisabled national imaginary.

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Taste of Their Lives: A Study of Select Women's Food Memoirs

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Abstract

Food images and the use of food as a symbol have had an enormous impact on Postmodern culture. A new domain in Cultural Studies, namely, Food Studies, was introduced in the twentieth century to explore the cultural significance of food, cooking and eating. Food Studies is an emerging area in literary studies exploring how food symbolism and imagery bring subtle, intricate ideas and more profound meanings into literature. This paper analyses texts that are often relegated as women's cookbooks or food-related writing, the genre of Food Memoirs. The article attempts to foreground how food helps women mould their identity and transcend societal barriers through works like Shoba Narayan's *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with Recipes* and Madhur Jaffrey's *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India*. In-depth analyses of these texts show that rather than acting as a marker of female oppression, food, cooking and eating play a pivotal role in an individual's journey to self-realisation. These texts portray how food has opened new arenas in front of the writers rather than limiting their possibilities.

Keywords: Food Studies, Food Memoir, Self-Discovery, Female Oppression and Liberation

Introduction

Food Studies is a multidisciplinary subject area that explores the multifarious relationships among food, society and culture from several branches in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences. This new branch of literary studies challenges researchers to probe deep into the acts of cooking and eating and find deeper meanings in these quotidian activities. People's food choices, either as individuals or groups, can reveal their thoughts, likes, and dislikes and tell stories of households, migrations, assimilation, resistance, and changes over time. The food we eat defines us; it can act as an agency for defining individual identity or communal identity; it can also reveal a lot about

the hegemonic potential of patriarchal society and the processes of gender stereotyping and oppression. Many myths regarding food consumption and food-related stereotypes can be shattered through an in-depth analysis of our food habits and food choices. Every meal served on a plate reveals personal connections, nostalgic longings, a sense of belonging and racial pride.

The term food habits (also known as food culture or foodways) (54) was formulated by Kittler, Sucher, and Nelms to explain how humans consume food, including its selection, cultivation, and distribution to who cooks, serves, and eats it. Human beings alone perform these acts. Hauck-Lawson came up with the idea of food voice (24). She suggested that what one eats or does not eat can reveal manifold facets of one's personality.

Food and Identity

Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard, in the "Introduction" of *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature*, assert that food is fundamental to literature, "If food is fundamental to life and a substance upon which civilisations and cultures have built themselves, then food is also fundamental to the imagination and the imaginary arts. Food is fundamental to the imagination because food is fundamental to culture" (5)

Culture can be defined as the thoughts, beliefs and viewpoints followed by an individual who is part of a group or community. Culture cannot be inherited but must be cultivated by a deliberate effort. The food habits of various cultures are often related to racial practices and sacred rituals that are part of religion. Thus, in the cultural context, one can say that what one eats defines who one is and is not. According to Kittler, Sucher and Nelms, "Eating is a daily reaffirmation of [one's] cultural identity". (54) A good number of people value the foods from their culture, foods that are part of their ancestry and childhood with warmth. Food is an integral part of who we are as individuals. As adults, when we experience stress or frustration, foods that are part of our childhood, our culture can often provide us with comfort or solace.

Culinary Memoir: Genre, Form and Function

A Culinary memoir or Food memoir is a form of autobiographical writing. Contemporary food memoirs put food at the centre of their narratives. Still, they are more systematically biographical, chronicling the authors' lives through cooking and eating rather than mere narratives about food that include personal anecdotes. In the paper "Food Memoirs: What They Are, Why They Are Popular, and Why They Belong in the Literature Classroom," Barbara Frey Waxman notes that this form is "about the treasury of metaphorical associations that link food with love and emotional nourishment that are often present in the personal histories and confessions of food memoirists" (363). According to Waxman, food memoirs are based on the theme of food and its association with cultural identity, ethnicity, family and cross-cultural experiences. Until recently, very few thinkers attempted to bring a feminist perspective to their work on food, as many feminist scholars focussed their attention on women's food pathologies like anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders alone. Women's studies scholars addressed domesticity problems but ignored cooking altogether, blindly assuming it as a marker of patriarchal oppression. Many contemporary women Food Memoirists regard their work as resisting conventional notions and fixed identities. Culinary memoirs are not mere individualist narratives of foods; the culinary memoirs have a cultural and communal significance as the narrator is placed in a cultural and historical scene. It is particularly politicised and marked by the difference when it comes to the immigrant and post-colonial authors. The culinary memoir promotes the construction of individual identity. It is linked to personal and general settings, the notion of home and childhood, and how they affect the person's formation, very much so in the case of the individual migrating from one place to another or straddling between two worlds.

This paper analyses two Food Memoirs- *Monsoon Diary* by Shoba Narayan and Madhur Jaffrey's *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India*, two books that present fascinating autobiographical sketches through food images. These texts share several traits, but they are thematically and emotionally different. They are set within the global Indian context, target an English-

speaking population, and the authors are women of Indian origin living abroad. Thus, they speak of immigration, dislocation or displacement, and exile- aspects that play a pivotal role in shaping the group identity of Indians residing outside the country.

Barbara F. Waxman explains, "Culinary memoirs generally trace the memorists' passage from youth to a maturity in which they have discovered a passion for food (eating it, cooking it, writing about it, and travelling to experience it) and established a niche in the world" (365). In the texts analysed here, food is not a mere detail or an embellishment in the backdrop; food is the protagonist, playing varied roles, such as that of a bond between generations of migrants, as an identity marker, and as a symbol of religious rituals, superstitions and remembrances.

Shoba Narayan's Culinary Trail

Shoba Narayan was born in 1968 to Tamil Brahmin parents in South India. She graduated from the Columbia University School of Journalism. Her articles on food and travel have found a place in celebrated publications like The New York Times, Financial Times and The Wall Street Journal. Narayan published *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with Recipes* in 2003 during her immigrant days in America. The book chronologically portrays the author's life, from her birth in Madras to her adult life as an immigrant in America. Food is always central to the text, and she vividly recounts her food memories. She has incorporated recipes into the text that present a slice of the memory that she shared in each chapter.

Narayan has interwoven into the fabric of the text cultural aspects of the South Indian Tamil Brahmin family that she grew up in. One gets a detailed understanding of the region's different local festivals, customs and culinary specialities, the importance of various rituals and ceremonies, and the prevalence of various castes in Indian society. The first chapter, 'First Foods, ' talks about her "Choru-unnal" ceremony or "rice-eating" ceremony that marks a child's first proper meal, wherein the family members and priests feed the child nibbles of mashed rice, lentils and ghee.

Narayan highlights the significant role of ritualised sensorial experiences in the lives of middle-class Indian families through her remembrances. These culinary experiences act as milestones in her journey to selfhood as a Keralite, Indian, and Indian-American. Lisa Heldke, in *Exotic Appetites*, talks about the strong interconnections between cuisine and culture and argues that food adventurers who opt for foreign cuisines for their strange nature are largely unaware of this vital connection. She observes: "Food is just food [...] We ignore any attachments it may have to the social practices, religious traditions, economic conditions of a culture" (50). Narayan in *Monsoon Diary* provides many such descriptions that reaffirm food's cultural significance, enabling the reader to identify the associations between meals, spices, flavours, and people's lives.

Shoba narrates one of her most vibrant memory of growing up in India in the chapter 'Mumbai Train', wherein she sketches in detail her family's train journey. Narayan recounts this episode and looks deeper into how communal values, rituals and traditions enhance the day-to-day act of consuming food. October starts the monsoon season in India, and it is also vacation time for school kids. Shoba's family travelled to their relatives' houses in Bangalore and Bombay on the Lal Bagh Express, between Madras (Chennai) and Bangalore (Bengaluru), or the Bombay Express, between Madras (Chennai) and Bombay (Mumbai). Narayan remarks, "the most important thing when travelling by train in India is not the location of your seat [...], whether you have confirmed tickets or even your destination. The crucial element is the size of your neighbor's tiffin carrier" (Narayan 60). Tiffin carriers are a special kind of "lunch boxes" used in India, made of stainless steel or brass where containers with lids are stacked one atop the other and secured by a metal clamp. Young Shoba chose her seats wisely based on the number of vessels piled in the tiffin carrier of her travelling companion.

If my school lunch box with its measly two containers was a Manhattan townhouse, the Marwari matron's tiffin carrier was the Empire State Building, with more than a dozen impressively stacked stainless steel containers. She opened each one at strategic points during our train journey together. At dawn we had roti and potato saag. At ten o'clock, a snack

of crisp kakda wafers speckled with pepper. For lunch, a bounty of parathas. (Narayan 62)

Monsoon Diary epitomises the Epicurean philosophy and the pleasure of eating. When we think of food as means of pleasure or nourishment, the category of pleasure predominates. This memoir enriches what the food scholars or culinary chroniclers call "the sensory embodiment of food" (Pilcher 695). While illustrating Indian customs, Narayan comments on the difference between Indian and American cultures from an outsider's vantage point. The book traverses her life, childhood in Kerala, her youth or College days in America, and her arranged marriage and life after that in New York City. It showcases her coming-of-age journey. The book is an excellent example of how a memoir intertwines public events with personal details and creates a "public identity" (Rak 485). For Narayan, *Monsoon Diary* was a platform for presenting herself as a writer to the world and a chance "to construct, package and market identity so that others will want to buy it" (Rak 486).

Narayan fondly remembers her mother's baking classes and how her father always supported her mother's talents and let her set up a Tutorial. After shutting down Bright Tutorial, her mother enrolled in a community college to learn cosmetology and became a certified aesthetician. With the wholehearted support of her husband and children, Sobha's mother started a beauty parlour in their house, 'Kadambari Beauty Parlor', and it was inaugurated on Sobha's fourteenth birthday. Sobha is in awe of her mother's multivariate talents. It is very evident from her account of her mother that this woman has influenced her enormously and has played a significant role in moulding her personality. In another part of the book, she unapologetically asserts her identity as a Keralite-

I am from Kerala, which means that regardless of where I live at any other point in my life, I will love coconuts in any form. I will habitually douse my hair with warm coconut oil and wash it off with ground herbs during a weekly "oil bath," I will be enchanted by the sight of large expanses of water, and the smell of the rain will transport me back to my childhood. (Narayan 80)

Food has shaped her past and has played a vital role in deciding her future. When she received a scholarship to join Mount Holyoke College in the USA for her graduation, her family members were apprehensive about her going to America. After days of arguments, protests and cajoling, Sobha's uncle came up with an idea, "Cook us a vegetarian feast like this one. If we like it, you can go to America. If we don't, you stay here." (Narayan 106). Her future hung on her ability to cook, to mix flavours and spices. Even though she had seen her maternal and paternal grandmothers churning out delicious feasts for hordes of visitors and her mother who cooked appetising meals effortlessly, Sobha had never ventured into the kitchen to cook a meal. This was a challenge she embraced wholeheartedly because she badly wanted to go to the US for higher education. At the end of the feast she prepared, her family members could not stop themselves from eating. Her grandfather, Nalla-pa, who had a demanding palate, ate so much that he belched unapologetically, which meant Sobha was going to America.

Sobha encountered Feminism for the first time at Mount Holyoke and learned that it is about choices and freedom. She compares Indian women with their American counterparts. She says that rules and traditions bound women like her mother, but they still had achieved many things like these women in America. When the American women question and overthrow the system, Indian women navigate within the system's confines and achieve their goals. Which made a woman happier, Sobha is not sure. What Sobha Narayan has done for herself is that -she has stuck to her roots, the culture and tradition that she grew up in, and has successfully concocted a new identity as a bold career woman. In this journey to selfhood and independence, the food and traditions of her parent culture have been crucial for her. Food and cooking here function as tools of liberation and not as instruments of oppression, suppressing the potential of women. Food has helped Sobha realise her dream of foreign education, at first to go to America and then to stay an extra year there. Food opened new arenas for her, both personally and professionally.

Madhur Jaffrey's Taste Trail

Madhur Jaffrey is an Indian origin British writer, actor and culinary figure. In her delectable memoir *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India*, Jaffrey draws a colourful pen picture of the myriad smells and tastes she grew up on, stimulating her passion for food. In the Prologue of her book, Jaffrey narrates how flavours and aromas have played a pivotal role in her life right from the day she was born. Like in Narayan's memoir, Jaffrey also starts by recounting her first food memory- her grandmother welcomed her to this world with sacred blessings with honey put on her tongue. There are many similarities in these memoirists' life journeys. Both Sobha Narayan and Jaffrey left India for the US and England for higher studies.

When she reached England, Jaffrey hardly knew to cook; she was far from the Culinary Guru that she is today. However, her childhood tastes and smells were inside her, enriching her palette. "...I could not cook at all, but my palate had already recorded millions of flavours. From cumin to ginger, they were all in my head; waiting to be called to service...I could even 'hear' the honey on my tongue." (Jaffrey xiv). Jaffrey calls this "taste memory". This taste memory shapes an individual, and it is something one will carry with oneself wherever one travels and till the end of one's life. Young Jaffrey, who left for England, carried in her mind the heady aroma of spices and flavours that she tasted and smelled as a child, and this, in turn, has moulded her tastes as an adult. As an Indian living in England, this taste memory is what kept her going.

Jaffrey points out that "...that so much of my past would always remain my present." (231). This underscores the importance of food in moulding individual identity. She emphasises the taste memory, which emphasises her ancestry and its traditions:

The innocent Indian honey of my infancy was now mixed with pungent Indian spices, the sour and bitter, the nutty and the aromatic. Interwoven with these flavours, like tenacious creepers, were births, deaths, illnesses, caste and creed. Yet somewhere in my depths, each bite, each taste of all I had

eaten lay catalogued in some pristine file, ready to be drawn up when the moment was ripe (Jaffrey 231).

The tastes and flavours that an individual grows up with will remain with him/her until death.

Jaffrey brings a food memory each into her narrative to portray family dynamics. She depicts interactions between her uncle Shibbu dada and the children and calls him the Pied Piper for the family's young ones, as he arranged fun and games eliciting delight in the children. She recalls special visits to their home, arranged by Shibbu dada, of the 'khomcha-wallah', seller of coveted food delicacies, "hot, sour and savoury snacks known through much of North India as chaat" (Jaffrey 69). The narrator recounts how the 'khomcha-wallah' would bring half-prepared foods, such as fried split-pea patties, with him and finish preparing the treats like 'dahi baras' in front of his eager customers, adding their selection of spices, sauces, and yoghurt blended together and placed atop the food. There is a mouth watering description of chaat preparation by the 'khomcha-wallah'. This food experience is portrayed as gastronomic heaven for the children. Jaffrey likens it to giving Western children the opportunity to spend an entire afternoon in a candy store (Jaffrey 68).

The Tiffin Carrier lunches are another instance referred to by both authors, and the graphic description of the Tiffin-carrier lunches that Jaffrey and her friends enjoyed in school helps to bring out the diversity of India's culinary traditions. She explains that even though the ingredients were the same, the taste was entirely different, and each food item represented a particular culture and religion- the Muslim food brought by her friends Abida and Zahida, the Jain food of Sudha and Promela, who brought Punjabi food.

Jaffrey's book is suffused with nostalgia. The author recalls images of bygone days joyfully. She recalls her trips with her mother to 'Parathe Vali Gulley' in Old Delhi, where they devoured steaming hot 'parathas'. The past is here idealised and romanticised. Jaffrey describes her mother as a woman of "uncommon intelligence" (Jaffrey 31); She did everything to perfection, be it cooking, sewing or embroidery. Jaffrey feels she has inherited her mother's desire to

excel. However, unlike her mother, who was not educated and quietly accepted society's limitations, Jaffrey rebelled against conventions and her "loving and indulgent parents" (Jaffrey 32) let her choose her own path in life. Through this memoir, Jaffrey reaffirms that the tastes and flavours she imbibed in her childhood have helped her build her identity as a Food Connoisseur and Food Writer. The tastes she grew up with have also served as an emotional anchor to her in her adult life abroad.

Conclusion

A negotiation and reconnection with their origins precede the migration to the West for both Narayan and Jaffrey. In her memoir, Shoba Narayan says: "I was ready to embrace Indian food, using childhood memories and hastily written recipes as my guide." (194). The culinary memoirists not only use this subgenre as a venue to trace their life story but also to redefine cultural markers. The culinary memoir is a hybrid genre, poised between cookbook and autobiography; it recounts the dilemma of the members of the Diaspora and depicts an intense uneasiness that Shoba Narayan pinpoints in *Monsoon Diary* "it's about juggling cultures, straddling lifestyles, never fitting in anywhere, questioning the values that you have grown up with, and having your kids grow up as Americans." (104).

Preserving relics from the past is a gesture of comfort and consolation for members of the Diaspora. It is a means of cultivating roots and consolidating a fragmented identity. It is a therapeutic activity in which recipes and associated rituals are recorded to preserve the past-particular events, social rituals and traditions in the case of culinary memoirs. These memoirs depict food-assisted personal metamorphosis and the chance of taking one's life in hand. The popular notion regarding food and cooking is that it is a tool of oppression. However, home cooking and kitchens can be seen as domains where aspirations and desires take root; as places that allow identities to emerge; especially in the case of the Diasporic community, it leads to personal and cultural deterritorialization yet completes the endless pursuit of an identity that accepts the present and appreciates and celebrates the past.

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Unearthing the Roots of Food Gifts in Japan: A Tradition or an Invented Tradition?

Anjali. A. R.

Abstract

Gift-giving is a gesture that cuts across cultures as a universally performed phenomenon, practiced in order to position oneself within the framework of a society as a social being, by building bonds and reinforcing relationships. Beyond the belief of gift-giving as a purely altruistic act performed out of intimacy and affection of the giver towards the receiver, it is a habit with hidden motives threaded to it, in-filling it with layers of social, psychological, cultural, and economic meanings, thereby turning it away from an act of innocence. In Japan, gift-giving is a frequently and celebratedly carried out societal function, observed under rigid rules and regulations. The gift-giving occasions in Japan can be based on a tradition rooted in religion, some developed through the influence of the West and other cultures, and the remaining newly emerging as a reflection of the changing social behaviour and patterns. In that sense, one is critical of certain gift-giving practices in today's Japan, and is caught up within the network of both traditions and invented traditions. The present study is an attempt to explore the escalating exchange of food gifts in Japan, and to critically look into the trend as an outcome of Japanese tradition or a tradition invented to boost the sales of food industries in Japan.

Keywords: Gift-giving, Japan, Food gifts, Tradition, Invented tradition, Food Industries

Virtually any resource, whether tangible or intangible, can be transformed into a gift. Objects, services, and experiences may be conferred as gifts. The transformation from resource to gift occur through the vehicles of social relationships and giving occasions. Gifts are frequently context-bound, and canons of propriety tailored to specific situations... Designations of "gift" may arise through cultural convention, or through such directed intervention strategies as advertising.

(Sherry 160)

These lines included in “Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective” as a way of defining gifts capture the very essence of the concept of gift. It conveys the idea of what constitutes a gift and how any resource can be transformed into a gift depending upon the relationship shared between the giver and the recipient and the gift-giving occasion. It also sheds light on the fact that gifts attain their meaning only from the context within which the exchange occurs, therefore marking it as a context-bound phenomenon, defining itself with respect to the specific situations in which it is exchanged. This can also be read as a practice that is culturally rooted and ritually performed based on traditions of a particular region and also shaped by the strategies of advertising that modify itself in pace with the far-changing society by capturing the most recent trends. The primary function of gift-giving as a universal phenomenon is to position oneself within the framework of a society as a social being, by building bonds and reinforcing relationships. But, the gesture of gift-giving is infused with a collection of cultural, social, psychological, and economic dimensions, thereby turning it into a highly symbolic and semiotic system with hidden motives and also taking it beyond an act of innocence performed out of affection and intimacy of the giver towards the recipient.

Gift-giving in Japan with its unique position in the history of Japanese culture is a frequently and celebratedly carried out societal function, observed under rigid rules and regulations, thereby making the practice “a minor institution in Japan, with complex rules defining who should give to whom, on what occasions he should give, what sort of gift is appropriate on a given occasion, and how the gift should be presented” (Befu 445). In Japan, gift wrapping is equally significant as what is presented, where the colours chosen, the type of knot used, and the decoration attached (*noshi* is attached or printed only for good occasions) are deeply loaded with meanings. The number of gifts presented is also of utmost importance, where gifts in pairs are considered as a symbol of luckiness and gifts presented as four (it is pronounced similar to the word death in Japanese) and nine (pronounced similar to the word suffering) are extremely unlikely.

Every nation is caught in the obligation of reciprocity in gift-giving, and Japan is strictly rooted to this act of reciprocity in its gift-

giving tradition, where one receives numerous gifts depending upon the occasion, but at the same time, is expected to close the cycle by reciprocating a gift of equal value as a sense of expressing gratitude towards the presenter. While referring to the system of *potlatch* in Northwest America, Marcel Mauss writes – “The obligation to reciprocate constitutes the essence of the potlatch...”, in addition to the other two obligations – the obligation to give and the obligation to receive (53).

In Japan, depending upon the relationship shared between the giver and the receiver and the motivation behind the presentation, the gift-giving tradition can be categorised into two – *okurimono* (gifts offered to those of inferior or equal status with the aim of seeking love, respect, obedience, and support) and *shinmotsu* (gifts offered out of respect to those of superior status with the motive of seeking support and protection) (Guerin 3). The tradition of *shinmotsu* existed long back as a religious custom as offerings to the god, expecting support, protection, good health, and well-being as rewards. The customary gift-giving practices of Japan include *ochugen* (the July or half-yearly gift tradition), *oseibo* (the December or year-end gift tradition), *omiyage* (gifts presented to friends and relatives after returning from a trip), *temiyage* (thank-you gifts), *senbetsu* (farewell gifts), *okaeshi* (return gifts), *otoshidama* (New Year gifts), *omimai* (gifts for the sick), *kekkon* (marriage gifts), *iwai* (celebratory or congratulatory gifts), *kouden* (funeral offerings or condolence gift) and other gifts like Birthday gifts, Christmas gifts, Valentine’s day and White day gifts. The gift-giving tradition in Japan has undergone tremendous transitions accommodating the changes within the modernised Japan – 1) the tradition of gift-giving traced back to the ancient rituals of offering gifts to deity has transformed into a custom practiced in a more secularised fashion marking the loss of religious significance in gift-giving, 2) the idea of ‘collective’ gift-giving (presented as a common gift to a family) changed into an individual based system of gift-giving (gifts presented between individuals to express affection), 3) the gift-giving based on the concept of *giri* (the social obligation to give) turned into a more “ulteriorly motivated” practice, and 4) a weakly developed altruism replaced a “self-sacrificing devotion” for reciprocity (Befu 455). The present study aims to analyse the changing gift-giving behaviours, explore the

escalating exchange of food gifts, and critically look into these trends as an outcome of Japanese tradition or a tradition invented to boost the sales of food industries in Japan.

Escalating Exchange of Food Gifts in Japan

One of the most common forms of gift-giving is the presentation of food. Food forms such an important part of gift-giving for a number of reasons: Food is an ‘intimate’ gift, implying comfort and closeness. Food is a primary need for humans and offering it implies emotional support. And food is a gift which covers a wide range of prices, and can thus be made appropriate for almost any occasion.

(Ashkenazi 1)

The above lines explain the reasons behind why food gifts qualify as the most appropriate item for gift-giving in Japan. Compared to other countries, Japan intertwined with its rich history of widely celebrated food culture, exhibits an escalating trend of food gifts exchanged as the most common gift item for their gift-giving tradition. A typical *omiyage* (translated as “local produce”) is usually cookies, candies, cakes, alcohol and other snacks specific to that region visited, wrapped and brought to be gifted to one’s friends and relatives. The gifts preferred for *oseibo* gift season are mainly confectioneries, snacks, special fruits and alcohol, selected depending upon the taste of the receiver in mind. Valentine’s day is uniquely designed in Japan, where women are obliged to give gifts to men on that day, and in return, men reciprocate their love through gifts on White day, which is celebrated a month later. These are boom days for the food industries in Japan, where chocolates, candies and cookies form the commonly exchanged gift items. In contemporary Japan, Valentine’s day is not restricted to couples alone and is again an added advantage for the food industries, where there are different types of chocolates sold as gifts – *Giri Choco* (Obligation chocolates), *Honmei Choco* (True love chocolates), *Fami Choco* (Chocolates for family members), *Tomo Choco* (Chocolates for friends), *My Choco* (Chocolates for oneself) and *Gyaku Choco* (Reverse chocolates) (“Valentine’s”). In general, there are a handful of occasions in Japan where food gifts are exchanged as part of the gift-giving tradition.

In a research summary titled “Food Gift Market in Japan: Key Research Findings 2017” by Yano Research Institute Ltd. in 2018, one of the key findings is stated as ‘domestic food gift market in 2017 rises to 4,100 billion yen’ (1). According to the report, it shows a decline in the practice of *oseibo* and *ochugen*, but a more casual exchange of food gifts became the trend, thereby leading to the estimation that the food gift exchange market will exhibit a rise to reach 4,150 billion yen in 2018. The trend was observed in food items like sweets/confectionery, processed food, fresh food, condiment/cooking oil, beverages and liquor. The gradual rise in the domestic food gift market size was researched from the year 2014 to 2018, marking the market size as 36,920 (Hundred Million Yen) in 2014, 38,460 in 2015, 39,900 in 2016, 41,000 in 2017, and 41,500 (estimated) in 2018. A recent report notes that “Although there were positive sales movements for mid-year summer gift season (*ochugen*), for luxury products, and the highest ever for e-commerce, overall sales remained sluggish as the number of store-visiting customers decreased due to the harsh rainy season, the resurgence of COVID-19, and deconcentrating large summer sales at stores. Data from the Japan Department Store Association showed food sales down by 11.5 percent from July 2019” (“Japan”).

Even though the practice of food gifts being exchanged showcased an upward trend, there is a parallel trend where gift-giving occasions are not strictly followed. As discussed earlier, there were tremendous transitions in this tradition in modern Japan. *Oseibo* and *ochugen*, which is close to the heart of Japanese people as two traditional gift-giving seasons in Japan have shown a decline, where they are not followed as they were in the past. It became less prevalent among the youth as well as in the cities, due to the changing thoughts and perceptions of the youth and the urban dwellers in Japan and mostly remains strong among older generations and in rural Japan. Another reason for the declining trend is that a part of the population is denying gift-giving as an obligation to be followed and instead attempting to make it a more intimate exchange out of affection. Moreover, they believe that one shall not await the gift-giving season but immediately reciprocate and express their feelings through gifts (Kyle). The chocolate industry is facing a decline in sales when Valentine’s day gift-giving is beginning to be seen as a

more gendered gift-giving ritual, where a recent report reads – “Shifting gender politics and the corona virus have combined to spell the possible end of the Japanese Valentine’s Day custom of women giving chocolates to male colleagues” (McCurry). But the day is turning as a way to gift oneself, rather than exchanging chocolates with men, thereby maintaining the sales of the chocolate industries even when encountering a slight decline (Minowa et al. 53). Even when the gift-giving traditions are fading in Japan due to many reasons as discussed, the trend of food gifts selected as an item for exchange is rising according to the reports. The pandemic conditions are adding fuel to the fire, where gift-giving seasons witnessed a decrease in the number of customers visiting the stores.

Food Gifts as a Tradition

The origin and development of gift-giving as a tradition in Japan can be pinned down to a supernatural past, where people made offerings to the god. The study of this same past leads us to the reason why food gifts are popular in Japan and is revived today as part of Japanese tradition, as those offerings were mainly in the form of food. Even today, this custom of offering food is practised in Japan, where in many houses, food is offered to deceased family members and village shrines, and the celebration of New Year also involves offering rice cakes to god. *Naorai*, understood in the present day as a feast scheduled after a festival at the shrine, where they are made to share the sacred food and drink, was historically considered as food gifts to god, and they were returned by god to the people to be shared together, as a way of transferring the divine powers and blessing them. Food in the form of a communal meal is thus considered to be infilled with certain magical powers, and sharing food is also a symbol of transferring good energy and health. In Japan, offering food gifts to a person in bad health is common, where it is believed that the person is cured by the power of the healthy through the food gift given.

The motive behind the use of food as a major item for gift-giving in today’s Japan going back to this system of commensality is clearly stated by Befu – “It is because communion with supernatural beings was achieved primarily through commensality that offerings to gods were, and still are, largely foodstuff, and also that even now food is

considered as the traditional type of gift in Japan and that in fact it is the most popular type of gift” (448). Thus, the preference and love of Japanese people for food gifts is strongly rooted in the tradition of commensality, where they are exchanged as a way of transferring love and good health.

Food Gifts as an Invented Tradition

“Invented Tradition” is a term coined in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) (edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger), where it states that,

traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented... 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (Hobsbawm 1)

He also explains how in the rift between “constant changes and innovation of the modern life” and in an “attempt to structure at least some parts of the social life” as unchanging, invented traditions are becoming popular in standing between the two.

Invented traditions are part and parcel of all spheres of life, where in every society there are a number of customs practiced in the name of tradition, but on a deeper analysis, unfolds itself as a habit quite recent in origin, developed to ensure continuity with the past or as an effort to make certain things invariable when the modern world is constantly changing. Traditions are often interconnected with a sense of belonging and affect, and therefore, representing tradition, certain practices are created as traditions for political plays in various fields of activities. The same trend is visible in the case of food industries with the commodification of nostalgia, where unusual connections are constructed between a particular cuisine and an event of the past, and sold as traditional food items to boost sales. In Japan, gift-giving is followed as part of its tradition, but there were reports suggesting the escalating trend in the exchange of food gifts, even when the gift-giving tradition itself is fading in Japan. As discussed in the previous part, the food gifts in Japan have a tradition of their own, so the rising

demand for food gifts in the background of declining gift-giving tradition in Japan, can be understood as the way food gifts are reinvented as a tradition, as a part of market strategies to increase the sales.

Oseibo and *ochugen* are considered as traditional Japanese customs, which claims its origin in the 1600s (Edo Period), where people exchanged gifts to those they are indebted to, or it is said to have its root set in the ancient practice of food offerings to god or ancestral offerings. On one side, there is an attempt to guard this tradition by the countryside dwellers and older generations that there is an increase in the food gifts purchased according to the reports. On the other side, both these traditions are fading away. *Oseibo* is fading as a tradition because

many younger Japanese think of *oseibo* gift exchanges as something that their parents do, or that their relatives in the countryside enjoy, but not something that applies to them. The original meaning of a “thank you” has been weakened, and instead the expectation of exchanging *oseibo* has come by many to be viewed as an unwelcome and burdensome obligation. (Kopp)

This is true with both the traditions, where they are facing a fall in practice in the urban Japan and among the youngsters. But still, the food industries are not economically suffering, as they were successful in playing a game that captures the youngsters, where they neglecting *oseibo* as an obligation, is today caught in a more private exchange of Christmas presents, as both happens in the month of December. Beyond the idea of food gifts being exchanged, the Christmas dinner that has entered the Japanese tradition, is a tradition invented. For Japanese people, a Christmas without cakes and Kentucky Fried Chicken dinner, is very upsetting. The economic boom in Japan during the 1940s and 50s, opened Japan towards the necessity to emulate Western culture in food, fashion etc., and in the rapid globalisation period during the 1970s and 80s, Japan witnessed the sprouting of many Western food brands in Tokyo. KFC found its first outlet in Japan in 1970, and by 1981, more than 300 KFC stores were opened. It was easy to implement the KFC Christmas dinner in Japan, as KFC chicken had a flavor similar to many traditional

Japanese dishes as well as promoted enjoying a family meal together, which is core to the practice of eating together in Japan. So, with the introduction of KFC Christmas dinner, from the 1970s onwards, we have Japanese people celebrating Christmas with a KFC meal together, which later became synonymous with Christmas in Japan and thus, a part of Japanese tradition (Springer). Like Christmas, which was introduced to Japan under the western influence, Valentine's day in Japan possesses a similar history. Valentine's day in Japan has a unique history as discussed earlier, even when it is a western imported culture. It entered the Japanese tradition by being different from the usual Valentine's day procedures in the West. It is a day when women exchange chocolates to men, and men have a separate day to reciprocate the gifts received a month later on March 14 - White Day. In a study "Social Change and Gendered Gift-Giving Rituals: A Historical Analysis of Valentine's Day in Japan", one could understand how the marketing strategies for advertising Valentine's day gifts changed in response to the changing "social values, consumer ideology, gender roles and power relationships in Japanese society over the past 50 years" (Minowa et al. 45). With slight changes added to the advertisements reflecting the changing gender politics in Japan, the new ways of celebrating Valentine's day entered into the tradition by ensuring a continuity with the past to be treated as a tradition, but on a deeper thought they are traditions invented to bring in a rise in market sales. At a point when the practice of Valentine's day gift-giving began to be frowned upon as a gendered ritual, the markets manufactured different chocolates, when women showed an increased tendency to gift their friends and themselves on Valentine's day. *Omiyage* is another tradition close to Japanese people, which is believed to be rooted in the ancient custom of travelling long distances to offer prayers at shrines, where they buy local goods or religious objects to be given to their relatives and neighbours. The tradition helped many industries to achieve an economic boom, where they are basically destined with the duty to create traditions and are expected to help evoke certain food memories in the people who consumes it. Every place has its own unique local food items wrapped as gifts, where there is a direct link between the place and the food item, that a particular food item consumed is expected to evoke memories of that place (Ashkenazi 1). Even when people are caught in a set of false memories created

through such constructed connections, they are exposing the Japanese society to its wide variety of food items and thereby, unite people through food in a world where people are having a compartmentalised existence in a modern society. Also, people segregated by geographical boundaries in Japan began to bring in local cuisines unique to their region as a way of shaping local histories through food as a reaction to the growing metropolitanism and modernisation, which is said to erase traditional Japanese food memories (Ashkenazi 4). So, in the name of a tradition, marketers are shaping our food choices and defining what constitutes traditional Japanese cuisines, which can be seen as an example for how a collection of invented traditions resides within a tradition.

So, many gift-giving practices that lie interconnected to the Japanese culture and believed to be part of Japanese gift-giving tradition today, are recently created as a continuation of the traditional gift-giving practices in Japan. Whenever the society undergoes changes, new gift-giving practices were invented as a continuation to the traditional practices, to suit the needs and desires of the society. This is true with the food industries, where they are in a constant race to find a space in the modern market and in the minds of the consumers, by shaping them according to the perceptions of the society, so as to be with the unstable and changing modern world. The link they reinvent between tradition and food items, is a technique to boost the sales by reviving lost memories in the consumers through such connections made. It is the same reason behind food gifts turning as a popular gift item for the gift-giving occasions in Japan.

Conclusion

The paper explored the unique gift-giving practice in Japan, the different types of gift-giving occasions, the recent reports stating the rising trend in the exchange of food gifts even when the gift-giving as a tradition is falling apart, and more importantly, it was an attempt to critically look into the escalating trends in the exchange of food gifts and understand whether it was based on Japanese tradition or an invented tradition. Japanese people are framed into a complex combination of both traditions and invented traditions, where they practice them as part of their tradition. Many gift-giving traditions in

Japan are based on influences from the West or invented part of the market strategies, beyond its rootedness in Japanese religion. The study helps locate various gift-giving traditions in Japan as an interwoven network of traditions and invented traditions. Both Christmas and Valentine's day are celebrations imported from the Western culture, where they have entered the Japanese culture undergoing many changes, to qualify as a celebration unique to Japan. With the synonymous connection Christmas established with KFC Christmas dinner and the modification made to Valentine's day as a day for women and developing a day called White day for the men of the society, Japan was making them unique to Japanese tradition, where one very clearly knows that they are invented traditions. Similarly, the study sheds light on how in the name of tradition, many traditions are invented by ensuring continuity with the past events, reflecting the changing social values and ideologies, as in Valentine's day. How invented traditions are created within a tradition, was looked upon through the practice of *omiyage* in Japan, where it helps understand the way market shapes our notion of traditional cuisines by evoking false memories. As Friedrich Nietzsche defines truth as "a lie agreed upon", "tradition is an agreed-upon recourse to elements of the past, so that they may constitute the present" (Ashkenazi 4). Thus, the gift-giving practices are shaped within the complex network of both Japanese tradition and invented traditions, thereby blurring the distinction between the two.

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Advertisements of Beauty Enhancing Products: An Interpersonal Analysis

Avinash Chander

Abstract

The present paper focuses on the selected advertisements published in various Indian magazines with the purpose of analyzing the concept of beauty in the context of the ideology of an 'ideal' Indian woman. The paper makes use of Systemic Functional Linguistics as a theoretical framework for the purpose of analysis. The choice is based on the assumption that all texts – literary and non-literary, minor and major – can be subjected to linguistic scrutiny to understand their underlying ideology. The study aims to reveal the dichotomy between the implied purpose and actual purpose of the corporate houses. The linguistic means employed by the advertisers to allure the prospective customers and to sell their products are the focus of investigation. The study brings together the diverse fields of linguistics, mass media, sociology and philosophy on a single platform. The paper intends to explore the way the linguistic, feminist, material, cultural, commercial and global issues interact with each other to construct the concept of an 'ideal' Indian woman. In this paper, an attempt is made to analyze the selected advertisements of beauty enhancing products published in various Indian magazines from interpersonal perspective. The advertisers make use of certain specific linguistic structure to allure the prospective consumers towards their respective products.

Keywords: Advertisements, Beauty, Interpersonal, Structure, Function, Linguistic

This paper is an attempt to examine advertisements of beauty enhancing products published in various Indian magazines like 'Filmfare', 'Stardust', 'Femina', 'Good Housekeeping', 'Bridal', 'New Woman', 'Woman's Era', 'Vogue', 'Savvy' etc. from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The advertisers make use of certain lexico-grammatical structures to allure the prospective buyers towards their specific brand/s. Obviously, the purpose is to produce a positive image of the brand in the minds of

the target readers and to get maximum financial returns. But in the process of achieving their objectives, the advertisers also tend to create an idealized image of the target readers.

The interpersonal function of language focuses on the way one interacts with people and establishes and maintains relations with them. It is used to influence the behavior and attitude of the addressee as well as to express the addresser's attitude and behavior. It is used to provide information to the addressee as well as to get information from him/her. Systemic Functional Linguistic is based on the assumption that interaction is an inherent function of language. It implies that there are certain linguistic structures that enable one to communicate through language. The present research paper is an attempt to trace those linguistic structures that advertisers have employed to exchange their ideas about the issues of beauty in the context of Indian women.

Objectives of Study

1. To explore the linguistic strategies used by the advertisers to allure the readers towards their specific brand.
2. To provide insight into the ways through which the readers are unconsciously being exposed to and made part of the ideological positions taken by the advertisers.
3. To find out why a particular advertisement means what it does.

Theoretical Framework of Study

The advertisements of beauty enhancing products under study are analyzed by using the theoretical framework provided by Systemic Functional Linguistics. This theoretical framework gives equal importance to structural as well as functional aspects of language and "interprets language as a system network of meaning potential" (Morley: 1985, 42). It takes into account not only the paradigmatic relations of systems, but also the syntagmatic relations of structure and sequence.

Systemic Functional Linguistics deals with the way language functions in social and cultural contexts. It demonstrates the various

purposes served by the language and the way these are realized at the lexico-grammatical level. It puts forward three grammatical relevant functions of language: i. Ideational Function, ii. Interpersonal Function, and iii. Textual Function.

1. Ideational Function

The Ideational function of language deals with the expression of content. Through this function, the speaker or the writer embodies in language his experiences of the phenomenon of the real world. These include his experiences of the internal world of his consciousness, his reactions, cognitions and perceptions and also his linguistic acts of speaking and understanding.

The Experiential meanings in a language are expressed through the system of Transitivity. Transitivity is the linguistic representation of extra linguistic experience. This experience may be concerned with the phenomena of the external world or with one's feelings, thoughts and perceptions. In Transitivity system there are options available to the speaker to encode his experiences of the external world and of his own consciousness. The various experiences are represented in language through Processes, Participants and Circumstances attached with them.

2. Interpersonal Function

The Interpersonal function of language deals with constructing interaction. Language is organized as an interactive event where the writer and the reader engage themselves in social and discursal relations. It expresses the writer's comments, attitudes, evaluation and the relationships that he sets up between himself and the reader. It also expresses the communication roles adopted by the writer. It may be of informing, questioning, persuading and the like. Interpersonal function is realized at the lexico-grammatical level mainly through three systems of Mood, Modality and Appraisal.

Interpersonal function covers two main areas. One is concerned with the type of commodity being exchanged and the other with type of interaction taking place. Language can be used to exchange information as well as goods and services. The interactive roles are

of two types, i.e., of demanding and giving. In other words, the interactant can demand information or he can give it and similarly he can demand goods and services and give them. The most usual way of giving information is a statement and the most usual way of demanding information is a question. The most usual way of demanding goods and services is a command or order. There is, however, no linguistically straightforward way of giving goods and services.

2.1. Mood System

At the interpersonal level, the major system that enacts roles is of Mood. It has systems of Polarity, Modality and Appraisal associated with it. Mood refers to clause types, such as Interrogative, Imperative and Declarative. These patterns deal with the presence and arrangement of certain elements in the structure of a clause. In other words, the component of the clause, which carries a particular speech function, is called Mood. Mood is made up of two components – the Subject and the Finite. Polarity is concerned with whether the clause elements are asserted or negated.

2.1.1. Subject

The Subject is the person or thing with which/whom the proposition is concerned. There can be no argument or negotiation without Subject. The Subject is generally a nominal element in a clause.

2.1.2. Finite

The Finite expresses the Process part of the clause that makes it possible to argue about the Subject Participant. The Finite is always a verbal element, i.e., it is always realized through a verbal group. Verbal group in a clause may consist of one word only or it may consist of more than one word. Where the verbal group consists of more than one word, the Finite is always and only the first element in this verbal group, and corresponds to what is conventionally called the ‘auxiliary verb’. Where the verbal group consists of only one word, the Finite and the Predicator are realized in that single word.

2.1.3. Predicator

The Predicator provides content to the verbal element of the proposition. It tells the listeners what is happening. Like the Finite, the Predicator is expressed within the verbal group. The verbal group may consist of a single word or several words. When there is more than one element within the verbal group, the Predicator is all the constituents of the verbal group minus the Finite. When there is only one constituent in the verbal group, then that constituent is functioning both as Finite and as Predicator. This is the case with the simple present or the simple past tense of a verb.

2.1.4. Complement

The Complement is a participant that is somehow implicated in the proposition, but is not the pivotal participant. Like the Subject, the Complement is expressed by a nominal group. This indicates that there can be two nominal groups in a clause, one, which is the Subject, and the other, which is the Complement. The Complement is that nominal group in the clause, which could be made the Subject but has not. Complements are most frequently realized by nominal groups consisting of articles, a head noun and limited number of qualifying elements.

2.1.5. Adjunct

Adjuncts are elements that are additional to the proposition. Their function is to provide additional information about the events expressed in the proposition. They are expressed through all parts of speech except those that are used to express Subjects, Complements, Finites and Predicators. They are expressed by prepositional phrases, adverbs and adverbial groups, or conjunctions. All Adjuncts have two points in common:

- A. They are not pivotal to the clause. They could be left out and the clause would still make sense, although it would not be as informative.
- B. They are elements that cannot be made Subject since nominal groups do not express them.

2.2. Modality System

Modality can be defined as the grammatical resource by which speakers / writers communicate degrees of their opinions. It can be seen as the intermediate space between the positive and the negative poles, or various kinds of indeterminacy that fall in between.

Positive	
Negative	
Yes	certainly, maybe, possibly, etc.
No	-----
Always	usually, often, seldom, rarely
Never	

2.3 . Appraisal System

The Appraisal system is concerned with attitudinal lexis and lexical choices. In the words of Martin (2000: 145), Appraisal systems are the lexico-grammatical resources used to express and negotiate emotions, judgements and evaluations, together with resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations. This system provides a rich and evolving framework for analyzing interpersonal and social relations in a text. The system, which is grounded in SFL, concerns itself with “how speakers and writers adopt inter-subjective and ideological positions in their texts through positive and negative evaluations of the attitudes towards people, objects and events” (Arlene Harvey 2004: 254). A chief advantage of the Appraisal system is that it takes into consideration the non-linguistic features of the text under analysis. This system can be divided into two categories – Attitude and Graduation.

3. Textual Function

Textual Function enables the writers / speakers to construct texts and enables the readers / listeners to distinguish a text from a random set of sentences. This function is internal to the language and is instrumental to the other two functions namely Ideational and Interpersonal. At lexico-grammatical level, this meta-function is realized through the Thematic and Information Structures and various Cohesive devices.

Analysis of Advertisements

The advertisements selected for analysis belong to the field of 'beauty'. It is obvious that the purpose of the advertisers is to persuade the readers about the utility of their product and also to allure them to purchase the product. The hidden motive is to get maximum profit out of this interaction. While doing so the advertisers assume certain roles and they also assign certain roles to the readers. Sometimes, they exchange information about the product with the readers and at other times they direct the readers to do something. Most of the time, they take the readers into confidence and assume the role of their well-wishers. But sometimes, they also give them a kind of veiled threat and tell them what they are going to lose if they do not use the recommended product. An interpersonal analysis brings to the fore the attitude of the advertisers towards the readers as well as the kind of relationship they establish with them.

1. **Lakme Hairnext:** In the advertisement of Lakme Hairnext, the advertiser exchanges information about the product with the readers in four of the clauses. He assumes the role of giver of information and assigns the readers the role of receiver of information. In this way, he assumes the role of a superior being who has all the information regarding the product while the readers are presented as ignorant ones. This is done by the use of Declarative sentences. Then in the other four clauses he directs the readers to do something. Here again, he assumes the role of a person in power while the readers are presented as obedient ones. This is done by use of Imperative sentences.

Proportion of Mood Types in the Advertisement of Lakme Hairnext

	Declarative	Imperative	Interrogative
Total - 08	04 50%	04 50%	0 0%

As the purpose of the advertisement is to create a positive image about the product in the minds of the readers, all the clauses used in the advertisement are of positive polarity. There is only one

modal operator used viz. 'It's really'. The purpose is to enhance the degree of the following clause. The advertiser wants to bring home the point that it is very simple to get soft and silky hair with the use of Lakme Hairnext.

**Proportion of Polarity in the Advertisement of
Lakme Hairnext**

	Positive	Negative	Modal Operators
Total - 08	08	0	01

2. Dove Whitening Deodorant: The advertisement of Dove Whitening Deodorant contains three clauses and all the three clauses are in the form of statements. It means that the advertiser wants to exchange information with the prospective users of the product. The use of statements further makes it clear that the advertiser assumes the role of giver of information and the prospective buyers are assigned the role of receivers of information.

**Proportion of Mood Types in the Advertisement of
Dove Whitening Deodorant**

	Declarative	Imperative	Interrogative
Total - 03	03 100%	0 0%	0 0%

Similarly, the Polarity used in all the three clause is a Positive one. It indicates that the advertiser is quite confident about the information, he provides in the clauses. There is no use of any Modal operator in the text. It further shows that there is no doubt in the mind of the advertiser regarding the information provided in the text.

**Proportion of Polarity in the Advertisement of
Dove Whitening Deodorant**

	Positive	Negative	Modal Operators
Total - 03	0	0	0

The subject position assigned to various participants is also significant. In one of the clauses the subject is ‘hair removal’ while in the other two clauses it is ‘Dove Whitening Deodorant with ¼ moisturizing cream’. In this way, these elements are made responsible for the success or failure of the clauses as interactive events.

3. Gillette Satin Care: The advertisement of Gillette Satin Care promises to bring out ‘the goddess’ in prospective buyers. The term ‘goddess’ is used to connote exotic beauty. The advertiser has used seven clauses to communicate his message. Of these, two are minor clauses containing infinitives ‘to look’ and ‘to feel’. The first one focuses on the external experience of an individual while the second one on the internal one. The purpose is to communicate to the readers that the use of the product will lead to the satisfaction of their external as well as internal needs. The advertisement contains two Imperative clauses where it directs the readers to perform some action. But one of the actions is an internal one indicated by the Predicate ‘experience’. In this way, an effort is made to control the inner feelings of the users. Similarly, ‘reveal’ focuses on beauty and creates positive feelings in the mind of the readers. There are three clauses in the form of Declarative Statements where the purpose is to communicate the working of Gillette Satin Care. The Subject position is assigned to Gillette Satin Care and hence it is made the core of the exchange between the advertiser and the prospective users.

**Proportion of Mood Types in the Advertisement of
Gillette Satin Care**

	Declarative	Imperative	Interrogative
Total - 05	03 60%	02 40%	0 0%

The Polarity used in all the clauses is a Positive one except in one clause. Even the Negative Polarity ‘not just to look’ is used to enhance the effect. Even the Modal operator ‘unbelievably’ is used to enhance the degree of convenience in the use of this product.

**Proportion of Polarity in the Advertisement of
Gillette Satin Care**

	Positive	Negative	Modal Operators
Total - 05	04	01	01

3. Olay Natural White: The advertisement of Olay Natural White contains four clauses in total and all the clauses are in the form of propositions indicating that the advertisement predominantly deals with exchange of information. The Mood in two of the clauses is Declarative and in two of the clauses is Interrogative. In the clauses containing Interrogative Mood, the advertiser seems to assume the role of seeker of information. But actually, the questions put are rhetorical ones which are used for the sake of emphasis. The answers are provided by the advertiser himself in the form of statements where he provides information regarding the benefits of the product.

**Proportion of Mood Types in the Advertisement of
Olay Natural White**

	Declarative	Imperative	Interrogative
Total - 04	02 50%	0 0%	02 50%

In three out of the four clauses, the Polarity used is positive one. It indicates the certainty level of the advertiser regarding the information provided in the advertisement. There is only one case of negative polarity in the construction type ‘not only ... but also’. Here, it is used to enhance the degree of benefits provided by the product. There is no modal operator used in the advertisement.

**Proportion of Polarity in the Advertisement of
Olay Natural White**

	Positive	Negative	Modal Operators
Total - 04	03	01	0

In the clauses containing Declarative Statement, the Subject position is assigned to Olay Natural White. In this way, the validity of the clauses as interactive events is put on the product itself. The presence of Interrogative clauses in the text makes the advertisement a dialogic one. The readers are involved in the process of interaction and their view is given importance.

5. **Asmi Diamond Jewellery:** The advertisement of Asmi Diamond Jewellery is endorsed by Priyanka Chopra, a film actress and a model. Obviously, the advertiser wants to cash on her ability to communicate. It is based on the assumption that the credibility and popularity of the film star will get transferred to the brand. The Circumstantial Adjunct ‘for the woman of spirit’ shows that this brand is aimed at a specific category of users. The advertiser makes use of three clauses to communicate his message. All the three clauses are in the form of Declarative Statements. It means that the advertisement deals with the exchange of information.

**Proportion of Mood Types in the Advertisement of
Asmi Diamond Jewellery**

	Declarative	Imperative	Interrogative
Total - 03	03 100%	0 0%	0 0%

Polarity wise, all the clauses are of Positive Polarity. There is only one Modal operator ‘believe’ used twice in the advertisement. It indicates high degree of confidence in the brand as well as of the communicator.

**Proportion of Polarity in the Advertisement of
Asmi Diamond Jewellery**

	Positive	Negative	Modal Operators
Total - 03	03	0	2

In two of the clauses, the subject position is assigned to ‘I’, i.e., Priyanka Chopra. It means she performs a key role in the interactive event. She is made an entity by reference to whom the assertion can be affirmed or denied. In one clause, ‘every new day’ is put at the subject position. The assertion has validity only by reference to it.

6. **Amante Lingerie:** The advertisement of Amante Lingerie contains eight clauses in total and all the clauses are of Declarative Mood. It means that the main purpose of the advertiser is to communicate information about the product with the readers. Again, the role of the advertiser is that of a giver of information while the readers are put as receivers of information.

**Proportion of Mood Types in the Advertisement of
Amante Lingerie**

	Declarative	Imperative	Interrogative
Total - 08	08 100%	0 0%	0 0%

Polarity wise, all the eight clauses are of positive Polarity indicating high level of confidence of the advertiser. There is a use of model ‘can’ that falls somewhere between the positive and negative poles. It shows the ability of ‘the right lingerie’:

And the right lingerie **can** flatter your body and make you feel gorgeous.

Then, there is use of the Modal operator ‘believe’:

At Amante, we **believe** every woman is beautiful.

It is high degree Modal operator and shows the faith of the advertiser in the participants mentioned in the Residue. The advertiser’s use of ‘we’ at subject position helps the brand in gaining the confidence of the readers. Then, we have the use of Modal operator ‘thought’:

And you **thought** lingerie is only for models.

It indicates high degree of Modality on the part of the readers. But the advertiser’s purpose is to prove in the rest of the advertisement that the readers’ thinking is not the right one. The product can be used even by the readers.

Proportion of Polarity in the Advertisement of Amante Lingerie

	Positive	Negative	Modal Operators
Total - 08	08	0	03

In different clauses, different participants are put at Subject position. ‘You’, ‘we’, ‘the right lingerie’, ‘our range of innerwear’, ‘designs and fits’ etc. are some of the participants at Subject position. In this way, the advertiser has focused on different entities in the advertisement.

Conclusion

In this way, an analysis of advertisements of Lakme Hairnext, Dove Whitening Deodorant, Gillette Satin Care, Olay Natural White, Asmi Diamond Jewellery, Amante, from the Interpersonal perspective brings to the fore various lexico-grammatical strategies used by the advertisers to communicate with the readers and prospective buyers. The analysis reveals that in majority of the clauses, the dominant Mood is the Declarative one. It shows that the

advertisements are mainly concerned with the exchange of information. Even here the advertisers assume the role of giver of information and the readers are assigned the role of receivers of information. Next to Declarative Mood, the advertisers have used the Imperative Mood where they direct the readers to perform certain actions. Most of the time, it is a direction to use the product or how to use the product. In a few clauses of Interrogative Mood, the advertisers assume the role of receiver of information. But even here, their role is a representative one. They echo the questions which they think are there in the mind of the readers. From the angle of Polarity, most of the clauses are of Positive Polarity. It shows the high confidence level of the advertisers about what they say about the products in the advertisements. The elements put at Subject position in different advertisements are diverse as they deal with different products. But most of the time these are either the product advertised or some attribute of the product or the users themselves.

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Indian Female-led Music Bands and Riot Grrrl Movement: A Critical Study

Kanika Vasishta

Abstract

The present paper explores the female-led music bands in India in the context of the Riot Grrrl movement. Riot Grrrl movement is a subcultural feminist movement that began in Olympia in the 1990s and gradually spread across the globe. It started with their own magazines called *Zines*, punk music, DIY shows, and live concerts as a protest against sexism and patriarchy. In light of this movement, the paper is divided into three sections. The first section examines the Riot Grrrl movement and its significance leading to the second section of the paper. The second section traces the history of female-led music bands in India, such as 'Mad Hatter,' 'Missing Links,' 'Sur Samalaya,' 'The Tetseo Sisters' and many more. The songs were composed and performed as resistance towards gender inequality and related biases and prejudices with an aim to create awareness, support and care for those in need. The third section discusses the aesthetics of Riot Grrrl movement with respect to Indian female-led music bands, followed by conclusion. The Riot Grrrl movement showed that it is up to people, including every gender, to create a path of equality, justice, and peace. Therefore, the paper explores how the Riot Grrrl movement paved a path for female-led music bands to voice their opinion against societal wrong-doings across the globe with a focus on examining its aesthetics in the context of Indian female music bands, in particular.

Keywords: Female-led bands, Indian music bands, Patriarchy, Protest, Riot Grrrl movement

“We are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad,
Girl = Weak.”

(*Riot Grrrl Manifesto*, p.2)

Music is an indispensable part of everyone's life. It has the capacity to uplift moods, cheer up souls and rejuvenate beings from everyday drudgery. There are different kinds of music, such as Rock, Jazz, Rap, and so on. These mainly developed in the west, whereas

the classical music like Hindustani and Carnatic originated in India. Everyone has a unique taste in music. One of the interesting kinds of music is Pop music – its origin is a matter of debate. It was developed in the 1950s and 1960s in west and became a huge hit among the masses. That's why the term "popular" is associated with it. On the one hand, music is a medium of exhibiting one's creativity, on the other hand, it is also a medium of showing resistance, protest, and angst. For example, the Riot Grrrl movement was started in the 1990s by a group of women against sexism, misogyny, and male domination in punk music. It was a time when hyper-masculinity became a norm in punk, and women's influence started fading away. Consequently, the movement was carved out as an alternative space by students, artists, and activists in Olympia, moving to Washington D.C., then across the nation, and after that to England.

Riot Grrrl movement was a subcultural movement that involved feminism, politics, and punk music. It paved the path for budding feminists and angry girls whose voices were unheard or ignored in society. It was set to normalize women's aggression and sexuality, which were socially acceptable for men but not for women. The members of women-led band called 'Bratmobile' came up with the phrase "girl riot" and repeating 'r' was added by an artist named Jen Smith, making it "grrrl." The three r's in "grrrl" signified the ferocity and anger against the unfair treatment given to women, creating a growling effect. In this movement, women started their own magazines called *fanzines* or *zines*, where they wrote about issues that were not considered by mainstream media. It was a movement that made clear that personal is political since the birth of a child. It was filled with energy, resistance, and optimism. They believed that women were free to speak, get aggressive and be loud and expressive. It was all about girl power and female empowerment. It provided space 'to be' without shame.

Women-led bands such as 'Bikini Kill' and 'Bratmobile' created unfiltered music to express their views on gender discrimination, marginality, rape, sexuality, violence, and unappreciated voiceless women. They wrote songs on eating disorders ("Feels Blind" by 'Bikini Kill'), societal expectations for female beauty ("Teenager" by 'Bratmobile'), and other issues such as heteronormativity and queer dynamics, to name a few. They believed that everyone had a story to

tell, but they were usually silenced by society. There was a lot of energy and anger which could work as a unifying force, they affirmed. Many male bands were in conflict with this movement, and some men created chaos in the live shows of women bands. In one of the iconic concerts, bands like 'Heavens to Betsy,' 'Bikini Kill' and 'Bratmobile' performed, and the artist named, Kathleen Hanna urged "girls to the front" so as to unlearn invisibility and hesitation. In addition, it was done to keep women safe from violent acts by male audiences. The Riot Grrrl movement made youngsters aware of feminist concerns and resistance through various mediums – zines, music concerts, organized meet-ups, DIY art, and live shows. Women could create their own rules and discuss sex, queerness, beauty standards, and women issues which were considered taboo in society.

Gradually, this movement began to disintegrate by the late 1990s. It has been critiqued for not being an inclusive movement but a movement exclusively for white women. This space of feminist activism was limited, and no concerns about the intersectionality of race, class, colour were addressed. While it is agreeable that the Riot Grrrl movement did not show solidarity with all women across the world, still it definitely served as a catalyst in awakening feminist concerns throughout. "Girls to the front" became a rallying cry for years, and the aesthetics of Riot Grrrl movement never went away completely. The movement might have died, but its essence is present and carried forward in various parts of the world, such as Europe, Asia, Australia, South America etc. 'Pussy Riot' is a Russian band that came out of Riot Grrrl movement in 2011. They identified themselves as "riot grrrls" and performed on themes of feminism, politics, and queerness. However, the three artists got imprisoned for a protest song against Russian President, Vladimir Putin.

Similarly, various women bands were formed across the globe to give expression to their feelings, which was usually denied in third-world countries like India. In 1962, the first female-fronted band – 'Mad Hatter' was formed by the students of Miranda House, University of Delhi. It was for the first time that women performed on songs composed by their own selves, hence attracting more visibility. However, the band splintered soon. There were quite a few women's music bands that were active in the 1970s and 1980s, but

none of them survived for a long time. Nonetheless, this initiation of creating a women's band in itself was a revolution during that time when women were confined to homes. In the 1970s, 'The Ladybirds' was formed by Farida Vakil, who was also known to be the first woman lead guitarist and vocalist accompanied by other women artists. It was based in Mumbai, then Bombay. Well known singer, Usha Uthup was a part of this group as a jazz vocalist. The women band entered western music in Mumbai, giving competition to male music bands such as 'The Mystiks,' 'The Savages,' and many more. But in a few years, the band fell apart. Farida Vakil had exposure to western music and the Beat movement (which originated in America). The imitation of western music could be seen during this period in India.

'Losers and Weepers' was another women's rock band led by Kumari Koshy, Lata Chandy, and others. It was a band that faced societal hatred and was looked down upon. They would weep and label themselves as losers, hence the name of the group. They were asked to perform in a saree on stage by family members and were accompanied by parents wherever they performed. It could not sustain itself for long and remained active from 1969 to 1972. There was a band called 'Missing Links' in Kochi, a women-fronted rock band that was ahead of its time in the late 1960s. It was also famous as the 'Paul & Mathew Sisters' because of its four members – Sunila and Anila Mathew, Shalet and Rita Paul. The legendary pop singer Usha Uthup was also associated with this group. It experimented with a lot of themes and music but eventually, the band, like the other ones, disintegrated soon. Marriage and studies were the primary reasons for their discontinuation. These women's bands tried to break away from gender prejudices and stereotypes but fell apart too soon. Despite the constant struggle, the survival of such women-led rock bands was not easy amid male-dominated bands. Patriarchal mind set, societal restrictions, and rigid norms made it difficult for women's music bands to continue.

Many women-led rock bands have come up from the Northeastern part of India which aligned with the aesthetics of Riot Grrrl movement in their approach. 'Sur Samalaya' came up in the early 1980s with musical instruments like guitar, mandolin and a pair of bongos. A group of five women from Assam, locked the room,

drew curtains, and kept their music away from the patriarchal society as a protest. In 1994, the 'Tetseo Sisters' was formed as a band in Nagaland. The four sisters performed in traditional clothes and sang a regional song called 'Li' in Chokri dialect along with musical instruments including guitar, khabro, tati and banhum. They promoted their culture and fusion of western and folk music across the world, for example, in Scotland and USA. They were fierce and dominated the performance with their fusion of rock and other forms of music. The stage used to be full of energy with the songs created by these sisters. They were the driving force for many young girls who, too, aspired to be stage performers. Moving to 2000s, 'Affalatus' (meaning divine inspiration) was created by four experienced women musicians from Meghalaya. There was a charismatic approach to mixing music with the rock using guitar, bass and drums. The band made it clear that their love for music brought them together as one unit. They did not deny their influence from Bruno Mars and the music of the Beatles, but most importantly, they drew their influence from life itself. They received numerous awards, including one national award.

There was a time in the early 2000s when a number of female-led bands came forward from the Northeastern part of India. 'Blue Corn' is one of the most popular bands based in Mizoram. The group of three women is famous in their native state and other parts of neighbouring states of Manipur, Meghalaya, and Nagaland. Another rock band from Mizoram is 'Apples,' led by three girls. In 2007, they began their journey of rock music with high energy. They performed retro Mizo versions of hit songs which created their fan following. Mizoram has some really exquisite women's music bands, and 'The Chosen' is yet another one on the list. The six girls have great talent for jamming and mixing rock. The girls got attention for their songs in the native Mizo dialect called "Broken wings" and "We praise you" and were awarded in 2011. The three sisters from Manipur started a revolution with their band called 'Minute of Decay.' The Delhi-based rock band played a fusion of contemporary vocals and medleys. Their affair with music ensured that they would survive, irrespective of their disciplined parents and societal barriers. In 2011, another rock band emerged called 'Hurricane Girls'. This Assam-based group is formed by Mamani Kalita and Arju Begum. They

performed in various states like Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Kolkata. They are like a storm on the stage, as the name of their band suggests, full of energy with fusion music along with instruments such as nagara, drums, guitar, and *dhol*.

Sikkim is also famous for a band of women called 'Genesis of Pink,' formed in 2013. The band aimed to bring a change in society and voice their opinions on delicate issues like rape, violence, and other social concerns. The group of four women addressed various social issues in their compositions. They used rock music and many beats and believe in spreading the message through the medium of their music. Another group was formed in 2013 called 'Vivance – Naga Girls' with an aim to introduce masses with girl power in their songs. This resonated with the aesthetics of Riot Grrrl movement with similar motives. The band of four women created a blend of rock, pop, and Indie music and experimented with its fusion. It came out with "Dream Out Loud" in 2014, which created its fan base. They are involved in foot tapping music as well. Apart from northeast, there were a number of women-led rock bands flourishing in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai. For instance, 'The Vinyl Records' was formed in 2010 by four girls who were into punk, rock, and pop music. This Delhi-based band experimented with Indian rock music and got featured on one of the music channels on Indian television in 2011. Since then, it has gained popularity among the masses and has a great fan following. 'The Void' is a Bengaluru-based women's band that plays on genres like punk, pop, classic, reggae, and rock music. Created in 2014, the band experiments with their compositions and is passionate about music. Mumbai is considered as a city of dreams where many youngsters try their luck. 'Pais and Petticoats' is a women's music band which was formed in Mumbai around 2013. Their experiments with beats and association with pop, punk, folk and rock music make their band unique.

With globalization in the 1990s, India saw a major transformation in pop music. One of the Indian music channels followed the concept of the British reality show and formed India's first mainstream women's music band called 'Viva' in 2002. The band gave a fresh breath of air as it was the first time in the Indian music industry to create an 'all girls' band. A group of five young girls, vivacious in their approach, got amplified by their

performances on stage. They sang against sexism and patriarchy. Their song, “Jaago Zara” became an anthem for girls to reclaim their identity and fight all odds. The song raises relevant questions against oppression and biased societal norms. Another song called “Kali Mai Diya Salaai” is about smashing prejudices and norms against women, dowry, and gives a message of girl empowerment. The band performed songs for the marginalized, oppressed, and downtrodden sections of society and urged the masses to wake up from their slumber and show love, support, and care for those in need. Through the song “Jahan Ho Pyaar Ka Mausam”, they imagined a utopic world full of love and compassion. Clearly, their songs were ahead of their time. Though short-lived, the band made its mark in society. The time when music bands like ‘Euphoria,’ ‘A Band of Boys’ and others were dominating the market, ‘Viva’ made way to audiences’ hearts because of their uniqueness, individuality, and women bonding, which were not common during that time.

Recently, ‘Meri Zindagi’ has attracted attention among the masses because of its rebellious outlook and stand for change. It is the first women ‘mission rock band’ of five, based in Lucknow, whose words are as sharp as a sword. Clad in pink sarees, these bold women write songs on violence, abortion, menstrual hygiene, rape, and other major women’s issues. They draw inspiration from their day-to-day lives and compose songs with hard-hitting lyrics and catchy tunes. They started their journey by composing songs with kitchen utensils (tongs, spoons, plates, etc.) due to a lack of financial support; with their mission to create awareness about gender discrimination and inequality so that people become sensitive to gender issues. They perform to entertain along with a social responsibility to make girls realize their dreams and follow them. The lead singer observed how girls are not adopted in favour of boys from orphanages. This troubled her. Being a doctorate in music, she created ‘Meri Zindagi’ along with other women with similar thinking to bring awareness and change in society. They have released two albums and performed more than 150 shows all over the country. Moreover, they have conducted awareness programmes on girl education, anti-smoking campaign, and the latest campaign on racism (‘Hum kaaley hein’ – ‘we are black’). They are also in the process of opening a radio station online so as to provide a platform for women

to share their experiences and struggles all across the country. They manage to create an environment where women can talk and express themselves freely without shame. 'Meri Zindagi' provides space to feel protected and a voice for the voiceless, marginalized, and oppressed sections of society.

It is observed that the struggle for women's emancipation and freedom of expression has been brewing since the formation of the first-ever women-led rock band, that is 'Mad Hatters' in various parts of the country – Delhi, Mumbai, Assam, Sikkim, Manipur, Nagaland, Chennai. When one notices the chronology of the women-led music bands in India from the early 1960s to the late 2000s, it is quite clear how there is a shift from mere imitation of western music to experimenting with different forms of music. However, women bands were short-lived in the 1960s and 1970s owing to societal pressures and gender stereotypes. But gradually, women are coming forward in their true selves on stage – rebellious, showing protest and resistance through music. From imitation of western forms of music to Indianization of western forms through fusion and other musical experiment, to creating an individual space as women's music bands in India, women have come a long way. India has begun to see the change in the representation of women from ordinary to extraordinary women through resistance, protest, and rebel wherein music is one of the greatest mediums to bring the change. It is simply that our country needs more such 'mission music bands' by women to break the shackles of patriarchy and gender stereotypes.

There is no denying the fact that the world has shown signs of improvement over two decades, but issues like trans women, homophobia, and sexism are still prevalent in society. While there have been phases to revive the Riot Grrrl movement, it is better to learn from the highs and lows of it and make something better out of it. This movement showed a direction, and it is up to people, including every gender, to create a path of equality, justice, and peace.

Despite growing visibility, there is still misogyny, sexism, objectification, and commodification of women. There are still a lot of questions that hang in air as far as solidarity and representation of women are concerned. There is a need for women to realize their

potential and reclaim their space in whichever field they are in. It is high time the society realizes its responsibility and provides equal opportunities to both men and women. It is high time that people unlearn the deeply rooted gender stereotypes and prejudices and become aware of gender sensitization and gender-neutral language. There is a need to talk about the acceptance of women in the public sphere and dismantlement of societal norms which are mostly biased against one gender. There is a need to talk about issues of transgender, queerness, homophobia, and other issues which are silenced in the socio-cultural setup. Lack of solidarity, sexual cyberbullying, and cyber-crimes are harsh realities of the time. Through writings, music, and discussions, these issues have come to the forefront. There is a need for more such movements like the Riot Grrrl movement to show resistance and protest against wrongdoings in society. Music reflects attitudes, mindsets, and ideologies of the time, and there is a need for women bands to come up with their own compositions to create awareness in society.

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Ordinary People: A Street Play by Gursharan Singh

Translated by Sandeep Tokas

Introduction

Born on 16 September 1929, Gursharan Singh, popularly known as Bhaji, spans a career of motley-coloured commitments to the people of Punjab. Conferred with prestigious awards such as Sangeet Natak Akadami Award in 1993, Kalidas Samman in 2004, Shiromani Natar Award and Punjab Sahitya Akadami Award Bhaji is known to be the catalyst in reviving and reworking the People's Theatre in Punjab. Establishing Amritsar Natak Kala Kendra in 1964 Bhaji is said to have taken theatre from its urban space to the rural Punjab which he believed to be the real place of the lived experiences of the people. He took theatre to the villages of Punjab believing in its radical and revolutionary potential and impact as a discourse and medium of social, political and cultural change for the marginalized and dispossessed people. This can also be said to be the reason why Bhaji's theatre is called Awami Theatre, a theatre for Awam (People). Authoring around 200 plays Gursharan ji invariably created an audience for theatre in Punjab along with the collaborations from professional and rural theatre artists and activists which also resulted in founding and umbrella organization Punjab Lok Sabhayachar Manch in 1981. Some of his plays are *Baba Boldai Hai* (1984), *Bhand Canada Aye* (1985), *Katha Kehar Singh Kisan Di* (1986), *Nawa Janam* (1987). Gursharan ji passed away on 27th September 2011 and this day since then has been commemorated as Revolutionary Theatre Day.

Translation of *Sdharan Log* (Ordinary People)

1. The Devil One (in the garb of a Sikh)
2. The Devil Two (in the garb of a Hindu)
3. An ordinary Sikh
4. An ordinary Hindu.

These four characters are standing with their back to the audience.
(The play starts with the ordinary Sikh and Hindu turning and addressing the audiences)

Sikh: I am an ordinary Sikh, I am a Sikh because I am a Sikh, because I was born in a Sikh family.

Hindu: I am an ordinary Hindu, I am Hindu because my parents are associated with the Hindu Religion.

Sikh: I wake up in the morning, I worship my Guru and go to work in the field.

Hindu: I wake up in the morning. I worship my God and I open my shop.

Sikh: Life was going well at its own pace.

Hindu: Life was pulling on.

Sikh: Then suddenly there was an explosion, the earth shook.

Hindu: There was a storm, there was an earthquake.

Sikh: My life went topsy-turvy.

Hindu: It became difficult to stand still on the ground.

(A loud noise of clouds thundering. Devil One and Devil Two enters. They start circling around Ordinary Sikh and Hindu in a musical rhythm. Both the Devil gazes upon them as a hunter upon a naïve prey. They restrain them (act as if putting a nosebar on them like on an animal) and pull both Sikh and Hindu towards themselves. Both Devils mime lifting the Sikh and Hindu, they act as if infusing them with hatred: expressions of Ordinary Sikh and Ordinary Hindu changes slowly, their eyes have reddened visiblizing anger and hate.

On the rhythm of horror music, Devil One and Two takes big strides and reach their respective spots on the stage. Ordinary Sikh and Hindu are no longer the same old people whom we have seen awhile longer. Now they have bitterness in their utterances. They look at each other and start conversation which has now been transformed into a certain kind of war cry.)

Sikh: I am a Sikh.

Hindu: I am a Hindu.

Sikh: I have Ten Gurus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind.

Hindu: Ram and Krishna are my Gods.

Sikh: I am the native of Punjab, which is a part of Hindostan.

Hindu: I am the native of Hindostan of which Punjab is a part.

Sikh: My mother-tongue is Punjabi, Hindi can be my national language.

Hindu: Hindi is my national language, Punjabi can be my mother tongue.

Sikh: I have no hesitation in declaring no love for Hindi.

Hindu: I have no shame in declaring that no one considers Punjabi as a cultured language.

Sikh: Punjab gives wheat to Hindostan.

Hindu: Hindostan gives Iron to Punjab.

Sikh: Punjab gives cotton to Hindostan.

Hindu: Hindostan gives coal to Punjab.

Sikh: Punjab gives oilseeds to Hindostan.

Hindu: Hindostan gives kerosene oil to Punjab.

Sikh: You want to suppress us with your numbers.

Hindu: You want to lower us with your fanaticism.

Sikh: You are an expansionist.

Hindu: You are a separatist.

Sikh: You are deceitful.

Hindu: You are uncouth.

Sikh: You are cheat *Baniye*.

Hindu: You are rash/stupid jatt.

Sikh: Our Guru Gobind Singh has taught us to pick up the sword to

defend our rights.

Hindu: We also have been first-fed by Parsu Ram and Shiva.

Sikh: We will make it difficult for you to live in Punjab.

Hindu: We will squeeze your neck in Haryana.

Sikh: We give a sound thrashing to the enemies in the battlefield.

Hindu: We, too, do not go to the battlefield with bangles in our arms.

Sikh: We called for a *Punjab Bandh* on February 8th.

Hindu: We called for a *Shop Bandh* on February 14th.

Sikh: Punjab was closed on February 8th.

Hindu: On 14th February all businesses were shut down.

Sikh: On 8th no untoward incident happened.

Hindu: That was because of the civility of the Hindus.

Sikh: There were incidents of lawlessness and riots reported.

Hindu: This was the mischief of the Sikhs.

Sikh: On 14th February 1984, the model of The Golden Temple was broken at Amritsar Railway Station.

Hindu: On 14th December 1983, the idols of our God at Ram Thirath Mandir were also found in same condition.

Sikh: On 14th February 1984, the picture of Guru Ramdas was torn at Amritsar Station.

Hindu: On 14th December 1983, the pictures of Gods and Goddesses were burnt at RamThirath Mandir.

Sikh: (Loudly) We are Sikhs.

Hindu: (Louder than Sikh) We are Hindu.

Sikh: We have no association with you people.

Hindu: We too denounce to have any relation with fools like you.

Sikh: We are Sikhs.

Hindu: We are Hindu.

(The two poses as if in a fight and entangled, and then withdraw. The curfew siren goes off. On the loudspeaker, an announcement of 'city in danger' can be heard. A sound of music is intensifying the already tensed milieu. Streets are deserted and markets are empty. Domestic conversations between Husband and Wife can be heard "there is no

atta”, “then what should I do”, “go to the bazaar”, “go to bazaar and get shot”

Note: These snippets of conversation establish the background of curfew. Meanwhile, the Ordinary Sikh and Hindu return back to their ‘real’ Ordinary states as portrayed in the beginning.)

Sikh: I heard you did not go to the work today?

Hindu: You too are here.

Sikh: This curfew has made life very difficult.

Hindu: Even my savings are almost exhausted.

Sikh: What do you think, till when we won’t be able to work?

Hindu: Till the time fight is not over.

Sikh: But what is this fight all about?

Hindu: The fight is over the fact that you are a Sikh and I am a Hindu.

Sikh: But we were Sikhs and Hindus before also, so what’s the fight about.

Hindu: The fight is that I understand I live in Hindostan of which Punjab is also a part, and you say that you live in Punjab which is a part of Hindostan. That is, I should take the name of Hindostan first and you should take the name of Punjab first.

Sikh: But what’s the fight in that? If Punjab progresses Hindostan progresses, and if Hindostan progresses Punjab progresses. So what is the fight?

Hindu: you do not know? You yourself proclaim.

Sikh: What do I proclaim?

Hindu: That Punjabi is your mother tongue and Hindi *can* be your national language.

Sikh: You too have been saying something similar.

Hindu: What have I been saying?

Sikh: That Hindi is your National language and Punjabi *can* be your mother tongue. Now if we both say that Punjabi is our mother tongue and Hindi is our national language, it won’t affect our

health.

Hindu: it does not affect.

Sikh: What else for the fight is then?

Hindu: Hindustan does not acknowledge the favour that Punjab bestow by giving it wheat and Punjab does not understand the importance of the supply of coal and iron from Hindostan.

Sikh: But it is true that Punjab gives wheat to the rest of Hindostan and it is also true that Punjab is supplied coal and iron from other parts of Hindostan, if we accept the truth to be true, does it change anything?

Hindu: it does not.

Sikh: One more thing *Yaar*.

Hindu: What is it?

Sikh: We are all landed farmers, which is why our work will be agriculture.

Hindu: Most of us have capital only which we need to sustain ourselves and this is the reason we will have to work at shops.

Sikh: We have to do farming, you have to run your shops, quite a straightforward thing. Then why do we taunt each other with *uncouth jatt* and *baniye*.

Hindu: Yes a very straightforward thing indeed.

Sikh: That means we can share things and live together.

Hindu: Yes, we can live together.

Sikh: If I read the *Bani* of my Ten Gurus and keep my appearances according to the instructions of the Tenth Guru, do you have any problem?

Hindu: No I have no problem. And if I read Ramayana or Bhagwad Gita, do you have any problem?

Sikh: No, what problem can I have?

Hindu: The why do we fight amongst ourselves? Why do we shout slogans against each other? Why do we smash down each other's skull? Why do we burn each other's shop? Why do we drag off each other from the bus and beats mercilessly?

Sikh: We do not even realize the moment when we are *made* and

we *become* fools just sitting around.

Hindu: Yaar, we are fools, there is no doubt about it now atleast.

Sikh: If we were not fools we would have given it a thought that in 20th century man has reached the Moon but we are being made to live in inhabitable, underdeveloped, utter filth.

Hindu: Yes, we should give it a thought as what kind of society we live in where the one who works most is deprived the fruits of his labour? But there is one more thing to think about?

Sikh: What is it?

Hindu: We are not fools, we are made fools.

Sikh: It is something we have to think about.

Hindu: In our daily lives, we understand the smallest of things. In our business and agriculture, we understand profit and loss. We know everything, then why we do not understand that fighting with each other only amounts loss.

Sikh: That means we are not fools.

Hindu: We are just Ordinary People. Our crime is we starts flying like thatch and matchsticks in any storm.

Sikh: If we would have stayed firm, we would not have been sitting slumped.



Harishankar Parsai: The Master Satirist

Translations by Vikram Singh Thakur

Introduction

They say justice is blind. I contend that justice is not blind, it is one-eyed – it can see only one side.

Harishankar Parsai, *Crooked Lines*

Among various successful *vyangya* (satire) writers in Hindi that include stalwarts like Bhartendu Harishchandra, Balmukund Gupt, Shrilal Shukla, Sharad Joshi, Narendra Kohli and Barsanelal Chaturvedi, perhaps the most vociferous proponent was Harishankar Parsai (1924-1995). His literary oeuvre was more eclectic than any of his contemporaries ranging from essay to anecdote, reportage to memoir, letter to newspaper column and short story to novel. Though he wrote across genres, Parsai – a committed realist – chose satire as his constant companion. In his own words, the function of satire in society is finding “absurdities, injustice, falsehood, exploitation, hypocrisy, two-facedness” and that of a satirist is “to see these, investigate them in depth, give them meaning and find reasons” (qtd. in Rachnavali-3, 3). He practiced what he preached as he explored the problems of the proletariat, critiqued the exploitative capitalist ideology, exposed various social evils, ridiculed political opportunism, and derided religious orthodoxy in his writing. Parsai never let convention dictate his pen. In fact, his challenge to literary orthodoxy led him to experiment with literary forms and genres culminating in a style that is unique to him. The present selection – “The Story of a Revolutionary”, “A Divine Lunatic Mission”, “A Middle-Class Dog”, “Our *Chacha* – The Asian Flu”, “Obscene Books” and “The Swine” – has been chosen across genres and themes. Though it is difficult to translate a writer like Parsai verbatim for his writing style is too *Parsaiesque* to be emulated, I have tried my best to remain as close to the spirit of his thought as possible. In case, I have failed, I fully take the blame on myself. If, I have been

able to do justice to Parsai's writing, the credit is due to the master himself!

1. Middle-Class Dog

As my friend's car entered his bungalow I asked him getting down, "I hope there is no dog here!"

The friend said, "You are so afraid of dogs!"

I said, "I am not afraid of a dog in the form of a human. I can handle it. But I am quite afraid of a real dog."

I don't like houses that have dogs. If you go there the dog welcomes you by barking even before the host has. As soon as you greet your loved one the dog calls you names – "Why have you come here rascal? Is it your father's house? Get lost!"

I am not afraid of a dog bite – let it bite as many times. I am afraid of those fourteen mighty injections which the doctor pokes into your belly. Some people are more poisonous than dogs. A dog had bitten an acquaintance. I said, "Nothing will happen to him. Enquire about the dog and get it injected."

A new acquaintance had invited me home for tea. As I reached his bungalow I found a plate hanging on the gate – 'Beware of the dog!' I returned at once. He met me a few days later and complained, "You didn't come for tea the other day!"

I said, "Please excuse me! I had gone to the bungalow and found a plate hanging – 'Beware of the dog!' I had thought that the bungalow belonged to humans. But it had a dog's name plate."

By the way, some people are worse than dogs. Mark Twain has written – "If you feed a dying dog, it will not bite you. This is the basic difference between a dog and a human."

The bungalow belonged to our friends. We had to stay there for three days. As my friend rang the bell, the same sound of 'bow-vow'

came from inside the mesh. I stepped back. Our host came out. He reprimanded the dog – “Tiger! Tiger!” What he meant was – “Tiger, they are not criminals. Don’t be so faithful.”

The dog was tied to a leash. Though he had seen that his master himself was taking us inside yet he kept on barking. Keeping myself away from him, I almost ran inside.

I realized that he was an upper-class dog. At least that’s what it seemed. I respect members of upper-class very much even if it’s a dog. My situation in the bungalow was quite weird. I was struck with an inferiority complex – an upper-class dog and I were in the same compound! He would look at me with disgust.

We were sitting on the lawn in the evening. The servant was walking the dog in the compound.

I noticed that two stray and rogue dogs had stood outside the gate. They were proletariat dogs. They would watch this dog intently, returned after loitering around and kept looking at it. But the dog of the bungalow would bark at them. They would get scared and moved hither thither. However, they would return and kept staring at this dog.

The host said, “It’s pretty usual. Whenever my dog comes out these two dogs keep staring at him.”

I said, “But he should not bark at them. He has a collar and a chain. He has all the comforts. Those stray dogs are famished. There is no comparison between them. Why does he then challenge them?”

We slept outdoors that night. The chained dog also slept on his bench nearby. Now it so happened that whenever those dogs barked around he too would bark. But why does he bark with them? He usually barks at them. When they bark in the neighbourhood he joins their voice as if assuring them that he is there with them.

I have begun to doubt his class. He is not an upper-class dog. A gentleman in my neighbourhood had two dogs. Their awe was

unparalleled. I had never heard them bark. Dogs around them would bark but they did not pay any attention. They would not even pounce when people crossed them. I might have rarely heard their low growling. They usually kept sitting or roaming around. Even if the gate was open they would not go out. They were quite awe-inspiring, arrogant and complacent.

This dog barks at the proletariat dogs but also joins their voice. He says, "I am with you." To have the deceptive upper-class awe on the one hand and to be with the proletariat in the times of trouble on the other – it is the dog's character. It is a middle-class character. He is a middle-class dog. He pretends to be an upper-class but he also barks with the proletariat.

Upon our return, the third night, we found that the dog was intimidated. Hearing our footsteps, he didn't bark but growled in a feeble voice. The street dogs were barking nearby but he did not bark with them. He growled a little and then grew weary.

I asked the host, "Your dog is very quiet today."

The host told, "He is in a bad condition today. It so happened that he went out of the gate due to the servant's negligence. Those two dogs were already out for him. Both surrounded him, chased him away, overpowered him and bit him. He is in a bad state. The servant saved him. He is dull since then and has been caressing his wounds. I will get him a shot by Dr. Shrivastava tomorrow."

I looked at the dog. He was lying wearing a pathetic expression. I guessed that it must have been like this –

He would have got out of the gate arrogantly and barked at those dogs. They would have said, "*Abey!* You don't recognize your class. You masquerade, wear this chain and collar, freeloader, roam on the lawns and show off in front of us. But at night when we bark at some imminent danger you too are with us. You are with us in danger but would bark at us otherwise. If you are one amongst us, come out. Leave this collar and chain. Leave this comfort. Eat food from garbage or steal and eat. Wallow in dirt."

He must have barked again. At this the dogs must have pounced on him saying this – “Bloody imposter and fraud! We will destroy the false pride of your class right away.”

They chased him away, dashed and bit him and made him lick the dust.

Lying silently, the dog is contemplating his true class.

2. The Story of a Revolutionary

He had chosen ‘revolutionary’ as his sobriquet. He was well educated – healthy and handsome, and had a good job. He was a rebel. Perpetually quoting Marx and Lenin he was a special devotee of Che Guevara.

He would sit in the coffee-house for long and talk endlessly. He would always be anxious about the revolution. Everything was to be turned upside down. Everything was to be changed. He had long hair and a systematically grown beard.

He would proclaim rebellion. He would look for a reason to accomplish something. He would say – “My father’s generation must breathe its last soon. My father is an outright conservative, a casteist and a reactionary. A typical bourgeois. I will neither perform the *mundan* ceremony nor his *shraadha* when he dies. I will destroy all traditions. Long live Che Guevara!”

Someone said, “But your father loves you so much!”

The revolutionary would reply, “Love? Yes, every bourgeois loves in order to kill revolutionariness. Love is a conspiracy. You don’t understand. My father, at the moment, is in search of a *Brahmin* with whose daughter he could marry me for a few thousand rupees. But I won’t let that happen. I will not marry within my caste. I will marry a girl from a lower caste. My father would keep mourning.”

The friend said, “Will you not marry if you fall in love with a girl who happens to be a *Brahmin*?”

He replied, "Never. I will break my relationship with her. No revolutionary loves or marries a girl from his own caste. I love a *Kayastha* girl. I will marry her."

One day he married the *Kayastha* girl in the court. He brought her to his city and stayed at his friend's place.

He was in a martyrizing mood. He was saying – "I broke their neck. My father must be mourning for me. My mother would be crying. Having gathered the neighbours, my father would be declaring, "The son is dead for us." He will abandon me. He will disown me from his property. I don't care. I am ready for any sacrifice. That house will be the enemy's house for me. But I will fight to the end – to the end – "

In a tensed state he would pace up and down in the verandah. He would then sit and say, "The revolution is about to arrive."

A friend of his came. He said, "Your father was asking why didn't you go home straight with your wife? He was quite calm. He was asking to get you and his daughter-in-law home."

He was roused, "Huh! Bourgeois hypocrisy! This is a conspiracy. He would call me home, create a scene, insult me and then throw me out. Why should I compromise when he has disowned me? I will rent a place and live there."

The friend said, "But he hasn't disowned you."

He said, "I know everything – I will fight."

The friend said, "What will you fight when there is no conflict?"

The revolutionary was in his 'fancy'. He was sharpening his weapons. He was drying the gunpowder. The decisive moment of the revolution was soon to arrive. I will fight bravely. I will sacrifice myself.

His best friend came the third day. He said, “Your parents are coming by taxi to take you back. There is a wedding feast this Sunday. This invitation card is being distributed.”

The revolutionary banged his head. He began to sweat and turned pale. He said, “Oh! Everything is finished. My whole life’s struggle has come to an end. No struggle. No revolution. I am defeated. They are coming to take me back. I wanted to fight. My revolutionariness! My revolutionariness! Oh Lady! Please get me insulted by my father. Che Guevara! Dear Che!”

His wife was clever. She had been watching his revolutionariness for some days and was laughing. She said, “Dear, shall I tell you something? You are not a revolutionary.”

He asked, “No? Then what am I?”

The wife replied, “You are a bourgeois dimwit. But I love you.”

3. Our *Chacha* – The Asian Flu

‘*Asiyai chacha*’ has arrived. I am referring to the ‘Asian Flu’. Our ancestors have established the tradition of treating diseases as one’s kith and kin. If small pox is called *maata*, it is only fair to consider flu a *chacha*, according to the rules of kinship. Incidentally, a gentleman was saying, “Only God can save them who treat diseases as their kin instead of fighting them.” He is right. We have never allowed anyone to do us good. There had been many great people who were passionate to do us good but tell me if we ever let them do so? Despite our refusal, if someone doesn’t agree and is hell-bent on doing us good, we even shoot such people down.

‘*Asiyai chacha*’ has come to India after touring the West this time. Our *chacha* had attacked Western imperialism and took away thousands of lives. O, people of the West! If you have bombs, we have diseases. Here you drop bombs on the East and there we will release a flu. As invaders, you had once brought plague, let us send flu with the Goodwill Committee. We were under the debt of your plague. We have paid it back with flu. We will send an ordinary

disease next year as interest. Accounts settled! E&EO! (Errors and Omissions Excepted.)

‘*Asiyai chacha*’ came to India from Europe. The doors are usually open here. Every disease is welcome here – *atithi devo bhava*! A distinguished ultranationalist was saying – “Doesn’t our great motherland, the land of gods, have enough of its ‘personal’ diseases that it needs to import ‘foreign’ ones? Wheat is imported and so are diseases!” I told him – “Don’t be ashamed. We will Indianize the flu.” The same flu had come about three years ago as the Japanese Flu. Later on, Japan dedicated it to Asia. Japan has too much pride of the Orient. It sticks the label “Made in Asia” on its disease and spreads it throughout the world. Japan has lesser number of diseases than we have. It had a chronic disease called ‘imperialism’ which was wiped off in Hiroshima by a greater imperialistic antibiotic. However, it distributes rest of the diseases quite liberally. And here, in addition to the great stock of diseases that we have, we have also established factories to manufacture diseases. But we don’t export them though we have begun to export mud. We exported mud worth thirty-six lakh rupees to various countries last year. I was high on patriotism for a week after reading this news. Aha! Foreigners are crazy for Indian mud. Though I have been reading the stories of nectar-rain since childhood, but eventually what got sold – mud! If we begin exporting diseases, we will be able to arrange the foreign exchange required for our Five Year Plans. I am sure that the Minister for Trade and Industry will ask none but me about the disease to be exported. I can’t suggest a disease at the moment. Earlier, I could have suggested a chronic disease called ‘hypocrisy’ to be spread across the world. But the experts of caste-based diseases suggest that ‘hypocrisy’ is not a communicable disease. Its ‘bacteria’ keep weakening the body from inside in which they reside.

Several addictions, if not diseases, have definitely travelled abroad. It seems that Indian marijuana and hashish are quite popular in the West. We are on top in matters of addiction. There are various addictions – religious, caste based, racial and spiritual. Two of them are quite special – inferiority and superiority. You won’t find such addiction of inferiority even in the most backward country. Drawing a few puffs on it causes such collective utterances – “Alas! We are

miserable; we are fallen people. Alas! We are always victimised. We are innocent and yet we are traumatized. We are very backward people.” The specialty of this addiction is that its intoxication makes one feel good being victimized. It feels bad if someone says that even you have victimized. The addiction of superiority makes us rant – India is the world guru. Our forefathers had acquired all knowledge. There is nothing beyond that. The addictions of inferiority and superiority work alternately. Actually, we have never been disintoxicated!

Doctors say – Sir, this is a ‘viral infection’. A virus keeps mutating its nature. There is one kind of virus this year and another one the next. I got it! A virus is like an intellectual in post-Independence India. The doctor says – “That’s why it’s impossible to find a permanent cure for the virus.” He’s right. There is no permanent cure even for an intellectual.

Then how do you treat flu? The doctor replies – “We only treat symptoms.” Treating symptoms is a matter of convenience. Treat symptoms when you are unable to find the cause and cure of a disease. Lock the university down if there is a student movement. Impose section 144 if there is an agitation for food. Call a meeting of the National Unity Council if there is a riot. It’s just the symptoms that are being treated. There is no need to cure the disease.

There is something called a ‘broad spectrum antibiotic.’ Doctors keep giving it to the patients without even bothering about the disease. It kills several kinds of infections. The most convenient thing about it is that the doctor doesn’t know the disease but the treatment is in progress. There are many broad spectrum antibiotics – proposals, boards, assurances, judicial enquiries, commissions. If all of these fail, there is the Indian Penal Code. They say – “Why don’t you see a specialist?” A specialist is equivalent to the name of Ram. Our ancestors believed that in the end salvation is achieved through the name of Ram. Nowadays, salvation is achieved with the intervention of a specialist – I mean that one can be relieved from this life and death cycle if a specialist tells the cause of death before one has passed away. However, how does one find a specialist all of a sudden? When I had last fallen ill, a few well-wishers had brought

some specialists and every well-wisher had wanted that I was cured by his doctor. I was in a dilemma. If I was cured by a particular doctor, the other one would get upset. I had to borrow some money from one particular well-wisher. I didn't want to upset him. So, I received treatment from his doctor. Though I did get the loan, the disease lasted quite longer. How does it matter? Even this country has been taking the medicines prescribed by its well-wishers' doctor. Out of hesitation, it can neither change the medicine nor the doctor.

People around are groaning with pain due to the flu. There are different styles of groaning. Someone's groan is like begging for mercy while someone else's is like a roar. The way Congo groans is different from Burma. In fact, Vietnam has got a unique style of groaning. Everyone groans but it should not become a habit the way it has become with us. We groan whether the steel production is high or there is a famine.

'*Asiyai chacha*' has made the entire world groan. My Asian pride is bursting. We have enough diseases to distribute as freebies. If there is a charitable dispensary or hospital, there is also a charitable disease-distribution center. It is producing new diseases and keeps sending them here. Not a big deal! We have released a Chinese yellow fever as a result of which the ambassadors of China and America have been trying to find its cure together in Geneva for the past ten years.

4. A Divine Lunatic Mission

India faces a big question now – What shall it send to America now? They have read the *Kamashastra*. They have seen yogis, saints and ascetics. Their youth has tasted *charas* and *ganja*. They have seen the Indian cobra and the Gir lion. They have also bought 'ancient' sculptures from Janpath. America has even imported spirituality and has been giving wheat in return. It has even had enough of *Hare Ram*, *Hare Krishna*!

What after Mahesh yogi, Baal Yogeshvar, Baal Bhogeshvar, etc.? I am a patriot. But I also understand the American generation. I know that an American belongs to a 'bored' society. He is quite a

bore. His shares automatically give him dollars. A television set and bottles of liquor are available at home. He says, “How do you do?” in the evening to a few people. But these are no cure for boredom. America may drop as many bombs in Hanoi but it doesn’t excite him. He needs something. He needs it only from India.

I am equally worried about Indians as I am about Americans. Even they want something.

Now, for dollars and rupees, what shall we, Indians, take there? They have got bored of Ravishankar. Enough of yogis and saints too. Now they want something new– to kill their boredom and to excite them. They are ready to pay dollars.

My humble suggestion is that we take a “Divine Lunatic Mission” this time. Such a mission has never gone before. It will be unique – a “Divine Lunatic Mission” from India.

I know that an average American would say – “We have seen one. His name is Krishna Menon.” Our agents will the reply – He was neither ‘divine’ nor a ‘lunatic’. Real spiritual lunatics are coming from India this time.

I know that spiritual missions often indulge in ‘smuggling’. The Indian government and the masses don’t know that people are even smuggled in ‘heaven.’ This happens from the Department of Spirituality. In a great country like India when somebody can destroy an entire village in Gujarat by distributing holy water, isn’t he capable of ‘smuggling’ an American into heaven?

Smuggling may be of goods and spirituality too. Let somebody with a grown beard go to America with a *chela* and say, “I am one thousand years old. I had been meditating in the Himalayas for a few thousand years. I have talked with the God a few times.” The believer, yet doubtful, American would ask the *chela* – “Is your guru speaking the truth? Is he actually one thousand years old?” The *chela* would reply, “I can’t be sure as I have been with him only for the past five hundred years.”

This means that the *chela* himself is five hundred years old and can establish his own company.

Even I think that most Indian stuff has been already exported to America – the *Kamashastra*, spirituality, yogis, saints, etc.

We can now send just one thing to America – an ‘Indian spiritual lunatic’. Hence, I suggest to establish the “Indian Divine Lunatic Mission” at the earliest. I know that there are more important people than myself in this country. However, I too want to contribute in the service of India and in lessening the boredom of my big brother America. By the way, I know that even after chanting “*Hare Krishna Hare Rama*” for thousands of years, one still doesn’t get sugar from the co-operative shop but in the black market – so what would these Americans get by singing the Rama-Krishna *bhajan*? However, the members of a rich and degenerate society have their own ways of finding peace and relief – and if they find these in India, it only furthers India’s pride. By the way, Bertrand Russell has said – The American society has gone directly from barbarism to total degeneration – it hasn’t crossed the stage of civilization. It has missed out on a step.

What do I even care for Russell? I am only interested in establishing a new international business – “Divine Lunatic Mission”. The lunatics of the world are just lunatics – the lunatics of India are spiritual.

I want to establish a “Divine Lunatic Mission.” Its members can only be those who have never stayed in an asylum. We need lunatics outside the asylum – those who can act like lunatics. It’s easy to act like a yogi. Even to act like the God is simple. But, it’s very difficult to act like a lunatic. I am in search of talented people. I have a few professors in mind whom I have been appealing to join the mission.

The mission will be established for sure. Our agency will advertise in America – See real Indian divine lunatics. Our arrival at the New York airport will be reported in newspapers. Television channels would be ready to roll.

Mrs. Robert will ask Mrs. Simpson, “Have you seen a real divine Indian lunatic?”

Mrs. Simpson will reply, “No! Is there one in this country ‘under God’?”

Mrs. Robert will say, “Yes, a Divine Lunatic Mission of Indians is reaching New York tomorrow. Come on, we will watch it. It will be a real spiritual experience.”

There will be thousands of men and women at the New York airport to have a *darshan* of our Indian Divine Lunatic Mission – it will relieve them of their routine boredom. We will be welcomed. They will garland us. There will be great arrangements for our stay.

And then we will hold our programme of lunatic spiritualism. Each non-lunatic will have been already trained to act like a real one.

The entry fees would be 50 dollars and thousands of Americans will spend thousands of dollars to watch ‘Indian divine lunatics.’

Our business would flourish. Being the chair of the mission, I would deliver a speech: “We are real Indian divine lunatics. Our saints and sages, thousand years ago, said that the way to real internal peace and salvation lies through lunacy.”

After that my fellow lunatics will perform various acts of lunacy and dollars will pour.

Those who are interested in joining this mission may please contact me. The condition is that they must not be real lunatics. The real lunatics will not be included in this mission – the way real saints are never included in the class of saints.

After our return from America, there will be a great welcome for us at the Ramleela grounds or the Red Fort in Delhi. I will try that the Prime Minister inaugurates the event.

In case she is busy, we will get plenty of politicians meditating in the political exile.

We will have full support of the ‘smugglers’ of Delhi.

We are also in conversation with the Customs and the Enforcement Department. We are hopeful that they too will contribute towards spirituality.

The welcome event would claim, “This is another victory of the Indian spirituality that our spiritual lunatics are coming back after delivering the message of peace and salvation to the world. We hope that this tradition of spiritual lunacy keeps growing forever in the country.”

The “Divine Lunatic Mission” must go to America. When our political relations with them are improving, it is imperative that the mission of the lunatics go.

5. Obscene Books

There was an uproar in the city that obscene literature was being promoted a lot. News and letters from citizens were published in newspapers that obscene books were being sold openly on the roadsides.

Around ten spirited young social reformers formed a gang and decided that they would confiscate such literature wherever they found and burn it publicly.

They raided a shop and got hold of some twenty-five obscene books. Each one had two-three books. The chief said – “We are late today. We will inform the newspaper tomorrow evening and burn these publicly the day after. The propaganda will also impact other people. Let’s meet at my place tomorrow evening. I cannot take all these books home together. They are around twenty-five. My father and uncle are home. If they see these it will create a problem. You hide these two-three books and take them home. Bring them tomorrow.”

The next evening all of them met but none had brought the books. The chief said – “Give me the books so that I can hide them in this bag. We can then take the bag to the venue for burning them tomorrow.”

None had brought the books.

One of them said – “Not tomorrow. Burn them the day after. Let’s read them first.”

Another said – “We are reading the books at the moment. Let’s burn them after two-three days. We have confiscated them in any case.”

The programme to burn the books could not materialize that day. It was decided to meet the third day along with the books.

None had got the books the third day.

One of them said – “*Arre yaar!* My father laid his hands on the books. He is reading them.”

Another said – “I will bring once my uncle finishes reading them.”

The third one said – “*Bhabhi* took them away and told that she would return them after reading in two-three days.”

The fourth one said – “*Arre!* An auntie from the neighbourhood picked them up in my absence. We will burn them once she has read them in two-three days.”

The obscene books were never burnt. They are now being read in a more organized way.

6. The Swine

I took Chaubeji to Pandeji's house.

The marriage proposal of Chaubeji's son and Pandeji's daughter was being discussed. We were sitting in the verandah of Pandeji's house. The girl had served snacks. Chaubeji had seen her. It was Pandeji's paternal house and was in the old neighbourhood of the town. The locality was dirty. Heaps of filth was visible from the verandah. Sounders of swines were loitering around.

Chaubeji was watching this and was feeling retched. He said – Horrible! Swines loiter around your house like this!

I was to carry on the rest of the conversation. We returned. I met Chaubeji after two-three days. He said – Look! The girl is very good. But Pande's house is at a very filthy place. Pigs loiter around his house. Horrible!

I said – But what have you got to do with that house? You just have to get the girl married.

Chaubeji said – But will my son not go to his in-laws'? Or will I not keep any relation with them? I hate pigs. I am feeling retched on merely imagining that house.

I said – Do think. The girl is very nice. The family is good.

Chaubeji said – I agree with that. What if I reach their place with the marriage procession and start vomiting? Those pigs! I cannot tolerate them.

I said – By the way Pande will pay well.

Chaubeji asked – How much? Ten-fifteen thousand?

I said – No. Fifty thousand and jewellery. He has just one child.

Chaubaji began to think. It took him some time to return from the pig to money. After some more talk he said – If you are forcing so much then let's fix the match.

Chaubaji reached Pandeji's house with a splendid marriage procession.

Fifteen thousand rupees were offered at the gate.

Chaubaji was sitting under the canopy. His eyes were fixed where the rituals were taking place. He was waiting that thirty five thousand in a tray would be on his way.

Meanwhile a piglet barged in. Two-three men began to chase it away. Someone hit it with a stick. The frightened piglet lost its way. It was unable to find its way. It moved towards Chaubaji. People were chasing it. Chaubaji said – *Arre!* Don't bother it. Piglets are so beautiful. Very Sweet!

And Chaubaji started caressing the piglet. In the meanwhile thirty-five thousand rupees arrived in a tray.

The piglet was standing so satisfied as if it was with its own father.

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Short Story

Birubar Gamcha¹
Rose Kerketta

Introduction

Dr. Rose Kerketta is a writer and tribal rights activist. She was born in a Kheria family on 5 Dec, 1940 in Kaisara, Ranchi which is in Simdega district of Jharkhand now. She has led various activist movements which fought for the rights of women and marginalised communities. With her creative and critical works, she has made significant contribution to Kheria and Hindi literature. Her literature reflects her activist concerns. Her stories raise issues concerning adivasi life and identity. The adivasi worldview, their right to land and forest, the onslaught on their land, culture and tradition by outside forces and the adivasis' attempts to preserve their tradition and identity- these are some of the issues which form the subject-matter of her literature.

Translated from Hindi by Vandana

Five days after Diwali, Subhagi got a chance to go to her parents' home with her husband, Ganesh. They were welcomed warmly by her parents, brother and sister. Her father didn't go for farm work for two days. Instead, he began a fresh work of digging up of sweet potatoes with the purpose that the entire family could stay together. Subhagi's brother quickly dug out the beds of sweet potato. Mother began plucking tender leaves from vines. She'll cook curry with dried leaves. Subhagi and her sister, Kalawati clipped off sweet potatoes from the vines and heaped them up. Father-in-law, Pancham and his son-in-law, Ganesh had met after one whole year, so they chatted more, harvested little.

Subhagi has come visiting her parents only for two days. Pancham is overjoyed seeing his daughter and son-in-law. He found

an educated son-in-law in his own community. He lived in city, but his daughter didn't stay with him. Who knows what he must be getting to eat? The day she arrived, Pancham told Subhagi, "Son-in-law lives in city, might not be gettin' much to eat there. While he's here, you cook for him. Everythin's home-grown, all fresh. Groundnut and coconut oil's been extracted at home. Cook whate'er you wish t'."

Ganesh and Subhagi come from families having different financial status. But Ganesh is educated, doing a job, so moves with the times.

Chicken was cooked for dinner. Pancham made his son-in-law do the honours of culling the chicken as letting the son-in-law do it, is a way to honour him in Adivasi rural community. Kalawati was helping her brother-in-law in preparing chicken. With gentle affection she said. "We'll roast parts in patpuria², Bhatu³. In the city, you must ha' forgotten tha' taste."

Ganesh, "You ha' reminded me of tha' weird taste. Jus' the broiler chicken there in city. T' way it keeps sittin' all along, you too keep sittin' after eatin' it. So, I don' eat this sorta thin' there. Though I do get some milk and curd."

Kalawati asked excitedly, "So, you get milk-curd? Then, you mus' be eatin' Rasogola⁴ a lot?"

Ganesh, "No. Do'ya think I keep eatin' all the time? I've gone there for work, not jus' to have fun."

Ganesh Baraik works in a cloth mill in Surat. Earlier, his grandfather, Ghuran Baraik used to weave cloth, but times changed fast. He saw Barki, Pechauri, Motiya, Gamcha⁵ slowly going out of trend during his own lifetime. His family profession began to suffer. Would get to weave only Betra⁶, Gamcha and Bidauti⁷ just twice or thrice a year. They faced tough times. Loom and shuttle lay silent in a corner of the house. The couple began to spend days doing irregular labour, still they sent their son to school. But hunger loomed large. Paikara⁸ stopped too. Now, even the irregular work in fields, they

would get only during rainy season. Ghuran's angst began to burn him and one day, it swallowed him entirely.

Before the final parting, holding the hand of his son, Manku, Ghuran said, "E'en if there's no fire to cook and you're dyin' of hunger, don' sell off loom and shuttle. Don' let it burn or get infested with white ant. This's been our ancestral occupation, our identity." He was very proud of being a chik baraik⁹.

Ghuran's wife wailed, "Leave a word for me too, Manku's Pa. How'd this widow raise t' child."

"This son'll take care of you," saying this, he croaked.

Manku was in fifth standard then. His mother kept father's words in mind. Selling two goats, she somehow managed to do his last rites, kept crying, remembering her late husband for a few days. Past would come alive whenever she looked at the loom. At the time of their wedding, Ghuran was the only weaver among surrounding five villages. People grew cotton, every household had a spinning wheel. Villagers brought cotton yarn to Ghuran who wove cloth with different patterns. Villagers would come to collect cloth. He would get a good earning and, more importantly, respect from all. But he had no child. Tried many treatments, massages for getting a child. He could spend on all that as he had a sound financial position. Therefore, he named his son, Manku. How he wished to give his son good education!

"We still get chalani¹⁰ cotton yarn but don' get Serhuva¹¹ anymore. There's no forest. The enemies of chik baraiks've entered t' forest. Within a year, forest had been cleared and factories got built. Enemies've made the workers settle here. These people don' e'en touch t' handloom cloth. Wear laurapants¹² tha' look like double-barrelled gun. No rain. How'd cotton grow? All villagers turn into coolies, t' coolies. My son'll also do this for earnin'. Whate'er he does, he shouldn' leave t' village. Days for kargha-lundari¹³ are gone. If one's to serve t' others, then why think of colour or design!"

Handloom cloth has not vanished altogether. Motiya, gamcha

and bidauti are given to one's daughter at her wedding. But this has also remained just as a fashion.

Mother had father's dreams before her, but very soon the truth of those dreams was clear to her. The helplessness of landless dwellers of the village became obvious. Chik baraiks, potters, ironsmiths got swallowed by the mills and factories. When farming did not survive, how could co-operation, brotherhood have! Big farms came up on fields. There were farms for even hens and dogs. So, people were ready to take refuge in anybody's service.

Mother told Manku, "Fix t' kargha-lundari to t' wall, son. We'll show incense to it on days of festivals and worship. It'll be safe in t' corner, as your father wished," she grew sad saying this.

Manku acted on her command.

Manku had studied till 5th standard and knew basic addition, subtraction. He got work in the flour mill of Mahavir Saav¹⁴ in city. Manku was honest, would work efficiently. He received two rupees and one kilogram flour in wages. Mother continued with rearing hen and goat. Sometime later, mother fulfilled her responsibility of marrying her son off. While handing over the keys of home to her son and daughter-in-law, she also handed over her husband's last wish to them. Time lapsed.

Manku saw and understood business minutely. "Saavji keeps sittin' t' whole day," he saw. "I work on flour mill, t' other boy takes care of sellin' items in t' shop, but it's Saavji who earns money. He earns flour more than money. He sells tha' to those who look for fresh flour. T' rates for grindin' Madua¹⁵, millet, corn're higher."

Manku realised that this flour mill is not just a mill, it's the golden goose. He saw Mahavir Saav, soon, began being called Mahavir Seth¹⁶. He, now, had got a pot-belly. He would no longer try to hide his pot-belly on seeing people.

Manku regretted not having been able to finish his studies. Incidentally, his first child was a son. After much thought, he named

him Ganesh. The day he named his son, he announced that he would ensure his son gets highly educated. His son will get educated, work in a factory. He will set up a flour mill for his father. They'll see better times. He will get married to an educated girl; wedding will take place with great fanfare. Manku will get to have grandsons and granddaughters.

Manku got Ganesh pass Matriculation. He sent him to city to do 'Inter'¹⁷. He got good results. Ganesh was an ideal student – no tobacco, no wine. No blot of any kind on his character. The day he would be at home, he helped his mother in her work, mother got time to relax. Sometimes, he would help his father. It was then that he realised how heavy a sack his father had to lift for work. He also noticed how weak his father's spine had become and his gait did not look normal any longer. It was now the time to leave studies and search for a job. But when he went out looking for a job, all his certificates proved useless. His spotless character failed to impress anyone. Search for job brought him from top to bottom. Army, clerk, peon, office boy – all kinds of jobs require recommendation. Each required some palm to be greased. In the absence of both these, Ganesh was proved to be ineligible.

Ganesh was passing through the 16th and 17th spring of his life. Subhagi was finishing her middle exams¹⁸ then. They studied in separate schools, lived in different villages. But the path which led to their schools and back to home was the same. Intoxicating mornings and evenings of Spring thrilled the youth. Subhagi and Ganesh were eager to get entranced. There was just one condition- "I should become independent." Both were from the same community, both were educated, both had a good conduct- so their families agreed too.

After wandering for two years in search of job, Ganesh decided to leave village. Ramesh of Tudkadih and Lakhu of Kudahatu had left their villages after 3rd standard. They got jobs in cities. Ganesh contacted their families, they told him that both of them would come back home for Diwali holidays. As Diwali falls in the beginning of November, Ganesh would have to wait for five months to meet them. He took their address and told them about his plans. If a young man having studied only till 3rd standard can get a job, then he would

definitely get a good job there, he thought.

Having worked at Mahvir Saav's place, Manku was familiar with life outside village. On an auspicious day, he married his son off to Subhagi, but the wedding was a mere formality. He felt reassured that his son was safe now.

Lakhu and Ramesh live in a small room in Surat. They had a few pots and pans, cooked on stove, had bedding on the floor. Both of them worked in Bhagyashree Cotton Mill. Ganesh had brought all his certificates. He began searching for a clerical job, but he needed someone to stand surety for him for such a job. How will a man from Jharkhand get a surer in Gujarat?

Tired of searching for one, finally he joined duty as the guard of the godown of a mill. He chose night duty. His master was happy as other guards ran away from night duty. Ganesh opted for night duty because the mill was close to the sea. When his friends would be away for work during the day, he slept comfortably in the chawl¹⁹. The best thing was the clean toilet and clean water for bathing in the mill. He would come out the mill at six in the morning after taking bath. Would go straight to the sea beach; fishermen used to sell fishes there, which they caught at night, to contractors. No one bought small fishes, so the fishermen emptied them out on sand. People like Ganesh would pick these up. Ganesh used to collect fishes sufficient for the meal. With this new arrangement, the problem of vegetable curry was taken care of. Lakhu and Ramesh too became wiser. They began fetching some vegetables from the mill compound. They could do so as people knew him. Living here in Surat, they realised the value of vegetables, small fish and every single paisa²⁰.

When he received a warm welcome on visiting his in-laws after one whole year, Ganesh kept the miserable condition of his life in Surat, a secret. But when he returned for holidays after the 2nd year, Subhagi had a three-month-old daughter in her lap. There was no reason for Subhagi now to stay away from her husband. The description of availability of milk and curd made Surat seem to be a lovely place. It seemed to be a land of fairies where there's sea. Where large and small boats sail in the sea, where people travel by

buses and trains. Foodstuff is available wherever you go. People earn money and lead a happy life. Why should Subhagi be deprived of such a bliss?

Now, what could Ganesh do? He himself had extolled the beauty of Surat. Subhagi dismissed the problem of the lack of accommodation saying, “We live with parents in two rooms here, so we can adjust in one room there.”

Ganesh didn’t want to feel small. He informed his friends that he was bringing his family along. The friends thought him to be a fool, but they had to help him out. There must be some compulsion, they thought. They enclosed the three feet wide, six feet long porch with a thick tarpaulin sheet and put a plank for themselves to sleep on.

Subhagi reached there. For the first time, she realised the value of aangan²¹, alleys, plants and trees. Perhaps, this is why it is said, ‘to gain something, one has to lose something else.’ They were able to find a room in the same chawl after five months. Lakhu and Ramesh contributed in paying for that room. Then, it was time to buy pots-pans and bedding.

Ganesh went out with Subhagi on weekend. Subhagi tied her daughter to her back with a gamcha. Seeing this, Ganesh went wild, “You’ve been livin’ here for such a long time now, still’ve stayed a village woman. Untie this betara.”

Subhagi, “I’m comfortable wit’ it, I’ll go this way.”

Ganesh, “What d’ you think, you’ll attract attention of everyone. Where’ve these boorish people come from! You wish t’ hear this?”

Subhagi,” Whate’er people say, I’m comfortable this way.” “So, you’ll carry t’ betara?”

“Yes.”

Furious, Ganesh went out. It took Subhagi time to tie her daughter to her back and lock the room. Having done this, she ran

after Ganesh. Realising Subhagi was running after him, Ganesh accelerated his pace. Subhagi began following him ten steps behind.

A woman called out Subhagi on the way, “Don’t tie the baby like this, it will get suffocated.”

Subhagi adjusted the baby at the front, lunged forward without saying anything. The woman kept muttering. Subhagi feared that she might get lost. She kept moving, getting pushed, making her way in the crowded road. Ganesh then shouted, “Stop!”

Subhagi stopped, she was sweating profusely in winter. She was breathing hard as she stopped. Ganesh was in a bind. He wanted to scold her when he stopped her, but he felt pity seeing her condition. He took her to a tea stall. After having tea, they bought some small items and returned home. Kept walking silently, ten steps apart on the way back.

Both kept to themselves for two days. Pots and pans for kitchen had to be bought. Finally Ganesh broke the silence, “We’ll buy utensils on Saturday, will leave early,” he said.

It was Saturday. There was no change in their attitude. Both walked ten steps apart. The baby was tied with the same traditional gamcha. The same woman called out on the way. She said in a sharp tone, “Good god...look how she’s disfiguring the baby’s face. Her nose is getting rubbed and pressed.”

Subhagi took the baby off her back, “How her nose is getting pressed, tell me? Had it been so, the baby would’ve cried. But she’s quiet,” retorting thus, she tied the baby to her back again.

Ganesh was standing at the entrance of a shop. As Subhagi approached, he went inside the shop. it was a big shop. There were many benches, people were sitting on them. The shopkeeper and his workers were busy. A couple was sitting on a bench. The woman was smiling at Subhagi. She gave the impression as if she wanted to get familiar with Subhagi. She gestured Subhagi to come and sit by her side. When Subhagi was about to sit, she asked, “Are you from

Jharkhand? Do you belong to Ranchi?"

Taking the baby in her lap, Subhagi looked at her with surprise. But she didn't say a word. The woman kept smiling. After a few moments, Ganesh spoke, "Yes, but how did you find out? We have never met you before." The woman, "We recognised just by looking at you. We are also from there." Ganesh felt reassured. Subhagi smiled too. The woman continued, "Let's move out and talk."

As they came out of the shop, she began, "This is my husband, Subodh Manjhi. People call him Subodh da²² or Manjhi da. We are also from Ranchi, from Siramtoli. My name is Sushila, I have also studied from Ranchi. We are here for the last 25 years. We have our quarter²³ close by. My husband is a driver in the Ordinance factory, it is a Military campus."

Then Subodh da called them inside. "How did you recognize me? It's only six months since I've been here. Don' e'en have a decent stove at home," Subhagi asked.

The woman chuckled and said, "Is it difficult to recognize your own people? Our residence is nearby, at Crescent Road. Do come with us and see, children are also at home, you can meet them too."

Ganesh did not want this kind of intimacy with such a recent acquaintance, but Subhagi was sick of her loneliness, she readily agreed to go along.

Manjhi had four children. His elder daughter was a teacher. They spoke Hindi at home. Outside home, fluent Gujarati. Elder daughter Bula said, "Aunty, I was 11 years old when I last went to my grandparents' house. Today I am 20 years old, you can guess how much I miss that place. We live in the same country, still aren't able to meet our family members."

Subhagi, "I can understand your feelings. You must visit us. There're two others who also belong to that region."

Bula, "Where do you live?"

Ganesh, “In LavanyaBai KunjanBai street, near MaganBhai Biskutwala factory.”

Ganesh returned home with his family in the evening. Subhagi was overjoyed. She began going out for shopping every now and then. One day, a guard standing before a hotel saw her. He called out, “Are you from Ranchi?”

“How did you find out?”

“On seeing this Biruvar gamcha, only people from there have this gamcha.”

Jharkhandis have got their identity due to this gamcha. Most of them live in chawls or out-houses. Only Manjhi had a ‘quarter’ with three rooms. People began gathering at his house on festivals. He became everyone’s guardian. Earlier it was a compulsion to live in Surat, but now an invisible streamlet of joy began to flow through it. But this little joy proved to be short-lived.

Godhra Railway Station went up in flames. Entire Gujarat got engulfed in this fire. Surat, where people from every corner of the country had gathered for a living, all of them got scattered. MaganBhai Biskutwala factory was on fire too. The chawls in the area also faced disaster. Where would one go, nobody knew. Army lorries came out, but there was police patrolling on the roads. Police personnel with batons were spectators to the arson. In LavanyaBai KunjanBai street, there were mostly biskut²⁴ factory workers who were scurrying around. A stampede all around, suddenly an ordinance factory lorry came that way.

The factory lorry halted before Subhagi’s chawl, Subodh da came out. Subhagi clung to him and began crying. Subodh da told, “Quick, get into the lorry.” Five other women with their children from the chawl had boarded by then. After them Subhagi boarded with her daughter. Policemen patrolling the area were baffled to see the army vehicle. How this lorry dared to get here? Before they could reach it, the lorry drove straight and entered the military camp.

There was uproar in the camp too. Manjhi's neighbours were angry at these people being brought there. They got into a scuffle with Manjhi. The senior officer of the camp was informed. He came and sent others to the relief camp. Ganesh and his family stayed back.

It took time for peace to return to Surat. But Ganesh was restless after this incident. Subhagi insisted on returning to village. Ganesh knew that going back would be stupidity. Here, at least they were able to manage a living. Staying here, they could help father too, but how to make Subhagi understand all this?

They held discussion with Subodh da and Sushila di²⁵ daily. Subodh da understood the situation back at the village very well. He also knew the world around. He tried to persuade them, "You can't live in peace in any corner of the country. We, all the Ranchiyars²⁶, together can think of and share each other's happiness and well-being. You will face problem of riots, price rise, cheating, suffering everywhere. Shortage of water, shelter, food and injustice are the challenges for all of us. These challenges will always be there. To fight these, we left our homes in village. Now it is better to take these challenges head on." Ganesh reminded Subhagi of his two-year long loneliness.

Now people started returning to work. One day, Sushila di said, "Ganesh, we have this Biruvar gamcha as our identity. You brought it here. This gamcha helped so many of us in coming together."

Subodh da, "It is true, we have been staying here for the last 25 years, still we felt the pain of separation from home. Now, we have got united with our kin again."

Sushila, "We, all of us, are living together like a big family, isn't that so?" This helped Subhagi's mind to settle.

After a month, Manku received an envelope. Ganesh had sent a letter to his father. He had talked a little about the riots and informed about being safe. Further, he had written something very special -

Johar²⁷ to my great grandfather. Today I've understood how far-

sighted he was! He'd said – kargha-lundari is our identity. This Biruvar gamcha has saved our lives, given us our identity in this city where we're strangers. We all, who belong there, could get together under this gamcha. Now we're sharing each other's happiness and grief.

Pitaji²⁸, I request you to take time out to weave such gamchas, it's in demand here. I consider myself fortunate to be a chik baraik. Our gamcha is priceless. I am proud of being your son and dadaji's²⁹ grandson. We all send johar to you and ma³⁰.

Your son, Ganesh.

Two tears had dropped from Ganesh's eyes while ending his letter. Father kissed those on the letter.

Notes

- 1 Biru or Birugarh was a part of kingdom of Kaisalpur-Birugarh Parganas which was ruled by the king Ganga Vamsi of the Gajapati royal family of the Gajapat kingdom for centuries, even during the British colonial era. Currently, it is a village in Simdega district of Jharkhand situated at a distance of about 11km from Simdega city in South Jharkhand. This region is inhabited by the tribal and Odia communities. Kheria community is one of the five primary tribal communities of the region. Biruvar Gamcha is the traditional hand woven cloth made by this community. Three stripes in the cloth represent 3 sub-tribes of Kherias-Dudh, Dhelki and Hill or Pahari Sabar Kherias. A pattern of 9 stripes in the Biruvar Gamcha represents 9 sub-clans of Dudh Kherias. (<https://simdega.nic.in/en/history/>).
- 2 To cook food wrapped in leaves.
- 3 Brother-in-law.
- 4 An Indian sweetmeat made with curdled milk.
- 5 Various types of cloths made with coarse cotton yarn on handloom.
- 6 Cloth to tie a baby to one's back.
- 7 Cloths, utensils and other items given to one's daughter as a gift at the time of her wedding.
- 8 Foodgrain received annually from the village as a reward for the services rendered throughout the year.
- 9 The tribes of Jharkhand were culturally classified by the

- anthropologist Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi. According to his classification, chik baraik belonged to simple artisans' community.
- 10 Fine cotton yarn made with machines.
 - 11 Dye made from a tree's bark.
 - 12 Bellbottoms, as these were called in local slang.
 - 13 Handloom and shuttle.
 - 14 Trader, moneylender.
 - 15 A coarse food grain also known as 'finger millet' or ragi is widely used as staple diet by adivasi community.
 - 16 A rich trader, landlord.
 - 17 A short form of Intermediate which is an examination equivalent to higher secondary.
 - 18 Examination equivalent to 8th standard.
 - 19 A large building divided into many separate tenements offering cheap, basic accommodation to labourers.
 - 20 A monetary unit of very small denomination in Indian currency. It is equal of one hundredth of a rupee.
 - 21 Open space in the middle of the house which is the activity centre in Indian homes.
 - 22 Elder brother
 - 23 A small apartment
 - 24 Biscuit
 - 25 Elder sister
 - 26 Natives of Ranchi
 - 27 Salute, form of greeting in tribal communities.
 - 28 Father
 - 29 Grandfather
 - 30 Mother



Sudeep Sen in Conversation with Akshaya Kumar
on his latest edited anthology, *Converse: Contemporary English Poetry by Indians*
(Pippa Rann Books & Media UK, 2022)



Images consult
one
another,

a conscience-
stricken
jury,

and slowly
comes
to a sentence.

— A K Ramanujan

Akshaya Kumar: Editing a volume of poems is an act of responsibility, because anthologies, in a way, set the broad contours of what may later on ossify as a canon. Bringing within the scope of one volume, one hundred sixteen poets is a mammoth task, fraught with all kinds of risks, and possibilities of backlash from those who have been excluded. Scores of poems must have been read, re-read, and scrutinized by Sudeep Sen for the purpose of his latest anthology *Converse*. Reading a poem involves lot of cerebral effort, and also a necessary degree of immersion. Imagine how arduous it must have been for the editor to go through a whole range of poets and their poems. One has to be a poetry addict. I have known Sudeep for many years now, and I can say that he is addicted to poetry as much as poetry is addicted to him. He consumes poetry, and is consumed by poetry. His primary instinct is writing poems, but on the sidelines, he has this important contribution of an editor of poetry — not just Indian English, but poetry in translation both from India and abroad. Not long ago he edited an anthology for Harper Collins, to be precise in 2012. It was well-received and it travelled far and wide as a definitive volume of Indian English poetry. Then you edited *Modern English Poetry by Younger Indians* (Sahitya Akademi) which sort of acted like Volume 2 of the HarperCollins one. In this new collection *Converse*, one gets a sense of the field, and the broad spectrum of styles and moods that Indian English poets have been through in the

last 75 years. This book comes on the eve of 75 years of India's Independence.

So Sudeep, before I ask specific questions on the anthology, let me ask you about your motivation. What really triggers you to re-do an anthology of poems? Do you think in the last ten years the field has changed enormously?

Sudeep Sen: I do have an addiction to poetry, it's true. It's a strange disease, and I seek no medication, because I do not wish to be cured. Poetry sustains me.

So why do I do poetry anthologies? At a generic level, I find the world around us is so fractured, that the only things that seems capable of a universal healing, are intimately crafted words. Words that use both the head and the heart. Using just one source would be problematic. A lot of young poets write only from the heart, and it's wonderful if it's written for a specific person, but it can be sloppy. There are poets who write only cerebrally and that can be problematic too because the *rasa*, the cadence, and the texture is often missing, making it too academic, too staccato. The right calibration is in the balance.

The truth is, I have often told myself I will never edit another anthology. It can be a thankless job. Anyone you leave out is an instant foe. The reason I continue is because I think that the best of English language poetry coming out of India, and the Indian diaspora, is of a very high standard. I am fortunate that I am able to travel overseas extensively for my own poetry, and it makes me realize how little of poetry from India gets across to the world. Actually, very little gets across within India itself, leave alone outside India. I just want the best poetry to be out there. If it is there in book form, it is possible to pull people in to see it, to read it.

A very important motivation for this book also comes from my interest in Classical Indian music and dance, and my respect for the *guru-shishya parampara*. I have, as a poet, been very privileged to have had some wonderful mentors, directly or obliquely — Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, and Arun Kolatkar in India — Derek Walcott, Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney and others

overseas. These were all guiding lights as far as I was concerned. I wouldn't be a poet now, had they not paved the path, and carved the space for the next generation of poets. It's very important to recognize this. Some younger poets may decry and call their poetry "old fashioned" and therefore "not relevant." I believe it is important to know their poetry, because it situates us as part of a continuum.

Now in classical music and dance, this tradition or *parampara* is respected. You learn from your Guru and if you are a very good student, you break away from the Guru, and the Guru allows you to do that. And I have to say, the best of Indian poets in my case, people I have learnt from, have allowed me to break — break free, without them feeling slighted, because most good writers do not feel slighted. It's the mediocre people who get agitated.

Mediocrity is the biggest contagion in Indian poetry. Angst ridden poets, wanting their voices heard, wanting to be known, create a grisly kind of situation, because they feel the need to be everywhere. On the other hand, the really good Indian poets are fairly relaxed. They are doing what they have to do — they continue writing.

When we talk about other languages, I feel the problem is lesser, perhaps because we are talking about rootedness of a different kind. I am not going to get into a discussion of English being a rooted language or not, because English to me is an Indian language, always has been the case. But, the English language poetry scene in India is so fractured that it is almost disheartening, to the point of exasperation, really. Putting this book together, is perhaps, a gesture, to provide some peace and calm and salve. But ultimately, I do it for the wider cause of poetry.

Akshaya Kumar: One of the advantages of reading Sudeep Sen's anthologies is that he provides a very lucid and extended introduction or 'Foreword', which he terms as 'Contexts'. Each such prefatory note, in itself, speaks of his critical acumen, and can be read as an important resource for writing literary history. In *Converse*, Sudeep takes a long shot at the history of anthologies that have come right from *Dutt Family Album* onwards. He refers to various anthologies which have been compiled in the recent past. Sudeep, what do you think about the sudden spurt in anthologies of Indian English poetry?

Sudeep Sen: I am happy to see the spate of anthologies that have come out recently. It allows a wide variety of poets to be showcased, and allows the reader to really choose. The more there is out there, the more you have an opportunity to discern.

Akshaya Kumar: Designing an anthology needs to have some governing principle. When you do *Converse*, mere seventy fifth year of India's Independence can never be the only reason. So, when you put these poets together in one volume, do you have some overarching design, or overarching theme so to say? Are these poets being clubbed together because they have been writing prolifically all these years?

Sudeep Sen: Every anthology would have a very, very essential kind of tissue formation, the DNA is very important in any structure.

Poetry is not scrutinized in a critical way, like we scrutinize cricket for instance. Everybody is such an expert on Indian cricket, every missed cue, every leg lance, every little fielding lapse is deconstructed, in every home, across the country. Poetry on the other hand is the opposite. So, it's very important to deconstruct poetry, to see what is living, because no poem is dead. When you pick up a poem, whether it's by a dead poet or living poet, if a poem is working, it's like a microorganism that is living. It's like an algae that keeps moving, and you can't stop it, because it does something to you. That's the magic of poetry.

So yes, all these anthologies had a sort of reason and impetus. When I look back, I am kind of astonished at how many I have done. I have done almost fifteen anthologies, by which I also mean special issues of magazines which are on Indian poetry or South Asian poetry. And, truth be told, I take it up purely because it's my weak point, my Achilles heel.

When I was commissioned to do *The Harper Collins Book of English Poetry*, it was the sixtieth anniversary of Indian independence. The years don't really matter in terms of poetry, it's not important — but of course, it gives the publisher a reason for publishing. My impetus for putting together an anthology then was to showcase the excitement and ebullience that I saw in the poetry

firmament in India. Some years later I did another important anthology for the Sahitya Akademi., it was the *Modern English Poetry by Younger Indians* — and acted as Volume 2 of the HarperCollins one. When I was commissioned to do *Converse*, I already had these two big anthologies that had done really well. I looked at both of them and I asked myself, “Who are the people who deserve to be in this new one?” The answer was, “There are lots of poets who are good poets, but who haven’t really written in the last fifteen years significantly. Maybe they need to be given a rest, and others who were part of the larger team, to use a cricket analogy — those who are playing really well in the Ranji Trophy, but haven’t got a chance in the Indian Test Team — should be given a chance.”

You will find, therefore, that some who are not in it, are people who are significant names in literature, but have gone on to write novels or are doing other things. Very little poetry is coming from them, I don’t feel the burden that their older work should be here. The flurry of good younger writers now is just astonishing. And this is perhaps because the access and width of the platforms have broadened — it is not just print, but also performance, and it is on various platforms — social media, and so on. Personally, I do not hierarchize a printed volume over the others. I read poetry on Instagram-Twitter-Facebook, I watch poetry films. There is a lot of very, very good work coming out that captures this new vibrancy. And so, I chose to feature only living poets — because this would allow a wider representation of active younger poets.

But at the end of the day, the only guiding principle for anybody to qualify to be in this book is the purity and quality of writing itself. Nothing else matters to me. Whether he or she is powerful, or is a friend of mine or not. None of these concerns matter. The only reason poets feature in *Converse* is because they have written good work.

Akshaya Kumar: When you talk about *guru-shishya parampara*, are you aware of the perils of *gharana* politics? There are many *gharanas* in Indian poetry.

Sudeep Sen: Sadly, that is true. The English-language poetry scene in India is completely fractured. I had hoped as a younger editor when I first started editing anthologies, things would change over time, but

unfortunately, they haven't improved. Quite the reverse in fact — that is the reality. Ironically, in contrast, the state of Indian English poetry itself is very strong, the best if it is very good indeed, and there is a lot of it — which is what you find in this book. I try and side-step the regional *gharanas* because I want the focus to be on good poems as a whole, not the poet's personality. And for me, all the poets in the book are equal — they are all my children. Jayanta Mahapatra who is born in 1928 is rubbing shoulders with the youngest poet (born in the 1995) in this book — isn't that wonderful? And both are there for the same reason, because of the quality of their writing.

I have visited Jayant Mohapatra in Orissa many times over the years. His address is charmingly old fashioned — Jayanta Mahapatra, Tinkonia Bagicha, Cuttack, Orissa. Send a mail to that address and it will reach him safely. I have spent many afternoons and evenings on his slanted mango tree, talking about poetry and life over endless cups of tea. I still cherish the sense of comradeship that came with it. The youngest poet in the book is someone I had a chance to mentor on a long train ride to Delhi. When I first knew her, she was starting out. By the time I was putting this book together, she had published her first book of poetry by a very fine press in London. These are the two poets who book-end the *Converse* anthology.

Akshaya Kumar: Can you name some of the *gharanas*? It should not be very difficult to identify them.

Sudeep Sen: It is an open secret. Traditionally, it's been topographically mapped. There is the "Bombay School." It's not a school really, but for historical reasons, certain areas of India had clusters of poets, who in terms of numbers were much more than those in the other parts of India. Bombay was probably number one in terms of numbers. Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, and various others, Hyderabad for instance, had a loose conglomeration of poets. Then there are two other very interesting non-metropolitan centres. One is Orissa, and that largely happened because of Jayanta Mahapatra and his tutelage. And the other is the North-East, which often gets left out -- there again there is this sort of micro climate of poetry that exists independently. The poetry there is quite different, though in a holistic sense it merges with the larger Indian poetry scene.

And then, for the first time — in various journals I’ve guest-edited: *Lines Review* (Scotland), *Wasafiri* (UK), *Literary Review* (USA), *The Yellow Nib* (Ireland) and others — culminating in *The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry* (1992), I opened the whole anthology-making tradition to include the diasporic Indian poetry as well. Not just people from India who happen to have settled overseas in later years, but people of Indian origin who may have been born overseas. So, I included poets from say, the South Pacific, Fiji. I have travelled to many of these places — on the back of my poetry. I was invited to a festival, for instance, in South Africa, and because I am interested as an editor, I bought books by diasporic poets and brought them home. Over the years that aggregation is what has made these anthologies rich and diverse.

So yes, the old “gharanas” are there, but I find the divisive idea of that very unattractive. They work more like coteries and have no allegiance to a *parampara* or tradition. Personally, I don’t believe in clubs, cliques and hierarchies. I do not believe in boxed rooms. I like airy spaces which have transparent walls, which can breathe through osmosis, because poetry actually travels that way. You have to defragment (to use a computer jargon), to get the energy back. I believe in inter-racial-hierarchical mixing.

Akshaya Kumar: Since you’ve referred to Jayanta Mahapatra — Mahapatra himself says somewhere that because he was published abroad to begin with, that he received some audience back home. When one reads the biographies or bio-notes of the poets here, the same impression is buttressed. Some of these poets have been published, of late, by Sahitya Akademi, but most of them are recognized abroad first, and then these poets are anthologized back in India for some native approval.

Sudeep Sen: Doesn’t that say something about us, as Indians? I mean, the answer lies in your question really, and I don’t have to add anything. Just because someone has published in some obscure magazine abroad, is it the reason that their poetry is better than someone who has published in India? -- Of course not.

Overseas, in the US and UK at least, there is some degree of process in how books are published. There are dedicated ‘poetry

editors' in major publishing houses. The poetry editors are usually reputed practicing poets. Some of them are given a limited tenure, so their editorial vision doesn't get stale. Then the editors may change. This is wonderful for the health of good and diverse poetry.

Often, the only way you can get a manuscript published with a really good publisher there, is based on the 'acknowledgements' list in your manuscript. If eighty percent of your manuscript is published in various publications, then the poetry editor knows that it's already gone through a sort of a sieve or a system of selection, because these editors of different journals and magazines are varied. So, if you can impress, say twenty different editors and have eighty percent of the manuscript already published, automatically the editor at the publishing house will take the submitted book very seriously. Therefore, the whole tradition of publishing widely, literary magazines, reading live at festivals, become important — because there you can expect to encounter people who are really watching and taking notes.

So, what can I say? I do not want to sound bleak, because despite everything, four or five anthologies have appeared this year. It is a source of great celebration and I think the reason that is happening is because younger people are braver and more willing to cross boundaries, despite the hierarchical structures.

Akshaya Kumar: In this particular anthology you refer to, as to who to include and who to exclude. That only the living poets become part of the book. How good is that rule to compile an anthology of this scale?

Sudeep Sen: That was purely partly a practical decision I had to take. When I set out to work on this book, we put out an open call, and received over 15000 pages of poetry in response. This was in addition to the poets I had personally invited to be part of the book. I wanted the book to reflect the live stream of energy I was encountering, and so the decision to go with only 'living poets,' I say very specifically in my introduction that some significant, well-published, senior poets are not in the book. These are poets who are well-mapped already and their work is easily available. So, if I have left out Nissim Ezekiel or Arun Kolatkar or A K Ramanujan, have I done any disservice? Not

at all, because they are already well anthologized over the years and are incredibly easy to find. I think I am doing a service by giving space to poets who are bright and who haven't had the space thus far.

Also, there are some very good poets who were in the HarperCollins book, who are not in this book. There is a very good reason. Some of those poets haven't produced any significant new poetry in the last fifteen years. Therefore, I haven't included them. They may come up with a better book or a new poetry book later on. If that's the case they'll be in the next anthology. It's not a race, you know. It's not a life and death situation. Poetry is something to be enjoyed, it's part of a living tradition. So, for many of the deceased poets (who I greatly admire) and who are not there in *Converse*, I have tried to ensure that I liberally use epigraphs of their poetry in my introduction to mark their presence.

Akshaya Kumar: Death is not something you can hold against somebody. After all, if you are publishing a book for commemorating seventy-fifth year of India's independence, I mean I am not talking about the other living poets, but poets like Meena Alexander, A. K. Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar, etc. happen to be the frontline poets of post-Independent India. How can one not include them in an anthology which has the claims of being 'definitive'?

Sudeep Sen: Many of the poets you mention are in my HarperCollins book. I do believe they are very fine poets. You can't hold me accountable for a publishing house's marketing spiel. Of course, they are going to say definitive, most intelligent, the best — but any discerning reader knows that is just a marketing strategy. Of course, it is not the "the" definitive anthology, which is why I continue to endorse other anthologies that have come out this year or last year. It's been such a wonderful thing that multiple anthologies have come out in recent times. And frankly, no matter which anthology you show me, I can make a credible argument why it is not 'definitive.' I think 'informative' would be a better word. The anthologies inform us about the movement in Indian poetry. I would say, just rejoice in what is there to savour.

Akshaya Kumar: Those who have read Sudeep's poetry will find that in any case when he writes, he doesn't write all alone. There are

epigraphs of poets from different continents and different nations that precede many poems or are placed in the beginning of a new section of a book. As he writes his poetry, he orchestrates world poetry to his advantage. There is always a lurking anthologist in Sudeep's poetry.

One of ways to anthologize poems is to put poems under some thematic rubric. The general rubrics have been 'love poems', 'green poems', 'peace poems' etc. What do you say about such anthologies?

Sudeep Sen: Thematic anthologies are a different beast. That was not what I set out to do. I wanted to do a book that was representative of the time(s). I look at anthologies from a practicing poet's lens, so my duty is not that of an academic or a critic who may wish to do anthologies under certain themes. For instance, in the last two years, there have been way too many anthologies on climate change, perhaps because it is topical or trendy. What about everything else that is important? — those tends to get edited out in thematic anthologies.

I have tried to make the *Converse* anthology different in subtle and nuanced ways. The book exhibits the poems from the oldest to the youngest. So, you can see the poetry change over time, and also see the poetry at a point in time. I have chosen to publish between five to twelve poems by each poet, which is again unusual. I want any reader who reads the book to get some sense of what each poet is all about. The norm in other anthologies has been to feature just two or three poems per poet — and the problem with two or three poems is, often, that the same poems get recycled in every anthology.

Another effort I made was to resurrect some work that was out of print. And make space for long poems. In anthologies, long poems are almost never published, because of the nature of anthology making and the market forces — there is just no space to include them. For instance, Adil Jussawalla's 'Chakravyuha' is in *Converse*. It has never been published before, you know? He wrote it as a commission for Channel Four television in the UK. Subsequently extracts were published here and there, but not the whole poem. He wryly said, "Sudeep, publish this at your own peril. Publishers won't commission you again because one poem has eaten up twenty-five pages of the book." I replied, saying, "It does not matter."

Similarly, I found some work by another poet, Tanya Mendonsa — who had written this wonderful, fable like, book-length poem, ‘The Fisher of Perch’, that was published by a small press. I thought the poem was so brilliant that it ought to have a full run in a book like this. So, the entire poem spanning over 15 pages is there in *Converse*. I told her, “I am only choosing one poem by you ... but it is going to be this long poem.” She said, “I would have preferred six shorter poems.” I said “It is your choice. Either six poems or one poem — and I prefer the long poem.” She later thanked me for my selection.

There has also been an effort to do things innovatively. Anybody who reads the book will see that. There is a lot of interesting internal architecture and musicality that resonates within the book. A *terza rima* poem is sitting next to a *ghazal*, fragmented Sapphic verse is sitting next to a tightly-wrought *canzone*, and so on. I had to read very deeply as you can see. The selection took many hours of re-reading every submitted poem.

Akshaya Kumar: My next question springs from your answer. In this age of anthologies, what is the future of book-length poems? Don’t you think that the poem-centric anthologies supersede book-length poems?

Sudeep Sen: I think there is a great future for book-length poems. Any serious reader of poetry reads poetry without any stipulated rules, as you well know. You look at Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, it is a book-length poem. His *Tiepolo’s Hound* is a book-length poem. Joseph Brodsky’s *To Urania* is a book-length poem. Michael Madhusudan Dutt has written book-length poems. Arun Kolatkar has written book-length poems. Mahapatra has written a book length poem (which won him the Sahitya Akademi prize) — *Relationships*, which is now being re-published, fortunately. Your own favourite book of mine, before I ever met you, was my book-length poem, *Distracted Geographies*.

I was a young poet then, and I came across one of your books *Poetry, Politics and Culture* published by Routledge, and there was a whole chapter in that book on my *Distracted Geographies*. I was relatively young when I had written this long poem, which takes place over two hundred and six pages. Reason it takes place over two

hundred and six pages is because there are two hundred and six bones in the human body. And the guiding principle for the structure of the book was the human spinal cord. Since there are thirty-three sections of the spinal cord, so there are thirty-three chapters in that book. You wrote a chapter on this book before I ever met you. That's how poetry should be read. Read the text first, if you like it, that is what matters — the person who has written can be discounted. If this person happens to be a nice guy, or you get to know him, great — that is a bonus. So yes, long poems have been a part of the poetic tradition. It still exists, very much so.

Akshaya Kumar: That is true. The question is that these days anthology is a very handy kind of a pedagogical tool also. Accommodating a long-poem within the limits of an anthology is difficult. Parthasarathy's 'Homecoming' or Mahapatra's 'Relationships' or Kolatkar's 'Jejuri' are difficult to fit in within the scope of any anthology.

Sudeep Sen: The length of any poem does not deter me. I take my decisions based on the merit of the poem. Including long poems in this anthology is one of the barriers in anthology-making that I was breaking. I have also included concrete or visual poetry, poems that are very difficult to set up typographically. It is a nightmare for a typesetter. If I find a poet who has taken interesting liberties with typography, how do you represent those poems? So, the first thing the publisher tells me is, "Drop that poem. Let's just get left-aligned poems." These are things you fight for, because you want to show variety, diversity, and representation of the different kinds of things that are being done.

Akshaya Kumar: There is a balancing act somewhere. You tend to choose poets from different rubrics, different clusters, and you keep repeating this thing that it is 'inclusive', and that I have tried to give representation to all *gharanas* or non-*gharanas*, or whatever else.

Sudeep Sen: Yes, you also do want to represent fairly — that is part of making a good anthology. If it was just a book of five poets, then my choices would be very clear who I would want. If you have a very small number of poets in a book, you could make a really cutting-edge, tight anthology — maybe even a maximum of twenty poets.

Now if you are making that kind of anthology, if that is the publisher's brief, it'll be a great thrill to do it. Only twenty people to be selected from the entire history of Indian poetry. But in *Converse* we were looking for a wider representation that does justice to the last 75 years and the present time.

Akshaya Kumar: You say that in your anthologies, including the present one, poetry precedes the poet. What matters to you is the quality of the poem more than the reputation of the poet. So, can you shortlist five poems which you think are one, two, three, four, five, as per your standards? I know it would be difficult to commit to four-five poems.

Sudeep Sen: I am afraid, I won't fall for that question. Instead, I will read just two poems — the first and the last. I will read one by Jayanta Mahapatra — who starts the book. It is a fairly iconic poem, ageless, — this is what the best poems are all about. It is called 'Dawn at Puri':

Endless crow noises
A skull in the holy sands
tilts its empty country towards hunger.

White-clad widowed women
past the centres of their lives
awaiting to enter the Great Temple.

Their austere eyes
stare like those caught in a net
hanging by the dawn's shining strands of faith.

The frail early light catches
ruined, leprous shells leaning against one another,
a mass of crouched faces without names,

and suddenly breaks out of my hide
into the smoky blaze of a sullen solitary pyre
that fills my aging mother:

her last wish to be cremated here
twisting uncertainly like the light
on the shifting sands.

Now, let me read the last poem in the book, by the youngest poet in *Converse*. This is a young person writing, ostensibly, about shoes. But it is talking about so many other things — about exile, about language, about moving from one land to the other, about being taken abruptly from a warm Punjabi-Himachali space into a cold Irish space, where slippers-and-barefoot existence is simply not available.

It's been a good discussion, and we do not want to spoil the beauty of poetry by too much analysis or explanation. Let us end with a poem by Supriya Kaur Dhaliwal, who was born in 1995. And it is called 'Reading Natalia Ginzburg in East Cork':

Words fail me often and so do shoes.
I always keep a pair ready, polished

in an empty suitcase like an air ticket
without a return date purchased on a whim.

I wear them only on uncomfortable occasions.
For when I am feeling most comfortable, I long

for the worn-out sneakers I have been wearing
every day for hundreds of days;

trusting them the most to keep my feet warm
and dry, to keep my gait pronounced

like an athlete's or a ballerina's. It is too much
to ask for, perhaps from something lifeless

summoned by all the burdens of the living.
At the edge of this forest and the tree-lined

avenues of the city where I have not yet
been able to go — reside some little virtues

and there, we can ask for everything
that the heart needs and there, we will

know that it would have been the best
if we came in our most worn-out shoes.

Akshaya Kumar: When you read this anthology, you are overwhelmed by the poetic talent particularly of the emerging younger poets. The natural ease with which a variety of emotions are expressed in the so-called ‘father-tongue’ English is simply remarkable. Diverse poetic forms — native, non-native — are practiced. Sudeep himself has written haiku, sonnets and quatrains. Agha Shahid Ali mastered the art of *ghazal* in English. He was a pioneer of English ghazal poetry as you know. In Converse, there are poets writing ghazals now with greater felicity. Let me take the liberty of reading one such, the opening four couplets from ‘A Ghazal for Peace’ by a young poet Mihir Chitre on Twitter, and the culture of trolls and fake-news that it perpetuates:

Empathy has just died on Twitter.
We have violently lied on Twitter.

They, who’re targeted today,
Your retweet is their cyanide on Twitter.

Lynching anyone with a dagger of accusations
Truth is often mystified on Twitter.

A lifetime reduced to 140 characters
Nuance commits suicide on Twitter. ...

Sudeep, since you have covered poets of the last 75 years, do you notice remarkable changes in the way younger poets deal with issues of religion, culture and nationalism? For instance, I read this anthology as a solid and unambiguous testament of non-

parochialism. Or this anthology can be read as the locus of India's cultural journey towards a more cosmopolitan and planetary future. To what extent have the poets experimented with the traditional forms of poetry?

Sudeep Sen: Not just experiment, I think new poets have been making new forms with wonderful exuberance. For instance, to cite a personal example, there is a poem of mine called 'Bharatnatyam Dancer'. It uses a form which never existed before — I invented the form. The story behind it is this: When I was watching a particular dancer dance to a particular *raga*, the *taal* and *bol* that were being used was — *ta dhin ta thaye thaye ta, ta dhin ta thaye thaye ta, ...* So, when I was working on the later drafts of this poem, it struck me that I could use that as the rubric for the structure. So, I invented a rhyme scheme — *abacca, abacca, ...* to match and mimic the dancer's classical beats. Now in books of prosody, this poem is cited as an example of a newly invented form. There are others I have invented too, like in the poem 'New York Times', and for the book-length poem 'Distracted Geographies: An Archipelago of Intent'.

Akshaya Kumar: And I have ventured to translate some of these poems into Punjabi.

Sudeep Sen: Yes, indeed. A book of my English poems in Punjabi translation, titled *Godhuli Lagna*, has come out as well. Can you imagine the challenge of translating these formal structures into Punjabi? Because a lot of my work is formally very strict, even though it may ostensibly appear as free verse. One of the poets I have admired is Gerard Manley Hopkins who is a master of half rhymes and internal rhymes, and formal experimentation.

So, it's not easy, but I think you did a very fine job. The translation project was, coincidentally, prompted in this particular hall where I had done a talk/reading and a workshop with young students. There were some people who wrote in Hindi or Punjabi, and I told them, "You don't have to be an English language poet to come to my workshop. Just be a poet." So, people who came, wrote

in Punjabi, Hindi, and English. Then some of the students started translating my poetry into Punjabi, and eventually, more than a decade later, under your tutelage, this new book of my 'Selected Poems' saw light of day. The book, apart from your fine critical introduction, also has a wonderful Foreword and Afterword by the illustrious Punjabi poet Surjit Patar and theatre director Neelam Mansingh, respectively. What a pleasing and fulfilling journey poetry can be.

(This is an edited version of a live conversation that took place in Mulk Raj Anand Auditorium of the Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh on 26 November, 2022)

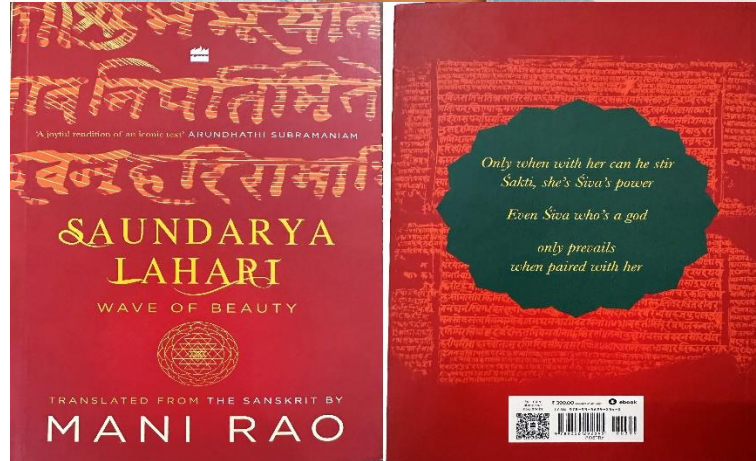
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Sudeep Sen's [www.sudeepsen.org] is one of the leading international poets whose prize-winning books include: *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems* (HarperCollins), *Rain, Aria* (A. K. Ramanujan Translation Award), *Fractals: New & Selected Poems | Translations 1980-2015* (London Magazine Editions), *EroText* (Vintage: Penguin Random House), *Kaifi Azmi: Poems | Nazms* (Bloomsbury) and *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion, Consolation* (Pippa Rann, 2021-22 Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize winner). He has edited influential anthologies, including: *The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry* (editor), *World English Poetry*, *Modern English Poetry by Younger Indians* (Sahitya Akademi), and *Converse: Contemporary English Poetry by Indians* (Pippa Rann). *Blue Nude: Ekphrasis & New Poems* (Jorge Zalamea International Poetry Prize) and *The Whispering Anklets* are forthcoming. Sen's works have been translated into over 25 languages. His words have appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Newsweek*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Independent*, *Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, *Herald*, *Poetry Review*, *Literary Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Hindu*, *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *Outlook*, *India Today*, and broadcast on BBC, PBS, CNN IBN, NDTV, AIR & Doordarshan. Sen's newer work appears in *New Writing 15* (Granta), *Language for a New Century* (Norton), *Leela: An Erotic Play of Verse and Art* (Collins), *Indian Love Poems*

(Knopf/Random House/Everyman), *Out of Bounds* (Bloodaxe), *Initiate: Oxford New Writing* (Blackwell), and *Name me a Word* (Yale). He is the editorial director of AARK ARTS, editor of *Atlas*, and currently the inaugural artist-in-residence at the Museo Camera. His professional photography is represented by ArtMbassy, Rome [<http://www.artmbassy.com/artists.html>]. The Government of India awarded him the senior fellowship for “outstanding persons in the field of culture/literature.” Sen is the first Asian honoured to deliver the Derek Walcott Lecture and read at the Nobel Laureate Festival.



Mani Rao in Conversation with Akshaya Kumar



This is the first publication of an interview with Mani Rao conducted by Prof. Akshaya Kumar, 28th October 2022, Panjab University, Chandigarh. Mani Rao is one of the most original contemporary poets, and a translator. She has an MFA in Creative Writing and a PhD in Religious Studies. Her doctoral research considered the very material of creation in ancient Indian thought. This interview reveals Rao's attitudes on the use of condensed language; looming presence of shadows in her poetry; her close assessment of life and fidelity in translation; her analysis of various modes of being; an honest examination of the process of writing poetry as blood-letting; her views concerning the "roles" and "duties" of a translator and the complex presence of a translator in their work; an interrogation of her subject matter as a source of life that is much of the history and goes beyond religious sentiments. For her, each translation takes a different course. At the core of this ethos is Rao's concern for not only literature and translation, but for the utterances and extraordinary hidden meanings in any work.

Akshaya Kumar: Let me begin with by saying that Mani Rao is a difficult poet, not easy to deal with. Such is the complexity of her emotion that each poem comes like an enigmatic *sutra* – sometimes textured, sometimes just abstract – contained in very measured words. As she falls back on language to express herself, she confronts a serious inadequacy of words. Repeatedly she questions the veracity of words, their transparency and their innocence.

In one of the poems titled 'Words ...' she underscores her paradoxical relationship with words thus: "Monkey, we leap from word to word, thick with meaning. / Spider, our words are resilient webs, we make snares/ in the colour of air, sweet-smelling and sticky. / Please, do not say a single word. Expressed, dead. You have my word." (*New and Selected Poems*, 70). In yet another poem ("War Is A ..."), she implores: "Bring me the words without meanings, /words all meanings have abandoned, sentenced to/ meaningless. (*New and Selected Poems*, 61). At another place, she says: "Wash words of meaning/ say iggy ugga luga wari oh numm numm" (*100 Poems*, 38). In another poem, she once again points out how suicidal the use of

language is. She writes: “Language can at best mortify thought.” (*100 Poems*, 98). She even goes to the extent of arguing against the very act of writing: “Writers, fireflies, mistake white paper for light. / The only writing really necessary is one’s Last Will and Testament/ and even that implies a lack of trust” (“Writing to Stop”, *Ghostmasters*, 44).

So, what makes her a difficult poet is her predicament of operating through a human language, which she knows, will invariably fail her. There is this tussle between language and non-language, and her poetry springs from this interstitial space. Before I speak about other things that stand out in your poetry and translations, let me begin the conversation by asking you about your stance on words in poetry, their cognitive value. What triggers you to write poetry knowing fully well that writing in words itself could be a self-defeating task?

Mani Rao: All we have is words. Like the body. It’s an instrument, a *yantra*, and it is only through it that we can find or search for an embodiment of what lies beyond, or within. Some say the body is just *jaDa*, like insensate dirt. But, if we don’t have that, we have nothing. We have to find the *spandana*, the stirring, the spirit, the vibration, the joy and the bliss through that. So, words are like the body, which, is why I love the expression—the corpus of work—this is my oeuvre, this is my body of writing, because when writing you’re actually making a body. In fact there is a word in Hindi, that we use to mean “dictionary” – *shabda-kosh*. I wonder why we don’t also use it to mean our body of work.

Especially considering there is the entire concept of koshas - or sheaths - in Indian thought. Our body, the food body - *anamaya kosha*, and also the *pranamaya kosha* for the pranic energy that animates us, *manomaya kosha* for mental body, *vijnanamaya kosha* for wisdom body, *anandamaya kosha* for bliss body.

Language is probably, I think, in the *vijnanamaya kosha* drawing from the *manomaya kosha*, and arriving at *anandamaya kosha*. It is like one of those vectors that crosses all of our bodies.

So, words are my body. It is what I have. I use it. If I was a musician, it would be music, if I was a dancer, it would be dance, but I am a writer, so I have words. Only words. I use them.

Akshaya Kumar: That's true. But when one reads your poetry, instead of the precise sound, one hears echoes; instead of the body you are more a poet of the shadows of the body. Your echoes sprawl on the mountainside and, and then they multiply, and act like garrulous sisters.

Mani Rao: Of course. Words are also like icebergs, what you see on the surface is only the visible part, the rest of it is beneath the surface. Very, very present and weighty.

Now this effect has to do with the very process of my writing. It's because when I write poems usually, I have no other reader, outside me, on my mind. I am not explaining the poem to anyone else. And that makes it more potent, that is how it is also meant for everyone else, because within me is everyone else.)

Then, there is no object per se that is limiting the expression. So, then you catch hold of the word only in order to have that part of the amplitude which is audible. As we know, sound has a range. There is the audible and the inaudible. We hear what is within the range audible to human ears, , but sound is way beyond that. Other species can hear sounds that we can't. And actually, we can expand our ability to receive sounds beyond what we can hear now. So, when we use words, we project something that you can catch or "hold on to" and that also drags in what you are calling the echoes. And if you listen attentively, the echoes will expand, open up. All this is about expanding our being beyond our limitations or just habits.

Akshaya Kumar: And what about the shadows that you keep hovering over in your poetry, in their uncanny ways? Sometimes

instead of the body that throws its shadows, it is the shadow that holds the body in its arms. You write: "I'm a baby in the arms of my shadows" (100 Poems, 69). You reverse the relationship between a person and his shadow. You say "The shadow had a person". It is the shadow that gathers agency, and not the body as much. In one of the poems, you say "My shadow comes home/ at night/ Howls at my grave/ till I open my coffin / and let him in" (100 Poems, 66). Is there any metaphysics of shadow in your poetry? Is the relationship between body and its shadow analogous to relationship between reality and *maya* or illusion? Are you in any way invoking or drawing from Shankaracharya's principle of *advaita* in your poems on and around the shadows?

Mani Rao: I have a whole book called *Living Shadows*. But what you say is very interesting. I wasn't really aware of Shankara in that way when I wrote *Living Shadows*. I mean that was 1997, I was in advertising, Shankara was not really a part of my reading or thoughts! So, I don't know, we all come from the same repertoire, and this is a very interesting point you are making about provenance, you know, because we always look for "Oh! Where, where did this come from?" you know?

"Oh! this came from Kant."
 "Oh! What was Kant reading?"
 "Oh, maybe Kant was reading Swedenborg."
 "What was Swedenborg reading?"
 "Maybe he was reading Upanishads."
 Like then we think, maybe, "what were the
 Upanishads compilers reading?"

You know, it's just never going to end and who knows what happened in history. But the point is we are all drawing from life, we all have shadows and surely so did Shankara. We are all drawing from the same repertoire...Right? I mean, yes I have written about shadows but I believe it comes from life, not from any school of philosophy.

Akshaya Kumar: So, does this mean that writing poetry is an act of self-attestation? In fact, you reiterate that you are a witness to your own self: “What if I am own witness/My ears believe each other” (“Void Plate”, *New and Selected Poems*, 35). In another poem, you say “Narcissism drowns in onliness, the rest is duplicity”. So, what is it? Is it enlightened narcissism or a very emancipated duplicity?

Mani Rao: These examples are not comparable. The first example: “What if I am my own witness? My ears believe each other” is a biblical reference. In that poem - “The Void Plate” - I am talking about witnessing something immense, and that I have no proof for it. I don’t have evidence of what I have seen.

In the other poem... that is actually about being solo and not being solo. Narcissus who is self-obsessed, is drowning in onliness. That poem is a critique of both the modes of being in society. One is the person who is only lonely and is so obsessed with it and turns it into a melodrama, and the other is the person who is part of a couple, a pair, but that is also duplicity. The duplicity of the double. So in that instance is actually a social critique on both those modes of being.

But yes – of course – I am a witness to myself. We are all our own witnesses. The task and goal is to become more and more conscious, to become better witnesses of ourselves.

Akshaya Kumar: When you clamour for the *sukshma*, your language, at times, becomes very bare, and I could see that in most of the poems you exhaust the experience of the immense in one or two lines, you actually boil down to equations. And, and the expression become very laconic. For instance, you throw a number of one-liners such as “Name two fictitious numbers: ever and never” or “There is word with no opposite: eternity”. These one-liners are good, but there has to be something for the reader to hold onto. After all, one does not write for oneself, one writes for the readers as much.

Mani Rao: Yes, the reader faces a problem, I guess, when one writes like that. Sorry! Sometimes the poems may be hard work, or just not satisfying, and hope other instances compensate. Like I said, in many

poems, I am not writing a guided poem for the reader. So it may come across like some mutter or off-cut, or remnant of conversation I am having with myself. I believe though that it would speak to the reader, that it is worthy of publication. Maybe something that does not appeal to you may appeal to others.

Akshaya Kumar: And what about the art of poetry? In one poem you simply multiply 365 into as many days. 365 is multiplied by 30, 365 is multiplied by 70, and 365 is multiplied by 90. Do you want to suggest that 365 is a smaller number, but when you expand it into days it looks like a longer span?

Mani Rao: Yes. I mean that each year has those number of days. And more years are more days. What more is there to say. In that poem, that's it. And actually, what I love here about the formulaic pithy style is that it forced you to give it a higher level of attention. You were intrigued enough to think about it, to discuss it.

But certainly, we come back again to some my writing methodology. I do write pages and pages and pages, and then when I arrive at the distilled essence, I think, that's all that is worth giving out, because the rest of it is just process.

Often poems can be just bloodletting...baggage and bloodletting and all the band-baaja the noise is not actually the point. I just want to share ...the pearl...the learning. And then you as a reader can attach any other biographical detail to it that helps it become a part of you.. Attach your own story to it. Isn't this more valuable for you as a reader, than being guided with a heavy hand as to how to interpret it.

Akshaya Kumar. Even in poems where you bring in a lot of imagery, your expression remains very terse and telegraphic. Your poems on "Eyes" are very compelling in terms of the series of images they inhere. Your description of eyes - "slippery flambéed moon on water" is exceptional. It's only four lines, so let me quote the poem for the audience.

We burn eyes.
Slippery flambéed moon on water.
How similar, fire and rain, the lapping and the fizz.
Outlined in soot, a black curvature.

There is a special fascination for the eyes in your poems.

Mani Rao: Now this poem actually proves what we have been talking about. That a few words can drag in a lot. That poem obviously spoke to you. You did not find it “laconic”.

Akshaya Kumar: There are some poems where you tend to create some design and a small narrative as well. In such poems you deliberately minus yourself from situations. You come out of your own body. You come out of your own dream. You leave out a story, and then you re-complete or re-imagine it. There are many poems where you use verbs like “recur”, “replace” or “recall”. Let me read this interesting poem. “I leave myself in the terrace and go downstairs/ I leave myself in the living room and go to the kitchen./ I get together sometimes, a hall of mirrors/. Swearing different stories, playing you know that I know that you know that I know.”/ “They are all true. Some of the truth you know, some you don’t./ You look for too much explanation”/ I can go back to fetch a better memory and I can recur if you wish.”

What is this word “recur”?

Mani Rao: That’s we do in life, isn’t it? How else do we hold our personality together? We have a certain memory of who we are, we don’t begin each day as a new person. We have a particular personality imprint, and we repeat that every day. And we repeat that to the other people who know us, we perform ourselves every day, and people would be shocked if we showed up as a new person each day. They wouldn’t know how to deal with us. They have expectations and we have expectations of ourselves, and we also

create ourselves like evolutionary graphs. “I am going to get better. Better at this.”

Actually, on that poem you mentioned, I would love to share an anecdote about it. I read this at Mount Carmel College last week and it’s part of a chapbook that’s just come out it’s called *Love Me in a Hurry*. Pratibha Nandakumar has translated it into Kannada, and she read this poem in Kannada translation. Somebody in the class said to her- “Why did you use the feminine pronoun?” She said, “I thought...because Mani is ... so I did.” Everyone started laughing.

Then I said “Wait a minute. How many of you thought that it was a woman – or a housewife - speaking in this poem?”

Ninety percent hands went up. I said “why?” If you imagine a housewife in that voice, you can pretty much hear the tone! “You look for too much explanation, *husband!*”

So the audience interpreted the idea about recurring as a comment on the banal life of a housewife. See, I had not given this interpretation to the poem. The readers gave the poem that particular interpretation, and I am sure that other interpretations are possible. Perhaps somebody who studies psychology and personality might come up with a completely different interpretation, right? And of course, I am not going to tell you mine. Because, because that would be spoiling the fun of it.

Akshaya Kumar: Okay. In another poem also you say “You close your eyes. Imagine the view. Open your eyes. Replace the view with edge-to-edge identical copy of the original” (“Views Not Parodied ...”, *New and Selected Poems*, 63). And then in another poem you say “and you my queen of honey lips, only one to ever know how to make a ghost of me. Play me a new song, recall me.” (“Bury Me In ...”, *New and Selected Poems*, 56). The pre-fix ‘re-’ is very pronounced in your poetic idiom.

Mani Rao: Thank you, Akshaya. Sometimes how critics read and observe can tell the writer so much about themselves. For me, that first poem was only a poem about looking at a view, I was describing the moment when I was looking at a mountain on some viewpoint on

a hillroad. As for the other poem, it is one of my favourites. May I repeat it – say it aloud - to fit your theme of recurrence? I know the poem by heart.

Akshaya Kumar: Sure!

Mani Rao:

Bury me in a frozen lake, saltless and safe,
someday lifted
to the eyes of a new person, telling her what to call
me as she probes me.
Drop me on coral entangled, hair streaming in the
current,
rocking on a seabed of pistons.
Leave me in the garden slope, a dial tilted to the
stars, on
the orange trail as they roll to rot.
Bury me bare a bird obvious on a tree in autumn.
Was desire meant to be saved, kept alive,
unanswered? But
this is a deathfuck, different, the more I
dismember,
the more I want,
And you my queen of honeylips, the only one who
ever
know how to make a ghost of me, play me a new
song, recall me
The nagman brings a daily death, squeezes my
breasts, a
clay clasp cooler than your hand, gives me fingers
and
teeth
The gardener of dust is song my frame as a mould
for the
shape of future dust. This is how the dust will
grow

into the pencilling will fail to bits

That was a love poem actually. I'm addressing someone I love, and talking about a time that has gone. Recalling here is about bringing back what has gone.

Akshaya Kumar: I am not reducing you into a category. But yes, I am tempted to describe you as a love poet. Love is a very intimidating emotion in your poems. It is not easy to be a lover in your poetry. Let me recapitulate some lines from some of your poems to underline how difficult it is to be in love, or to be a lover. Take for instance, the opening poem of your *New and Selected Poems*. This is how it goes: "Those love cannot leave alone/ Love those cannot leave alone./ Cannot love leave those alone./ Leave those cannot love alone./ Those cannot leave love alone." ("Five-Word Poem")

At times, you become fairly lyrical about love and its longings. Let me recite some lines from one of your love poems: "But still wait for my perch in your arms/ I would peg so lightly the sheets of your night flights/ We would travel in one mind your old lands by new skies And every morning you would breathe me fly. ("Address", 4). At times you become fairly aggressive and demanding as a lover.

Mani Rao: Sounds good to me. Love does do that kind of favour to us. If you're lucky. It destroys the nonsense and posturing. It is devastating, humbling.

Akshaya Kumar: This brings me to your translation of *Gita*. What makes you say that "Gita is a love poem."

Mani Rao: So now we have come to the problem of defining love. We know love is vast, there are so many kinds of love, not just erotic loves. Yet, when one says "love poem" it immediately gets interpreted as a romantic, erotic love, and there seems to be some difficulty of imagining any other format.

What I meant when I described Gita as a love poem is that Krishna loves Arjuna.

In fact, Krishna addresses Arjuna “*Priyo asi me*” – “you are my love.” But so many other translations fear to use the word love there. Instead they translate: “You are dear to me.”

The translation of “*Priyo asi me*” is “YOU ARE MY LOVE!”

But one more thing. Romantic and erotic love is only a first step, a preparation, for participating in the higher love. That is the love between the divine and its creation. Between god and devotee, guru and shishya.

Akshaya Kumar: In translation, how, how much is it important to be faithful to the original? This is important because you say that in matters of love fidelity is not an important issue.

Mani Rao: I never said that. I said it is complex. Fidelity is fundamental to translation. Nobody is buying the book because it’s Mani Rao’s book. They are buying it because it’s Kalidasa. There is a responsibility that goes with representing something. But fidelity must be deep, and it is always complex. The translator must not deny herself also, she must use her faculties, because her presence is crucial to the translation, to the relationship.

I surely want to bring in my insights because that will help the original communicate to the author. So I look for techniques that will keep the fidelity in place and yet give me creative space to achieve the goal. How do I signal to the reader that this is not what the source text said, this is what I the translator, am saying?

In the Kalidasa translation, certain things have to be pointed out to appreciate what is happening in the Sanskrit text. Typically, in a classroom they are a part of the discussion. The convention in books is that they are in footnotes. But that makes the translation itself very limited, cumbersome. So in Kalidasa, what I have done is added

interpolations – but marked them as mine. You will notice that my interpolations are always indented and in italics.

Translation is on this side – left justified to the margin, and my commentarial interpolations are indented and in italics. know exactly what the translation is, and exactly what the commentary is. High fidelity. A simple example, if I say Parvati, and if you don't know who Parvati is, the fidelity is ineffective. Instead, I translate the name as “Shiva's consort Parvati.” It is still high fidelity, because the objective is to communicate. Here, fidelity is in thinking about what the author wants me to achieve.

In the case of the Gita, Krishna wants Arjuna to understand. He is taking so much trouble over it, and, it's, it's not, it's not a written letter. He's talking in the battlefield. It's a speech, it's a conversation. And the Sanskrit is very simple. It's not compound words and classical Sanskrit. You can't get more simple than that. So simplicity has to be a part of translation. The norms that I formulate happen in advance for each translation. In translation I think it's really important to have a methodology. To come up with a methodology before you do it. To try it out and see if that is what you want to adhere to, and then to carry that forward throughout the work, and therein is the fidelity, you know? Umm...to the goal. To the voice, to the goal, etc. You'll always have different interpretations.

Akshaya Kumar: To me it looked like recreation at places. For instance, the very use of a big and bold alphabets – **I AM**, right in the middle of the page to translate the *virat swroopam* of Krishna is an act of transcreation. This is how it appears on the page, in the text:

7.06-7.11

womb of beings
everyone! get that

I AM

the origin
the end of
the entire universe

there's no thing higher

it's all strung on me
pearls on a string

water's flavor light in moon sun om in all vedas sound in etheric space

spunk in humans

the nice fragrance on earth sun's brilliance

life in all living
penance in ascetics

know me ancient timeless seed

intelligence of the intelligent
radiance of the radiant

strength of the strong
who are desire & passion free

the love in beings
that isn't inappropriate

Mani Rao: That's very interesting. It is also a comment on how *you* define translation. I will be happy to go into more detail with you, but I can give a simple example.

You know in Sanskrit the case endings are attached to the nouns. You can change the order of things about in Sanskrit, and it doesn't matter, you still get the meaning.

However, when people translate from Sanskrit, they try so hard to follow the exact same order of ideas. And in the process they miss out on the rhythm and destroy the entire beauty

Say there is a table, bottle, flower. In Sanskrit, it will make sense in any order because of the case endings. Therefore, when I do the English translation, I should not worry about the order so much. The person who is reading the translation is actually reading it because

they don't know the Sanskrit. Then my job is to make it readable in English. So, if saying chair, table, pot, glass is better than glass, pot, table, chair, I will do that. Regardless of what the order is in Sanskrit, because I have to deliver the rhythm and it has to be a work in the English. It has to be read. If it is not read at all, there is no use of the translation and so-called fidelity!

Then you mentioned the **I AM** section. It is like a mis-en-scene. A vignette.

What happens is when you are reading Sanskrit is that you are not absorbing the ideas line by line. That idea doing one shloka a day is not correct -- the Gita will not make sense as one shloka a day, because communication occurs in sets of shlokas, like cognitive units. They are in sets. So sometimes shlokas have to be treated as a set.

In that section, which I identify as a cognitive unit -- every shloka repeats, "asmi." Krishna is saying that he is everything. The effect is that of a big and bold, dominant, I AM. By placing it the way I did, I am replicating the effect that a Sanskrit reader anyway feels.

Akshaya Kumar: You've clubbed the *slokas* together.

Mani Rao: I have clubbed them together and turned it into a vignette. So, for me that's not recreation, that is actually showing the English reader how it is in the Sanskrit. That's that...

Akshaya Kumar: It's true. At the end of the day, it remains a translation of *Gita*. That's true but at couple of places I have come across people who were not happy with this cavalier form of translation. when you read Gita's translation, they run into many pages, but yours is very handy, and therefore very readable. The way you use all the modern typographic experiments, avant-garde techniques of the Concrete Poetry, and the way you put things in columns, flow charts, diagram, Venn diagrams, equations is very innovative, but it is very unsettling for a conventional reader.

Mani Rao: Yes, it may be unsettling, but that is a comment on the reader's mindset and prejudices, not on my translation's efficacy.

In fact, I think take more creative liberties in the first chapter, because it's a war scene, and the descriptions and the sounds and the weapons and all. I just "cavaliered" my way through that (smile). But, I did catch all the sounds. I caught all the sounds, even of the trumpets blowing, the cries, and what exactly was happening.

Akshaya Kumar: The point which I am making is that recent times we've had translations which are little avant-garde so to say. I mean, look at Mehrotra's *Kabir*, look at Sarukkai's *Andal*, and your *Gita*, or Daljit Nagra's *Ramayana* for that matter. There are hardliners who say that translators have no business even to tinker with the sacred original. They think that you have infringed the sacredness of the text.

Mani Rao: I haven't. I have as much a sense of the sanctitude of a sacred text as anyone else. I just don't wear the garb, the *jhanda*, that's all.

I think these "hardliners" of yours are looking for *kashaya vastra*. They are looking for something other than the translation. They are looking for the emblem of the Guru. They are looking for a homage to all my lineages in the first twenty pages. They want a *bhashya*. They want to know whether you're celibate or not. They want to know all these other extraneous information. Then they'll feel respect, and then they'll say ki "haan," you know? That is extraneous to it, completely extraneous to it.

And secondly, they are not familiar with how to read a poem that has one part of a line on the right and another on the left. That is simply a matter of reading convention. They are used to reading from left to right. They don't know that in poetry, a line is not a sentence. That's not their background and their context, they are used to reading Wordsworth, or whatever it is that they have read and expect

to read. So they are not used to reading poetry like this, and I don't blame them for it.

But what they do is, they confuse the reason for their discomfort. They are taking their difficulty with the form and they are putting it onto what they believe is fidelity to the spirituality or to the scaredness of the text. I think that is the mistake that is being made.

However, even though I may not fit the old stereotype of the person who may discuss a sacred text, I do know my subject.

Akshaya Kumar: In the translation of *Gita*, you explicitly mention very emphatically it is a poem. In the introduction to your translation of *Saundarya Lahari* you again foreground the poetic aspect of the text. You seem to underscore the literariness of the texts, not as much as their sacredness.

Mani Rao: As far as I am concerned, they are sacred, but they are poems too, and why I say that, is that if you look, if you read any of our shruti, you read *The Rigveda*, you read any of the sacred texts. They are all poems. They been hijacked by religion.

These poems, these sources, are our life, our history, our revelations. They are the visionary experience of people who came before us, and we all have the right to it. It is our heritage. It's not something that's locked in a temple. It is in the forest and in the trees, you know? Its ours, its mine, I'll do it.

Akshaya Kumar: Okay. But, when you read *Meghdootam*, or *Saundarya Lahari*, there is an attempt somewhere to be more informal, colloquial on the forefront. For example, the use of words like "chatter" in your favourite verse of the *Saundarya Lahari* is very casual.

Mani Rao: *Jalpa* is chatter. *Jalpa* is chit-chat, chatter, too much talking. The original says "Japo jalpa." Let my chatter be *japa*, let the

jalpa be *japa*. The translation is precise. I guess you are used to pedantic words in translations of sacred texts, that's all.

But actually Akshaya, where you are right is in observing that the translation is done with my sensibilities and my poetics. Otherwise, there is no reason to do it.

If the publisher only wants a repeat of what is already done, just go republish Chandra Rajan. Just go republish Rajagopalachari. Why aren't they doing that? Why are they coming to me? It is for my experience and expertise.

And the reason I translated it is to bond with it. To make it a part of me, and for me to be a part of it. For me to join that *dhara*, right? If I am just going to be a robot like everybody else, then you don't need so many robots on the scene.

Akshaya Kumar: In your translation of *Saudraya Lahiri* you are less audacious in the sense that you do not indulge in too many typographic experiments. Rather the emphasis is on the delicate acoustics of the original text. Explain the reason for this shift in translation strategy. How could you manage the sounds of the original?

Mani Rao: There is a different history here.

Saundarya Lahari is not like *Gita* and *Kalidasa*. It is a mantra. Every shloka, every stanza is a mantra. Mantras are uttered for effects and results. While their meanings may be enjoyable and helpful for building the bhava, the feeling that deepens the relationship with a deity. So, the translation of the mantra is typically the translation of the meaning of the words the way they are used in ordinary language.

I did the *Saundarya Lahari* first as my own *sadhana*. Translating it was a way to know it better. The challenge for me was how to – and whether it is possible to – catch the other meanings, the deeper

meanings - as well as how much of the resonances and syllabic triggers actually come across.

See, I did my PhD in religious studies, focusing on Hinduism. My interest was mantra, and my research was on the visionary experience of mantras. My fieldwork in tantric communities led me to people who had extraordinary experiences with the utterance of *Saundarya Lahari*. I found that a lot of people practice Srividya, and they chant *Saundarya Lahari*. But not many know the meaning – call it the outer meaning – of the words of *Saundarya Lahari*.

Many manuals are available but they focus on the yantras and instructions for religious rituals – they also give elaborate interpretations that are not easy for the *sadhaka* who is not scholastic or has no background in the theoretical side of tantra. As a result, they miss out on the bhava.

Whereas I studied the commentaries, I focused on integrating my understanding and insights and creating a coherent, lyrical and flowing translation. In some of the stanzas, the appropriate syllables are also encoded in my translation.

Akshaya Kumar: One last question. A.K. Ramanujan says, “The translator never chooses a book, it is the book that chooses its translator.” Which of the books that you eventually translated, chose you as its translator?

Mani Rao: All of them. Gita was an accident, hundred percent accident. I was doing my MFA and I did a translation theory class with Prof. Giuseppe Natalie He is the person who translated *Moby Dick* into Italian. We had to do a class exercise where we had to do four verses and do a critique of it, and break it down and look at comparisons. Telugu is my mother tongue, but I can’t read and write in a literary manner, and Hindi I didn’t have the confidence. But Sanskrit, I had the confidence, and I said “I think I’ll do *Gita Govinda*.”

Prof Natale said, “What is *Gita Govinda*?” He didn’t know anything about it. He said, “why don’t you do Gita?” I was not so happy with the suggestion. I thought it would be a boring task. He said, “this is an exercise Mani. You’re just doing a comparison and a textual analysis. Just pick few verses, and just translate them, and let’s have an essay on comparing translation.”

So, I picked it up and then -- I was just blown away by what I read. I was like “My God! What a great book this is.” I had never read the entire Gita, all the seven hundred verses. And when I read it, I was completely surprised that how beautiful it was and how much information there was in it. Some sort of sense of detachment comes in when you read it, you know? It just came alive for me, and then I started translating it.

There was no publishing contract, okay? I started translating it. Instead of doing four verses, I did the entire book and it took an entire year. Friday, make a big salad in the fridge, Friday, Saturday, Sunday was my time to do it, and Monday back to school. It went on like this and I researched and did lots of studying that became a personal thing. Translating it was another experience altogether. I already had a guru and was into *sadhana*, and this translation brought me new experiences. It is a beautiful poem, a sacred, beautiful poem.

Akshaya Kumar: Done. Thank you very much.

Mani Rao has authored a number of critically acclaimed poetry collections such as *Ghostmasters*, *Echolocation*, *Sing to Me*, *New & Collected Poems*. Her translation of *Bhagwad Gita* started a new trend of translation as she used techniques of Concrete Poetry with rare ingenuity. Her *Kalidas Reader* includes selected translations of the great bard. Translations of Rao's poems have been published in Latin, Italian, Korean, Chinese, Arabic, French and German. Rao has had poems published in literary journals including *Poetry Magazine*, *Fulcrum*, *Wasafiri*, *Meanjin* and in anthologies including *The Penguin Book of the Prose Poem*, *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia, and Beyond* (W.W.

Norton, 2008), and *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets*. (Bloodaxe Books, 2008) [3] She was a visiting fellow at the Iowa International Writing Program in 2005 and 2009. She has performed at literary festivals in India, Hong Kong, Singapore, Melbourne, Vancouver, Chicago, Canberra and at the 2006 New York PEN World Voices. Rao worked in advertising and television from 1985 to 2004 in Chennai, Mumbai, Hong Kong and Auckland. In Hong Kong, Rao worked for Star (TV) Group Ltd for 9 years, and was the Senior Vice-President of Marketing and Corporate Communications. She spearheaded the 'Kaun Banega Crorepati' marketing campaign (Who Wants to be a Millionaire).



Interview
“Writing can never be [a] peaceful activity”
-Arundhati Roy

No living writer attracts as polarised responses as Arundhati Roy does. This might be on account of the fact that issues like Pokhran nuclear tests, Narmada valley project, Maoism, war against Afghanistan and militancy in Kashmir, where Roy takes a bold stand against the nation–state are essentially those where opinions are most sharply polarised, and her writings inevitably provoke extreme responses. However, her life in slums, job as an aerobics instructor, huge publishing advance, Booker win, sedition charges, silver jewellery, choice to go to Dantewada forests instead of modelling for Gap continue to mediate how her writings are viewed and read by the reading public. Understanding the cultural politics of this sense-making allows the scope to see how the meaning of literature is mediated in the public sphere. While this requires studying how the writing is concretised after the writer’s task is over, it is also intriguing to know how the writer views this meaning-making process. In this interview, Roy addresses the questions pertaining to the production and critical reception of her writings.

Urvi Sharma: Every individual is shaped by the social structures within which they are placed. In your own words, you refuse to be reduced to a “novel-producing machine”. Having been placed within this kind of market structure as such a popular writer, how have you been able to resist that temptation?

Arundhati Roy: My first book sold so many million copies, it actually released me from needing to be in the market place. It freed me to write things that were not necessarily popular or what people didn’t want to hear.

US: You do not only embrace your role as an activist but also emphasise that it is not divorced from the task of being a writer. What has shaped or motivated your conscience as a writer?

AR: Well... I have written an essay called *The Ladies Have Feelings So Why Not Leave it to the Experts* in which I speak at length about the term 'activist'. I think it's a relatively new word—not a word that was used in the past to describe writer who wrote political essays or took clear political positions. I think that word appeared at a time when literature became an industry with "products" placed unashamedly in the marketplace. It became acceptable to suggest that literature ought not to be political and that writers who were political were 'activists'—not real literary beings. That in itself is a sly, deep, conservative kind of politics in which the status quo is required to be accepted as a sort of default position.

In my political essays I believe the writing, the language itself is the most political thing of all. Because language is a way of thinking. I cannot separate myself from what I write, what I believe and how I think. I could not, in any conscience, write today without denouncing the current regime in the clearest, most direct way. Because it blocks my breathing apparatus.

US: There are critics and scholars who question (what they call) the Manichean view of the world in your writings but admire your determination to use writing as a medium to discuss social issues. How do you view this line of criticism?

AR: Manichean denotes a sort of crude duality, a polarisation between right and wrong which flattens or erases complexity. But if you take a position on something after taking into account the complexity—that's not Manichean. It's what you feel is the right and just thing to do. Whether it's about dams or nuclear tests or new citizenship laws. Accusing somebody of being Manichean is usually a way of hiding your own pusillanimity. Bizarrely, many of those critics and scholars are saying things I said twenty years ago as

though they just thought them up. It's a bit late, but I am glad they are saying them.

US: Have you ever taken interest in the critical reception of your writings (reviews, articles, papers, thesis published about your writings)? Is there any particular line of criticism to your writings that has ever made you reconsider any political or literary stance of your writing?

AR: It would be arrogant to not take on board criticism. And I am glad that my writing has generated so much debate. One moment stands out—I was rattled and destabilised by the anger with which some Dalit academics, intellectuals and writers responded to *The Doctor and The Saint*, about the Ambedkar-Gandhi debate first published as an introduction to an annotated edition of Dr B.R. Ambedkar's 1936 speech *Annihilation of Caste* and Gandhi's response to it. Of course, though it was extensively annotated by the publisher, this was not some single authoritative edition of the speech, but only one of hundreds of editions that have sold in dozens of translations and in millions of copies since 1936. Not everyone was furious of course, Many greeted with love and excitement. VCK, the Dalit party in Tamil Nadu honored me with their Ambedkar Sudar award and in Pune I was honored with the Mahatma Phule Samta award. But in deference to the anger, as soon as it was legally possible, I decoupled *The Doctor and the Saint* from *Annihilation of Caste* and published it as an independent book. It has been translated into several languages and published by Dalit publishers too. The Hindi translation is by Anil Jaihind and Prof Ratan Lal, who is Dalit and runs the popular channel *Ambedkarnama*.

US: The critical attention showered on your non-fiction writings, particularly after the popularity of your debut novel, is very much visible and cannot be neglected. As a writer, do you consider your celebrityhood as an opportunity or inhibition?

AR: It doesn't matter anymore. I write what I like. About the things that move me. It's a pretty internal process.

US: You've often addressed the binary that marks the critical reception of your fiction/non-fiction writing. Have you made your peace with this dualistic reception that continues to define your writing career or would you like to reiterate something about the same?

AR: Writing can never be [a] peaceful activity... and I don't consider the fiction/non-fiction divide to be a binary. They're both a part of my living, breathing, writing body.

US: How do you view the academic researchers like me who are trying to negotiate the resistances in your writings?

AR: Honesty, how I view that shouldn't matter at all. Once the writing is published, those words belong to the world to interpret in myriad ways...

X-X-X

(This interview has been republished from the thesis titled "Writing and Activism: A Study of the Critical Reception of Arundhati Roy's Selected Works". With the intention to retain a point of objectivity during the research process, the researcher made a deliberate attempt to not contact Arundhati Roy and solely depend on the critical responses available in the public sphere for the conclusion of her Ph.D thesis. The interview was incorporated as a post-script to the thesis.)

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